

HOW THE NEXT UK GOVERNMENT CAN ENSURE A HOME FOR EVERYONE

This article discusses the issue of homelessness in the UK, exploring both the Conservative Party's promise to end rough sleeping in England by 2024, as well as looking at various other measures that a future UK government could take to tackle the issue. The article highlights the impact of the pandemic on the government's 'Everyone In' scheme on reducing homelessness and highlights the failure of the Conservatives to fulfil this promise due to the cost-of-living crisis and general government inaction.



By **Nye Jones**, Campaigns Manager, Homeless Link, UK

In its 2019 manifesto, the Conservative Party made a bold promise. They would end rough sleeping in England by the end of 2024.

Their record up to that point amplified the boldness of this promise. Rough sleeping has risen dramatically since they formed a Government in 2010, peaking in 2017 with 4,751 people estimated to be sleeping rough in England on any given night, a 168% increase when compared with 2010.


Despite this, many people within the homelessness sector allowed themselves to be encouraged by the commitment. It gave accountability, something to hold on to when working with the Government on policy. Then the pandemic hit and the Government's 'Everyone In' scheme, which paused the conditions which gatekeep access to housing, saw a huge fall in rough sleeping practically overnight. By 2021, the number of people estimated to be sleeping rough on any given night had fallen by nearly 50% compared with the 2017 peak. Maybe we could actually dream of no one sleeping rough by 2024.

But the cost of living crisis, coupled with Government inaction following the ending of the 'Everyone In' scheme, sadly meant the dream stayed a fantasy. Rough sleeping rose by 60% between 2021 and 2023. If it keeps rising at the same rate the figure for 2024 will rise above the 2017 peak.

Rough sleeping is just the tip of a broader homelessness iceberg. In England, over 100,000 children are currently growing up in 'temporary' accommodation. This accommodation, which local councils are duty bound to supply, is often squalid and overcrowded. Despite being labelled 'temporary', families may stay there for years with no sign of permanent housing.

However, there is no reason why anyone should be homeless in England. So now, with a general election promised by Rishi Sunak in the second half of this year, at Homeless Link we are calling for whoever forms the next Government to take action to end all forms of homelessness.

Our [Manifesto to End Homelessness](#), written following consultation with many of our member organisations across England, sets out four key asks of the next Government.


We believe a home for everyone is not only possible, but essential for a healthy, harmonious society."

EVERYONE HAS A SAFE, SECURE, SUITABLE HOME IN WHICH TO THRIVE

According to an analysis by the charity Shelter, there's been an average annual net loss of 24,000 social homes since 1992, meaning there are now 1.4m fewer households in social housing since 1980. This lack of secure, genuinely affordable housing pushes people into an extremely expensive and insecure private rented sector, from which evictions have been the number one cause of homelessness in recent years. Therefore, the next Government should commit funding to build 90,000 social homes per year for the next 10 years.

EVERY ARM OF GOVERNMENT WORKING TOGETHER AND PLAYING THEIR PART

Homelessness is an issue that cuts across many different sectors, with a decision taken in one space often having a knock-on impact on another. In recent years, partnership work has become the norm in the homelessness sector, but unfortunately, this is not the same in government.

For example, between August and October 2023, the number of newly recognised refugees sleeping rough after leaving asylum accommodation tripled following sudden changes from the Home Office regarding the move-on period from asylum accommodation. This is one of many examples of government departments working in silos, with one department not considering the huge ramifications of a policy in terms of homelessness. That's why the next Government should adopt a cross-government strategy to end homelessness, led by a new task force directed by the Cabinet Office, with representatives from across government.

"It's not rocket science, it's simply about creating more secure, affordable homes and making sure services have the resources they need to support people into them."

A HOMELESSNESS SYSTEM THAT WORKS FOR ALL

Over recent years, the homelessness sector has increasingly recognised the need for a diverse range of services to best meet people's specific needs. From female-only spaces, to offering immigration advice to people with restricted entitlements, solutions to homelessness are never one size fits all.

The impact of tailoring support to people's needs can best be seen through the results of Housing First schemes. Our [research into the long-term social impacts of Housing First](#) found that, over a period of three years, residents reported significantly reduced mental and physical health needs, while the number of people engaged in anti-social behaviour nearly halved and residents were less likely to require emergency health services.

Therefore, the next Government must ensure there is a diverse network of services available, and that sustainable housing options are accessible for every person who experiences homelessness. As a minimum standard, these services should embed person-centred, trauma-informed care.

SUSTAINED INVESTMENT PREVENTING AND ENDING HOMELESSNESS - FOR GOOD

The Government's £2bn investment in homelessness and rough sleeping over three years was welcomed by the homelessness sector as a sign it was serious about meeting its 2024 target. However, the cost of living crisis significantly reduced the funding's value in real terms.

At the same time, homelessness funding is too often characterised by short-term contracts that leave providers without security and needing to constantly use resources to bid for further funding. With this in mind, the next Government should commit to reviewing all spending across the government linked to homelessness, and replacing the existing piecemeal and short-term funding structures with a long-term, ring-fenced homelessness support fund, designed to flexibly adapt to local and individual needs.

CAMPAIGNING IN THE RUN UP TO THE ELECTION

These four asks are not outlandish, but realistic commitments a government dedicated to ending homelessness can make. It's not rocket science, it's simply about creating more secure, affordable homes and making sure services have the resources they need to support people into them.



It's been great to see so many homelessness organisations unite behind these asks as part of our ['A Home for Everyone'](#) campaign. Our recent ['Mass Lobby' of Parliament](#) saw over 90 organisations come together under our banner of 'Ending Homelessness Together', with speeches from the Homelessness Minister, Shadow Homelessness Minister and the Liberal Democrat spokesperson for housing. Homelessness organisations also engaged over 70 MPs as part of the day.

But the work doesn't stop there. From now until polling day we will be supporting our member organisations to influence parliamentary candidates across the country, with the aim of making sure that whoever forms the next Government prioritises ending homelessness.

Homelessness is often a deeply traumatic experience that ripples through people's lives and those of the people around them. People experiencing homelessness have worse mental and physical health, are more likely to misuse substances and have a far lower life expectancy than the general public.

At the same time, allowing homelessness to continue comes at a great cost to the taxpayer, with spiralling temporary accommodation bills forcing many councils into bankruptcy and huge swathes of public money going straight into the hands of private landlords.

It doesn't have to be this way. We believe a home for everyone is not only possible, but essential for a healthy, harmonious society.

