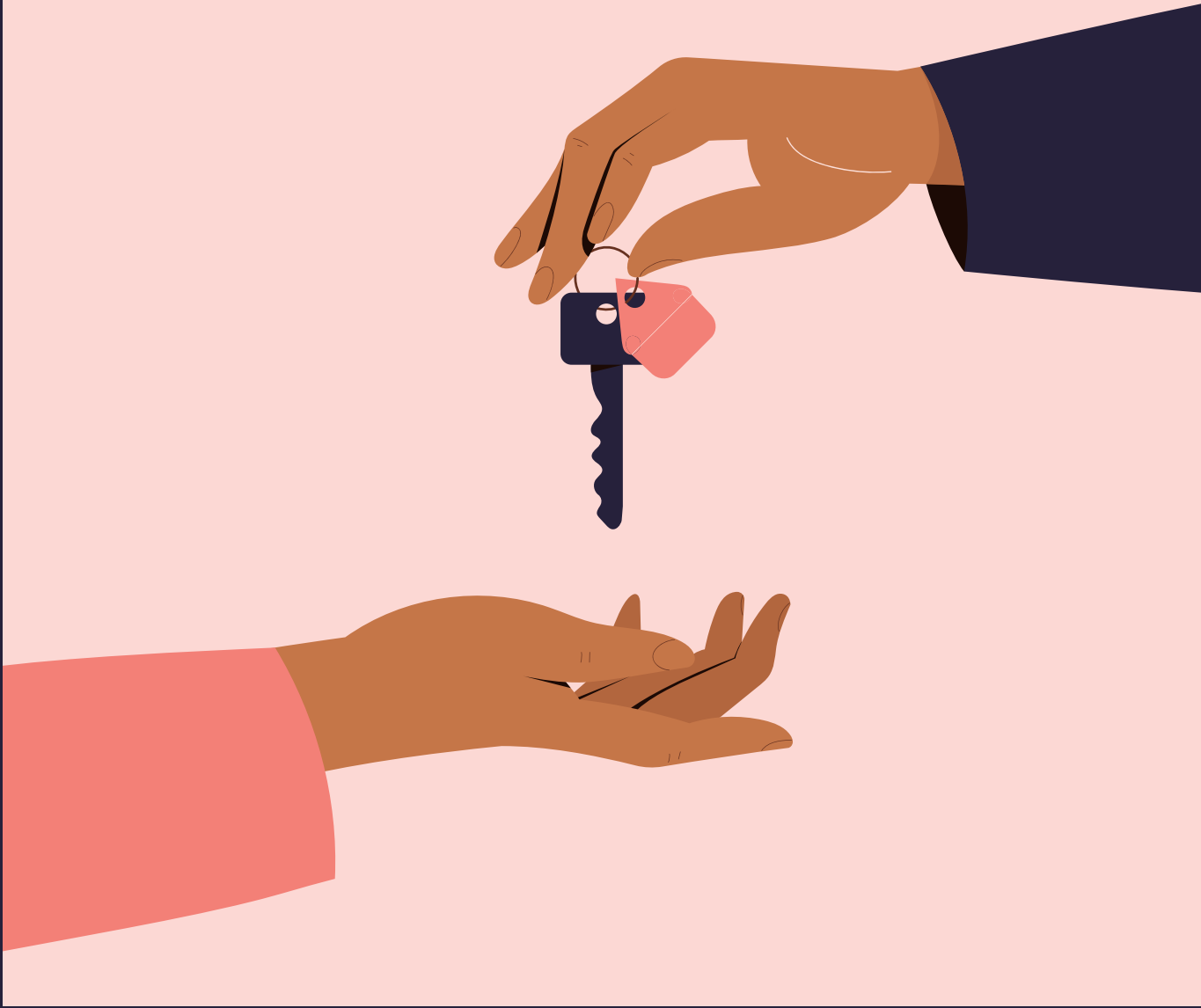


HELP US BEAT HOMELESSNESS



MANY ROOMS

How churches can respond to homelessness after the pandemic.



HOUSING
JUSTICE

14 ²“My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴You know the way to the place where I am going.”

John 14:2-4
New International Version



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MANY ROOMS INTRODUCTION

Like all parts of society, churches have been forever changed by the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the pandemic itself, many churches entirely changed the way they operate and fulfil their mission. While zoom services conducted from kitchens gathered headlines, how churches engaged with communities also went under a transformation, with church buildings closed. Many churches became more involved in efforts to address food poverty while others provided friendship and support to the isolated.

How churches engage with issues of housing need and homelessness suffered a sea change too. The traditional way in which churches have supported people affected by rough sleeping, church-based night shelters was particularly affected. All dormitory-style night shelters received a directive from the UK government to close in March 2020. In the winter of 2020/21 guidance issued by the government told night shelter providers not to return to communal provision. Many night shelters switched to providing self-contained accommodation or moved to support local councils in their efforts to get all people sleeping rough off the streets.

Many churches also found a dramatic increase in the number of people in their congregation or the wider community in housing need and in some cases threatened with or experiencing homelessness. As Britain emerges from the peak of the public health crisis of pandemic and begins to come to terms with the long term social and economic impacts of action taken during 2020 and 2021, the effects on housing need and homelessness are likely to be profound. The way churches and faith groups more generally engage with these key social justice issues will also need to evolve and meet the needs of a country that has been changed by its experiences of the pandemic.

In February 2020, I was contacted by a vicar in London's east end. A man was sleeping in his church, he'd lost his job as a result of the lockdown and had nowhere else to go. "What do I do? Who should I call? How can we help him?" the vicar asked. This guide sets out to support churches to put plans in place to answer those questions.

This short guide is for Senior clergy, priests, vicars, pastors, church leadership teams and members of the congregation who are beginning to plan how their church can respond to local needs moving forward.

It will not provide all the answers but aims to set out a basic level of information that will help your church and community to respond to homelessness and housing need.

JACOB QUAGLIOZZI
DIRECTOR, ENGLAND, HOUSING JUSTICE

MANY ROOMS AN OVERVIEW OF HOMELESSNESS

When most people think of homelessness they think of someone in a sleeping bag on the street. But there are lots of types of homelessness, which affect a range of different people. There are also precise legal definitions, underpinned by legislation and regulation of homelessness, which can affect the support a person can access.

The main forms that homelessness takes are listed in the table below.

Types of homelessness	
Types	Description
Rough sleeping	A person is left without a shelter of any kind, sleeping in the street, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments, buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or 'bashes').
Statutory homelessness	To be legally defined as homeless you must either lack a secure place in which you are entitled to live or not reasonably be able to stay. However, to receive assistance under the 'main homelessness duty' there are further strict criteria to meet. Local authorities may initially provide temporary accommodation to households who might meet these criteria, mainly families with children.
Hidden homelessness	Many people who are not entitled to help with housing, or who don't even approach their councils for help, and aren't counted in the official statistics. Many stay in hostels, squats or B&Bs, in overcrowded accommodation or 'concealed' housing, such as on the floors or sofas of friends and family.
At risk of homelessness	Some people are more at risk of being pushed into homelessness than others. People in low paid jobs, living in poverty and / or in poor quality or insecure housing are more likely to experience homelessness.

WHAT SUPPORT ARE PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS ENTITLED TO?

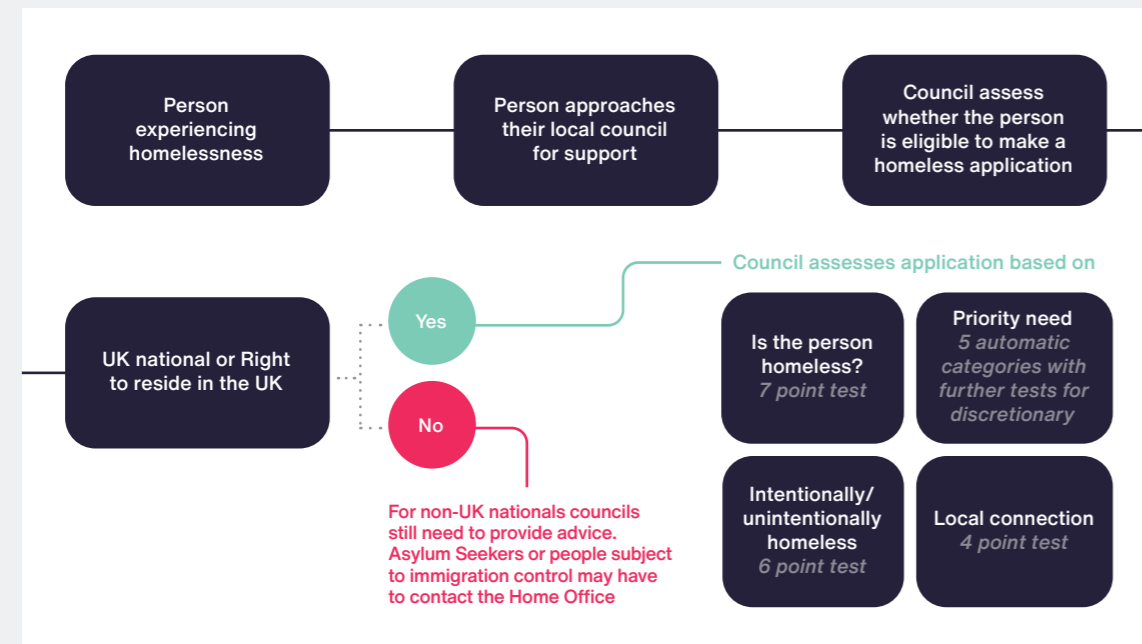
Local councils are responsible for housing under UK law and therefore are also responsible for supporting people affected by homelessness. In most areas it is the District or Borough council which holds this responsibility (not the County, Borough or Regional Mayor), this is known as their "statutory duty".

All councils assess whether they have to provide support to an individual based on a set of criteria.

The diagram below demonstrates the general process a council follows when they make that assessment of whether they have to help.

MANY ROOMS AN OVERVIEW OF HOMELESSNESS

LOCAL COUNCIL HOMELESS APPLICATION PROCESS OUTLINE



HOMELESSNESS APPLICATIONS

To receive support from the local council a person must make a “homelessness application”. The application can be made directly by the person who is homeless or threatened with homelessness, or by someone on their behalf.

The application does not need to be made in writing, but the person needs to be clear that they are seeking accommodation or assistance.

Local councils have a legal duty to ensure that applications can be made at any time and there should be 24-hour contact options for potential applicants.

Action: It is a good idea to ask your local council for the out-of-hours number so that you have it should you ever need to support someone experiencing homelessness.

Who can make a homeless application?

Generally, anyone with mental capacity, who is in the UK legally can make a homelessness application at the local authority. While there is no minimum age for an application, a dependent child cannot apply in their own right (the application would need to be made by a parent or carer). Generally speaking this is anyone under 16 or under 18 and still in full time education or training.

Applications include members of the applicants’ household, typically family members.

MANY ROOMS AN OVERVIEW OF HOMELESSNESS

PRIORITY NEED

Because of limited resources and political decisions, housing support and the supply of subsidised housing in England is prioritised, so that some groups are much more likely to receive support than others.

This is known as “priority need”, groups of people who are the highest priority for housing and housing related support. These priority groups are defined in legislation.

Since the 1970s the highest priority has been families with dependent children. Up until 2018 many single people were turned away for support from the local authority, leading to some sleeping rough. However, in 2018 the Homeless Reduction Act was introduced. While councils still do not have to provide accommodation for all homeless people under the new act, they are expected to work to prevent and relieve homelessness for all eligible people.

The core groups who are prioritised and therefore will always receive accommodation support from the local authority are as follows:

1. Someone who is pregnant.
2. Someone who has a dependent child (Younger than 16 or Younger than 18 and unable to support themselves).
3. Someone who has lost their property due to a disaster (Fire, flood, storm etc...).
4. Someone who is under the age of 18.

Other categories listed in the priority need legislation, such as:

- Old age.
- Mental illness.
- Physical disability.
- Being in care.
- Being released from prison.
- A former member of the army, navy or air forces.
- At risk of violence.

The local authority will come to a view on the vulnerability of the individual applying as homeless in relation to the categories above.

MANY ROOMS AN OVERVIEW OF HOMELESSNESS

LOCAL CONNECTION

The council usually looks at whether a person has a 'local connection' to the area. This means the person applying as homeless has links to the local council area they are applying in based on:

- Living or working in the area.
- Close family in the area.
- Other special reasons.

You can find out more about local connection [here](#).

If the council determines that the person does not have a local connection they should make a referral to the area the individual does have a local connection to.

THE HOMELESSNESS REDUCTION ACT

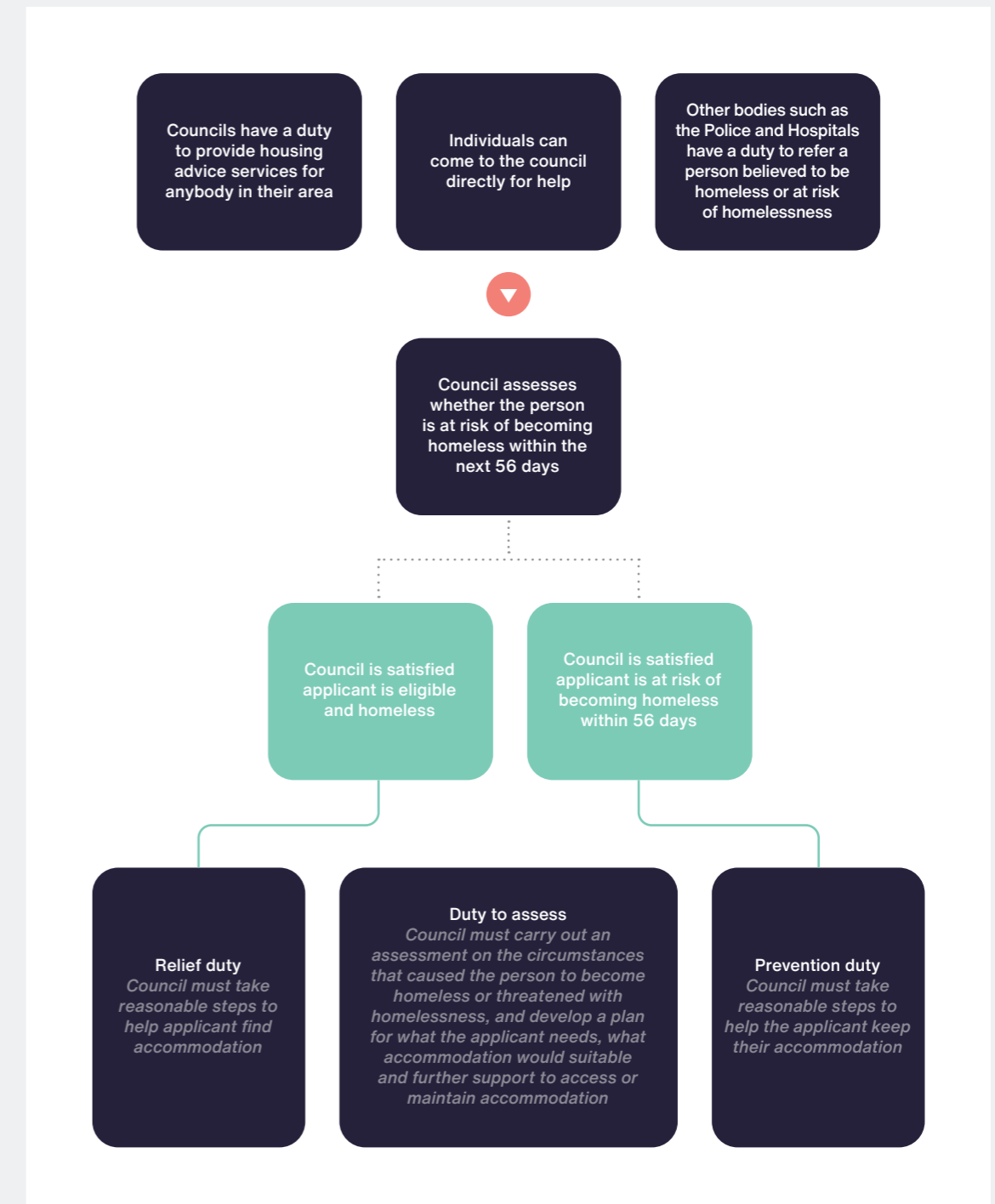
A new law was passed by parliament in 2017 – The Homelessness Reduction Act, which is probably the biggest change in Homelessness legislation in England since the 1970s.

In essence it means local councils have to work with anyone threatened with homelessness, even if they don't have a statutory duty to house that person. It particularly places an emphasis on prevention, with all councils having to support anyone they judge may be at risk of homelessness within 56 days.

There are also other positive changes including requiring councils to provide homelessness advice services for everyone in their district, requiring other public bodies to refer any person experiencing or at risk of homelessness to the local council. Personalised Housing Plans should be developed by the council and the person affected to avoid homelessness.

This new act means local councils should almost always be the first port of call for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

MANY ROOMS AN OVERVIEW OF HOMELESSNESS



MANY ROOMS AN OVERVIEW OF HOMELESSNESS

HOMELESS APPLICATIONS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

During the COVID-19 Pandemic, the rules on priority need changed to allow for a greater prioritisation of particular groups vulnerable to the pandemic. However, these rule changes were temporary and were due to end on 21st September 2021.

The government also made a number of other changes which affected homelessness during the pandemic including banning bailiff evictions and increasing the notice period that landlords have to provide to tenants in order to evict them. Again, these were temporary measures due to end in the summer of 2021.

LOCAL AUTHORITY HOMELESSNESS STRATEGIES

Since 2012, Councils legally must have a homelessness strategy which sets out how they will approach and reduce homelessness in their local authority area. All authorities are required to publish homelessness strategies at least once every five years. As part of the strategy the local authority must carry out a homelessness review and formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on that review. The homelessness review is an assessment by the local housing authority of the levels and future levels of homelessness in its district. They must also assess activities which are carried out to: prevent homelessness, ensure accommodation is available for people who are or may become homeless, provide support for people who are or may become homeless, or who need support to prevent them becoming homeless again.

This strategy must be consulted on and faith groups should be a voice that the council consult and listen to. You can find examples of strategies [here](#). Finding your own local strategy should be easy, using a search engine with your local authority name and 'homelessness strategy' should yield results. If it doesn't email your local councillor and ask them to send you a link.

Further Information

[Overview of legislation affecting statutory homelessness in England](#)

[Homelessness Reduction Act](#)

<https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/publications/homelessness-and-rough-sleeping-in-the-time-of-covid-19/>

MANY ROOMS WHO IS HOMELESS?

The English evangelical preacher and martyr, John Bradford (circa 1510–1555) is said to have first coined the phrase “*There for the grace of God go I*” when seeing people less fortunate than himself. While Bradford’s utterance is from a more pious era, its sentiment is often used today in considering homelessness. Many of us believe a few crises or unanticipated problems could lead to us ourselves becoming homeless. During the pandemic this has been exacerbated with huge disruption to the economy and incomes.

But some groups are much more likely to experience homelessness than others. Lower earners, ethnic minorities and people from poorer backgrounds are all more likely to become homeless.

There are many, often complex factors as to why a person experiences homelessness, each are unique to a person’s circumstances and background. But two things are true for almost everyone experiencing homelessness:

- The lack of a support network is present in almost all cases.
- Most instances of homelessness are temporary; the housing situation of a person can be addressed with the right support.

Broadly, the factors leading to someone experiencing homelessness can be divided in to structural and individual factors.

Structural issues including the UK housing market, access to welfare, immigration, poverty.

Personal challenges can also lead to homelessness. Mental or physical health problems and substance misuse can see people struggle to hold on to their home while the loss of a job or the breakdown of a relationship can mean that people cannot carry on covering rent or are forced to find a new home. People who leave prison, care or the armed forces with no home to go to can find themselves homeless too.

Prior to the pandemic the most common reason for homelessness was a loss of a private rented home. Annual statutory homelessness figures for England show the loss of a private rented assured shorthold tenancy accounted for 43,260 households who required help from councils to avoid homelessness.

During the pandemic a ban on evictions and support for private renters meant that for the first time in a decade the loss of a private rented tenancy was over taken by the loss of accommodation with family or friends.

As Britain emerges from the pandemic, it is expected that unemployment will rise and some of the key support that has been in place to protect people from the economic impact of COVID-19 will be withdrawn (Furlough, Evictions ban, Universal Credit uplift). It is possible and sadly perhaps likely that there may be an increase people facing financial hardship and homelessness over the winter of 2021 and in to the following year.

MANY ROOMS WHO IS HOMELESS?

CHALLENGING PRECONCEPTIONS

While rough sleeping numbers tend to show that more men end up sleeping on the street than women, government data shows that homelessness affects women as much as it does men.

In the year up until September 2020, single men were the largest group of people to either become homeless or be threatened with homelessness, with 116,230 approaching their council. Combined with the 6,680 single fathers who approached their council, this brings the total number of male households to 122,910.

While far fewer single women (61,290) were homeless or at risk of homelessness during the same period, the number of women experiencing homelessness almost doubles when you add in the number of single mothers seeking help from their council (57,870). This brings the total number of female households who were homeless or at risk of homelessness in the year to 119,160.

While most people who were homeless or at risk of homelessness in the year up until September last year were White, Black households were disproportionately affected by homelessness in comparison to their population size.

In the year up until September 2020, one in every 25 Black households became homeless or were threatened with homelessness in comparison to one in every 101 White households. Meanwhile, one in every 73 Asian households approached their council for homelessness support, as well as one in every 35 where the main applicant's ethnicity was mixed.

MANY ROOMS WHO IS HOMELESS?

IN FIGURES

Crisis estimated that around **200,000 people** were experiencing core homelessness – the most severe and immediate forms of homelessness – in England in 2020.

In England, 288,470 households were owed assistance from councils to prevent or relieve homelessness in 2019-20 compared to 9,993 households in Wales.

The latest quarterly UK Government figures showed 68,250 English households approached councils for support between January and March 2021, down 10 per cent on the same period in 2020.

A further 95,450 homeless households were living in temporary accommodation as of March 2021.

At the end of December 2020, 95,370 homeless households were living in temporary accommodation – a rise of 7,060 households in just one year.

The latest official count found a total of 2,688 people were estimated to be sleeping rough on a single night in autumn 2020 in England, down 37 per cent on the 4,266 people recorded in 2019.

Research for Crisis in 2015 puts the cost of a single person sleeping rough in the UK for 12 months at £20,128 while successful intervention costs £1,426. To put this in context, the average private school place in Britain costs £11,565 per year.

Evidence shows that people who experience homelessness for three months or longer cost on average £4,298 per person to NHS services, £2,099 per person for mental health services and £11,991 per person in contact with the criminal justice system.

MANY ROOMS

HOW CAN MY CHURCH RESPOND TO HOMELESSNESS: BASIC PRINCIPLES

Many churches are physical and spiritual centres of communities across the country. Often church buildings are accessible places with opportunities for a range of people to use the space through community activities, drop-ins and social action programmes. It is hardly surprising then that many churches encounter people experiencing homelessness, even when not engaged directly in homelessness programmes.

Church leaders and people working or volunteering in the church want to do all they can to support a person experiencing homelessness, but it can be difficult to access the appropriate service, to know who to contact and what advice to give. These can be challenging situations.

Following 5 basic principles around how your church engages with people experiencing homelessness could put your church in a good starting position.

1. People before problems

It is best not to discuss a person's housing situation unless initiated by the person experiencing homelessness. Being kind and friendly, listening to someone's story without offering immediate solutions or trying to 'fix a problem' can often be the best initial course of action. Having the time to sit and listen is important. It can often take time to build trust and a relationship for someone to be able to share the issues around their housing situation. If you do have a conversation about someone's housing situation, make sure they are aware and consent to accepting support from you or any organisations you contact. Take care not to raise expectations or over promise and be honest about what is within your capacity to deliver. You will need basic details if you are going to refer the person to a support service.

2. Preparation

Many services a church runs will be likely to encounter people experiencing homelessness at some point. While you will not be able to prepare for every eventuality and pre-empt every set of questions, you can ensure a basic level of preparation in the same way you might if for example the church had a safeguarding issue.

- Print off the flow chart contained within this guide so that staff and volunteers know the basics of how to support someone experiencing homelessness. Fill out the relevant boxes with local numbers for your local council housing team (including out of hours number), local homelessness service and [StreetLink](#). Place it somewhere your staff and volunteers will regularly see it.
- Consider sending key staff and volunteers on a homelessness and housing need awareness training such as that run by Housing Justice to provide a basic level of signposting and knowledge. It may also be worth giving one member of your team responsibility for these types of enquiries in a similar way to having someone responsible for first aid or safeguarding.
- Regularly speak to your local council or homelessness service to ensure good, functioning lines of communication and that you are aware of levels of need and any issues locally.

MANY ROOMS

HOW CAN MY CHURCH RESPOND TO HOMELESSNESS: BASIC PRINCIPLES

3. Partnership

No single organisation or person is ever responsible for a resolution to a person's experience of homelessness. It requires different organisations and people to work in partnership with the consent and willingness of the person concerned.

In many towns or cities there are many agencies available to help people affected by homelessness. One of the best things that churches can do is help people engage well with these agencies who have the resources and expertise to support a person to address the complex factors which contribute to housing need and homelessness. Partnership is one of the most important factors to addressing homelessness. Your local council (usually the District or Borough Council) is likely to be a key partner as they are legally responsible for supporting people experiencing homelessness (though this won't always mean offering them housing).

4. Protection

Homelessness in general is isolating, stressful and can be very damaging to a person's mental health. Rough sleeping can have serious physical effects in a short space of time. If you are concerned about someone's health you should call your local NHS urgent mental health helpline or local safeguarding team. If you are concerned for someone's safety or wellbeing then you don't need their permission to do this. If you believe someone is in danger you should follow the usual process for contacting the emergency services.

You should apply the same approach to safeguarding as you do in your work in the church and the same boundaries should apply. Avoid situations which could put you or the person affected by homelessness at risk. It is best not to invite a person in to your living space, try wherever possible to have two people from the church in the room and avoid situations where the person might be placed in a difficult position with the personal belongings of others etc. Be clear about behaviour which is not acceptable in and around church as you would with anyone else using the church building.

5. Prayer

Prayer is central to churches and it is completely reasonable to expect you will want to pray for people you meet in your work, including those who are experiencing homelessness. Churches should be confident about who we are and why we are moved to be involved in social action. Support offered should never be conditional on prayer or a person engaging at a spiritual level, but being openly and positively Christian is a key part of who churches are. The Charter for Christian Homelessness Agencies sets out how this could be done appropriately. Some people will naturally want to explore what it is that makes people want to help and others will be less open, perhaps through previous experiences of faith which have not been positive and churches should be mindful of this. Many churches will pray and consider what their next steps should be when planning a new project to support people experiencing homelessness or housing need.

MANY ROOMS HOW CAN MY CHURCH RESPOND TO HOMELESSNESS: ACCOMMODATION

Churches have provided accommodation for many hundreds of years. Today churches provide a range of accommodation defined below. Providing any kind of accommodation is a significant undertaking and will require the support of the entire church, strong leadership and a committed team of people to steer the various parts. Longer term housing and the use of church land to provide long term homes also comes with greater financial commitment and inherent risk, but delivers long-standing transformation.

Type of accommodation	Explanation	Find out more
Emergency accommodation	Short term accommodation to relieve someone from rough sleeping typically a Night Shelter or hostel. Since the pandemic, the homeless sector, central government and some local authorities have advised against the use of traditional 'dormitory' style Night Shelters – typically camp beds in church halls – and instead urged the use of single room accommodation.	Government guidance and Housing Justice briefing on the use of Night Shelters.
Hosting	Short term placements through models such as Housing Justice Hosting, Refugees at Home and NightStop to provide accommodation for groups such as young people and asylum seekers.	Housing Justice Hosting. NightStop. Naccom.
Supported Housing	Accommodation is provided alongside support, supervision or care to help people live as independently as possible in the community. This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older people. • People with a learning disability. • People with a physical disability. • Autistic people. • Individuals and families at risk of or who have experienced homelessness. • People recovering from drug or alcohol dependence. • People with experience of the criminal justice system. • Young people with a support need (such as Care Leavers or teenage parents). • People with mental ill health. • People fleeing domestic abuse and their children. <p>These are not always distinct groups and many individuals may have multiple needs.</p>	A great example of a supported housing project is The Access Project , a church-based project in Kingston.
Genuinely Affordable Housing	Affordable housing is defined by the government as up to 80% of market rents in a local area and includes shared ownership and home ownership. Some churches chose to let housing at 60% of market rates closer to social rent.	Faith In Affordable Housing – helping Churches build houses.

MANY ROOMS HOW CAN MY CHURCH RESPOND TO HOMELESSNESS: ACCOMMODATION

NIGHT SHELTERS

At outset of the COVID-19 Pandemic in the UK, clinicians and homeless professionals raised the alert of the increased risks to rough sleepers to respiratory diseases such as COVID-19. Communal sleeping spaces such as those of the typical church-based Night Shelter (multiple beds in a church hall or dormitory like setting) were judged to be extremely high risk for transmission. Combined with the existing health conditions of people likely to be using Night Shelters the risks were considered extremely high.

As a result, Winter Night Shelters with communal sleeping arrangements in England, Scotland, and Wales were closed in the final two weeks of March 2020. Guests staying in these projects moved to self-contained or single room accommodation to prevent transmission of the virus. This was part of the Government's Everyone in initiative, which put the onus on local authorities to provide accommodation for people rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping in their area.

In Scotland and Wales, communal Night Shelters have remained closed since March 2020 and those governments have set out an aspiration to phase them out entirely. In England, the Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government (MHCLG) established Operating Principles setting stringent rules by which communal spaces could reopen. These principles were published on 13/10/20. MHCLG also made available an initial £2 million in funding to support providers of Night Shelters to adapt to COVID-19 secure provision. A further £3m was made available in 2021/22 for the coming winter.

The 2020 Operating Principles advised against opening communal Night Shelters in all but exceptional cases, with self-contained or single room accommodation as the first preference. It noted substantial risks to guests, volunteers, and staff involved with communal sleeping space. Any static shelters with communal space required the agreement of local authorities and local public health and a series of very significant mitigations. It was however envisaged that some areas may have had circumstances which made a shelter necessary as a last resort (e.g. lack of emergency self-contained beds, cold weather, larger numbers of rough sleepers)

On 19th July 2021 the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government published updated [Operating Principles for Night Shelters operating in England](#) for the coming winter. This is part of the UK government's [wider COVID-19 summer reopening plan](#). While the new Operating Principles remove many of the restrictions which had been in place, it retains the strong preference for single room accommodation.

Where there is acute local need, Night Shelter providers without access to a single room or self-contained accommodation should take advice and speak to their local authority and local public health colleagues and ensure a rigorous system of risk assessment is in place before proceeding in opening any communal spaces.

FIND OUT MORE

If you're interested in starting an accommodation project please contact: [Vanessa Nicholls](#) if outside London. [Mark Brennan](#) if in London.

MANY ROOMS HOW CAN MY CHURCH RESPOND TO HOMELESSNESS: SUPPORT

Many churches and faith groups who have provided night shelters or other forms of accommodation have come to realise that what has made these projects successful is not primarily a roof over a person's head but the relational support that comes alongside it. This does not take away the need for engagement in statutory services (health and welfare, housing) but will support and enhance the work of these services. There is a real spectrum to the support that can be provided by churches outside of "simply" providing a roof over someone's head. We have grouped the main services in to the following four sections:

MENTORING AND BEFRIENDING

The homeless sector term for this kind of relational support is often "Mentoring and befriending". Mentoring and befriending is a one-to-one, non-judgemental relationship where you volunteer your time to support and encourage someone. Many people benefit from the support of a mentor or befriender at a time of change in their life or when they are socially isolated. Good examples of existing schemes include: [The Passage](#), [Citadel](#) run by Housing Justice and the [C4WS night shelter](#) in North London.

FLOATING SUPPORT

Is a more formalised method of support from mentoring and befriending. It supports someone who is living in their own home to help them remain in their home and live independently. For example, someone who is moving in to a new home might need support to access white goods, furniture or set household budgets. People who are taking on a new tenancy might need some support to move in and set up home. [The Salvation Army](#) have a long established model but your local council or homelessness provider may have a similar scheme. Many faith groups and night shelters moved to running projects like this during the pandemic. You can find some examples [here](#).

ADVOCACY AND PREVENTION

Some churches have begun to provide advice, advocacy and support intended to prevent a person becoming homeless in the first place. Advocacy is once again a specialised service requiring training and almost certainly paid staff. [Wycombe Homeless Connection](#), are an example of church based project pioneering this approach. During the pandemic, they opened a dedicated telephone number that people could call for support, and recruited and trained two advocacy workers. They then put on two Housing Legal Advice Clinics with support from a local solicitors. This work helps them to support people threatened with homelessness to challenge illegal evictions, landlord harassment and prevent people from losing their homes in the first place. You can find out more [here](#).

MANY ROOMS HOW CAN MY CHURCH RESPOND TO HOMELESSNESS: SUPPORT

FRIENDSHIP: WITHOUT THE LABEL

Many other churches simply want to provide friendship to all, without putting a label on it. This will mean not seeking to "fix" any "problems" a person is experiencing but simply being a listening ear and showing warmth and compassion. This can be talking to people in the community who appear to be experiencing homelessness or guests at the lunch club/coffee morning.

If you are thinking of establishing a support based project, There are some basics in establishing a project:

- What is the need?
- What do you want to achieve?
- Who is your project for?
- How will it be funded?

Once these questions have been answered there are lot more practical questions to work through. You can access our [Community Connections](#) resource that may help with those and we are about to launch a set of slides that can be used to deliver training.

Please contact info@housingjustice.org.uk if you would like to know more about how we can help you.



MANY ROOMS HOW CAN MY CHURCH RESPOND TO HOMELESSNESS: FOOD

Scripture has many references to feeding the hungry. Matthew 25:31-46 is about a clear call as possible for followers of Jesus to care about food poverty. It is little wonder then that churches since the first Christians, have provided food for people in need.

Today many churches continue to provide food for people experiencing homelessness, wanting to ensure that people don't go hungry and can easily be provided for with a warm, nutritious meal. If this is something your church is wanting to do there are a few things you might want to consider first.

1. Find out what other provision is available in your local area, there are likely to be other churches and groups providing food and meals already – make sure you are filling the gaps and not duplicating what is already out there. Some areas have food provision networks and forums that you could join and you might be able to partner with other groups. Since the 'Everybody In' initiative in 2020, many churches and faith groups have provided food for people experiencing homelessness staying in local authority emergency accommodation.
2. Think carefully before you consider handing food out on the street, sometimes this can cause more problems than it solves and it is preferable where possible to bring people inside. **If you want to go ahead with offering food on the streets talk to your Local Authority first.**
3. Type of provision - will you offer breakfast, lunch or dinner, week days or weekends and how regularly? Will you be exclusively for rough sleepers or will you provide food to whoever comes through the door? Are you able to offer a shared meal that includes sitting down with volunteers or that even extends into the wider community?
4. Support – what other support will you offer; do you feel equipped to signpost people experiencing homelessness to other organisations for ongoing support or are you able to offer that support in house? Your volunteers will also need support and training.
5. Food – talk to your local [Fareshare](#) and [Foodbanks](#), they will be able to support you with excellent local knowledge and can provide surplus food and essential advice. At least one person in your team will need to have a current Food Hygiene Certificate and if you want to provide food on a regular basis then you will need to consult with your local environmental health or food safety team who will support with everything you need to ensure you are providing food safely.

To find out more or to discuss your plans contact [Isabella Harriss](#).

MANY ROOMS HOW CAN MY CHURCH RESPOND TO HOMELESSNESS: IMMIGRATION AND ASYLUM

Welcoming the stranger is central to Christian beliefs and social action. The record of churches of all denominations of providing sanctuary and hospitality to people from different places is rich in the UK and throughout the world. The bible has many references to offering sanctuary and in recent years the number of Christians fleeing persecution has also increased, drawing more churches in to this kind of support. Theological resources can be [found here](#).

Immigration issues are a significant and growing cause of housing need and homelessness and many churches already have a knowledge of the relationship between the two. But UK immigration law is complex and often confusing, containing a wide and changing suite of legislation, regulations, acronyms and terms.

Key terms used to describe the immigration status of a person

Types	Description
Migrant	Migrant is simply the term given to all non-UK nationals entering the UK. Often people come to the UK for economic reasons, for example looking for work, this is often referred to as economic migrants.
Asylum seeker	An asylum seeker (or asylum applicant) is a person who has applied for recognition as a refugee under the Refugee Convention , to which over 140 nations are signatories. To claim asylum in the UK, a person must be in the UK. It is not possible to apply from outside the country, and there is no asylum visa. Therefore, to claim asylum in the UK a person must enter either irregularly, such as by small boat, lorry, or by using false documents, or for another purpose, such as tourism or study. Asylum seekers are not generally permitted to work in the UK while their claim is being considered. If they are destitute, they can apply for free accommodation, as well as asylum support, which is set at £39.63 a week, equivalent to £5.66 per day.
Refugee	Refugee status is awarded by the Home Office for successful asylum seekers in keeping with the UK's commitments under the Refugee Convention.
Refugee resettlement	Unlike asylum seekers, who can apply for asylum only in the UK, resettled refugees are identified abroad by the UN, and then transferred to the UK. In recent years, the UK has operated four resettlement schemes. These were suspended in March 2020 due to COVID-19, and recommenced in December 2020. The largest of these was the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) , which began in 2014 and aimed to resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees by 2020. This scheme was later expanded to people of any nationality fleeing the Syrian conflict. The Vulnerable Children Resettlement Scheme (VCRS) aimed to resettle 3,000 children from the Middle East and North Africa by 2020. The Mandate Scheme and Gateway Protection Programme (GPP) are for refugees anywhere in the world.

To learn more about UK Immigration and Asylum policy [these resources](#) from The Migration Observatory are a good place to start. You can find a detailed list of the common types of immigration status in the [Glossary](#).

MANY ROOMS

HOW CAN MY CHURCH RESPOND TO HOMELESSNESS: IMMIGRATION AND ASYLUM

EUROPE, BREXIT AND IMMIGRATION

Around 3.7 million EU citizens were believed to be living in the UK in 2019, including approximately 300,000 Irish Citizens. Following the UK's decision to leave the European Union in 2016 EU immigration to the UK declined and EU citizens residing in the UK had to apply to the EU settlement scheme to continue living and working in the UK. Irish citizens did not need to apply to the scheme as there is a common travel area between the UK and Ireland, which provides Irish citizens with travel and residency rights in the UK.

The deadline for most people to apply for pre-settled or settled status through the EU Settlement Scheme was 30 June 2021. However people can still apply if they are in one of these situations:

- You started living in the UK by 31 December 2020 and you need to make a late application.
- Your family member has pre-settled or settled status and you want to join them in the UK.
- You have a valid biometric residence permit or visa.

If a person does not fall in to any of these situations, generally, they can only stay in the UK as a visitor for up to 6 months. To live in the UK, EU citizens newly arriving in the UK will need a work, study or family visa.

People who already have pre-settled or settled status from the EU Settlement Scheme, have permission to stay in the UK.

A number of people are still waiting for decisions from their EUSS application, you can [check how to prove your rights in the UK](#).

THE ASYLUM SYSTEM

Applying for asylum can be a long and challenging process, particularly for those who have experienced trauma in their country of origin or who lack the necessary documents to support their case. In the second quarter of 2020, just 22% of applications for asylum received an initial decision within six months.

On 31 December 2020, there were around 65,000 people awaiting an initial decision on their asylum claim (including main applicants and dependants) – a near seven-fold increase on the number awaiting an initial decision on 30 June 2010.

In addition, many asylum seekers are not successful in the initial decision the Home Office and so decide to appeal, some more than once. During appeals financial support for the applicant can be withdrawn and the person can be left destitute, often leading to homelessness.

MANY ROOMS

HOW CAN MY CHURCH RESPOND TO HOMELESSNESS: IMMIGRATION AND ASYLUM

ACCESS TO IMMIGRATION ADVICE

Immigration and asylum rules are complex and change frequently. For many people in this situation, receiving good quality, regulated immigration advice will be the key to addressing their housing situation.

Assessing a person's status and their entitlement can be difficult and should only be assessed by a professional immigration advisor. Immigration advice is regulated, in a similar way to legal advice (Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) regulates immigration advisers; ensuring they are fit, competent and act in their clients' best interests, in a similar way to the way Solicitors are regulated by the Solicitors Regulatory Authority). Many people receive poor or unregulated immigration advice and this can make their situation much worse, cost huge sums and even affect their long-term future in the UK.

For churches, providing support for a person to access good quality immigration advice will be a key way to support people in this position.

- You can search for regulated [Immigration advisors](#) on the government [website](#). Legal Aid is available for some forms of immigration advice but not always and it can be expensive if the person does not qualify for legal aid.
- Law centres can offer a basic level of advice, they are free and you can find your closest one [here](#).
- Migrant Centres can be an extremely useful resource, offering free advice and support to people experiencing immigration issues. There is no national network so you will have to find out what is your closest centre. Most large cities will have multiple Migrant Centres. There may also be immigration advice drop ins local to you. Asking your local Citizens Advice Bureau is a good idea as they may know of local specialist support.
- There are national charities offering advice or support. [Migrant Help](#) is a good option as they have a 24/7/365 helpline via 0808 8010 503 or via webchat.

NO RECOURSE TO PUBLIC FUNDS (NRPF)

No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) is a legal status that applies to non-UK nationals who have no entitlement to welfare benefits, social housing or UK Government asylum support and/or are subject to UK Government immigration control. This is only the case for a small proportion of non-UK nationals and you shouldn't assume someone doesn't have recourse to public funds just because they are a migrant or an asylum seeker.

Generally, people without recourse to public funds tend to be one of the following:

- People granted 'leave to remain' in the UK but without recourse to public funds.
- People who originally arrived in the UK on a visa and have subsequently applied to remain in the UK.
- People unlawfully present in the UK (including those with expired visas sometimes referred to as 'overstayers').
- People on student visas.
- Refused asylum seekers whose appeal rights are exhausted.
- Some European Economic Area (EEA) migrants.

MANY ROOMS

HOW CAN MY CHURCH RESPOND TO HOMELESSNESS: IMMIGRATION AND ASYLUM

WHAT SUPPORT CAN SOMEONE WITHOUT RECOURSE TO PUBLIC FUNDS RECEIVE?

Local councils, (usually the District or Borough Council) have a responsibility to support some people without recourse to public funds, in particular: People with leave to remain but no recourse to public funds, an assessed care need, or families with children who are destitute or at risk of being destitute. The council may still have a duty to provide support to other categories of migrants and asylum seekers where failure to do so would result in a breach of certain human rights. Assessed social care needs can include care needs arising from old age, mental or physical ill-health, being pregnant or having responsibility for children who are homeless or at risk of being homeless. [The NRPF Network has more about support options](#) for people with NRPF.

WHAT CAN YOUR CHURCH DO TO SUPPORT PEOPLE AFFECTED BY IMMIGRATION AND ASYLUM POLICIES?

- Follow the Five P's for engaging with people affected by homelessness.
- Try to avoid using the legal jargon and acronyms that litter the immigration sector. Research by Housing Justice shows that around half of the people who use church run Night Shelters who were believed to have 'NRPF' (No Recourse to Public Funds) were eligible for support. Linking in with a professional immigration advisor and specialist services while your church family provides kindness, love and hospitality is an important partnership.
- If you have a clear need locally and a group of people who have spare rooms or a church building with spare residential space, you could consider becoming part of a Hosting scheme, such as that run by Housing Justice. Hosting schemes match someone with a spare room (or house!) with a refugee, asylum seeker or destitute migrant experiencing homelessness. Measures are put in place to provide safeguarding and support the person being hosted financially and to regularise their immigration status. In London, Housing Justice provide a [Hosting Project](#), including a specialist scheme for clergy. Outside of London, groups like [Refugees at Home](#) offer similar schemes.
- Consider working alongside existing welcome schemes such as [Welcome Boxes](#).
- Join the [Churches Refugee Network](#).
- Consider supporting a local group working with migrants financially, making them your Christmas or Lenten appeal.

For more details contact [Jenna Roberts](#).

MANY ROOMS

USEFUL CONTACTS AND FURTHER READING

The UK has a range of excellent, expert charities and organisations supporting people in housing need or homelessness. Signposting to such an organisation could be an important intervention, but many organisations will also offer you advice on how you might best support someone.

SOURCES OF ADVICE AND SUPPORT

[Shelter](#) provide housing advice, a wealth of resources on housing law and homelessness legislation. They have a helpline for people in Housing need: 0808 800 4444.

[The Citizen's Advice Bureau](#) provide advice on housing, homelessness, debt and welfare they have a free phone helpline 0344 411 1444.

FOR 16 TO 25 YEAR OLDS

[NightStop UK](#) helps young people into emergency accommodation: 0207 939 1235 (office hours only).

[Get Connected](#) provides advice and help to under 25s on housing need, homelessness and a number of other areas: 0808 808 4994 (24hr).

FOR PEOPLE ESCAPING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

[National Domestic Violence Helpline](#) is run by the charity [Refuge](#) and provides help and advice for victims of domestic violence on 0808 200 0247 (24hr). You can also speak to an advisor via their online chat facility on their website.

FOR VETERANS

The Ministry of Defence's [Veterans UK helpline](#) provides assistance with many issues, including housing: 0808 191 4218.

[Veterans Aid](#) will assess a person's needs and find appropriate support, including housing: 0800 012 6867.

FOR PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

[Patient Advice and Liaison Service \(PALS\)](#) 24-hour mental health support helpline: 0800 731 2864.

[The Samaritans](#) 116 123.

MANY ROOMS USEFUL CONTACTS AND FURTHER READING

LGBTQ+

[Stonewall Housing](#) offers support for LGBTQ+ people experiencing homelessness or housing need and their website contains useful information and signposting.

[Albert Kennedy Trust](#) is a charity for members of the LGBTQ+ community aged 16-25. They have an [online chat facility](#) and a [community hub](#) which has housing related support pages.

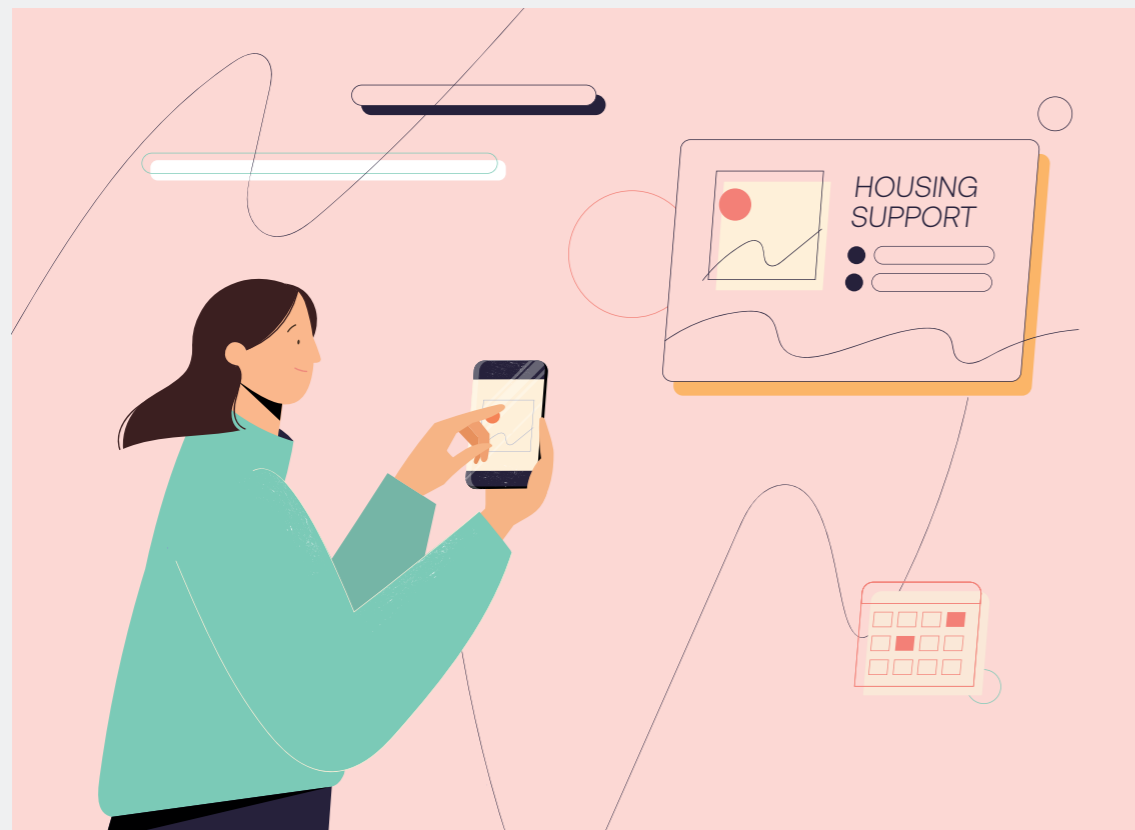
FOR REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

If a refugee needs specific support or advice, contact the [Refugee Council](#): 020 7346 6700.

[Migrant Help](#) also offer a helpline for people affected by asylum issues 0808 8010 503.

[Refugee Action](#) have a wealth of information on Asylum and Refugee issues.

If you need advice and can't find it with organisations listed above, contact Housing Justice on info@housingjustice.org.uk



MANY ROOMS GLOSSARY

Since the Housing Homeless People's Act 1977, the homelessness sector has become increasingly professionalised. This has seen significant progress in addressing some of the underlying causes of homelessness and improving the care and support available to people to people experiencing homelessness.

However, a homelessness sector has brought with it its own language and jargon. For people experiencing homelessness or for non-professionals trying to signpost people to the appropriate services this language can be hard to penetrate.

The table below lists some of the key terms, acronyms and jargon in the housing and homelessness sector. We have provided a summary, but it is worth looking further in to some of the terms and concepts. If someone comes to you for advice, it is completely acceptable and important to support them to access appropriate, expert support rather than try to be the expert.

Term	Definition	Further Information
Affordable Housing	The official definition of affordable housing is very broad, essentially housing for sale or rent for people who cannot afford local market prices, particularly affordable housing for rent which is at least 20% below local market rents, is provided by a registered provider, starter homes, discounted market sales housing (housing sold at 20% below market value) Other affordable routes to home ownership other schemes such as equity loans, shared ownership, rent to buy.	National Planning Policy Framework Annex 2
Dependent Children	The Housing Act does not define dependents but paragraph 10.7 of the Code of Guidance, states: 'housing authorities may wish to treat as dependent all children under 16, and all children aged 16-18 who are in, or are about to begin, full-time education or training or who for other reasons are unable to support themselves and who live at home.'	
Dormitory style Night Shelter	A Night Shelter where people staying sleep in a communal environment with several people sharing the same room. This type of shelter was ruled out during the COVID-19 pandemic and the potential for significant transmission of respiratory illnesses.	Housing Justice - Briefing Note on the Operating Principles 21/22
Hostel	Basic accommodation with shared facilities including kitchen, bathroom and laundry. Hostels are single sex and residents can stay for between 1-6 months. Most charge a form of rent, often paid through Housing Benefit and require a 'referral' through a partner agency such as the local council. A handful allow 'self-referral'.	Homeless Link - List of Homelessness Services Shelter - Information on Hostels

Continued...

MANY ROOMS GLOSSARY

Term	Definition	Further Information
Housing First	Principle in which somebody experienced rough sleeping in provided housing before addressing other support needs. Both housing and support are provided but not conditional. It has been highly successful in areas where pilots have been funded.	Homeless Link - Information about Housing First
Immigration Status	The type of permission a person holds to be in the UK (this is often called 'leave' or 'leave to remain'). The type of permission can change over time and this can affect what an individual can do, for example whether they can work or access welfare. Only the Home Office, responsible for UK Immigration policy has the authority to change a person's immigration status.	Please see page 21
Intentionally Homeless	Means that your homelessness, or threatened homelessness, was caused by something that you deliberately did or failed to do. When deciding if you are intentionally homeless, the council must consider the reasons you became homeless.	Shelter - Intentional Homelessness
Local Connection	Local councils prioritise scarce social housing and housing related support. To work out whether the local council has a legal obligation to support someone, they first establish whether the person has a 'local connection' to the area, this is typically having lived in the area for the last five years, a having family living in the area, working in the area, been in care in the area. If the council does not believe the person has a connection to the area they can refer to a different local authority for them to provide support.	Shelter - Local Connection
Mental Capacity	The ability to make decisions. Capacity is dynamic and a specific function in relation to the decision to be taken. It is NOT about the ability to make a different decision from the one you may make.	
Night Shelter	A Night Shelter is emergency accommodation for a person who is or is at immediate risk of rough sleeping. Shelters are usually run by charities and either paid for by the local council or independently funded by local faith or community groups. In the UK, Night Shelters are free and typically around 12-15 beds. Prior to the pandemic they were often situated in church halls but since the pandemic single rooms have become the default in most areas.	Housing Justice - Night Shelters

Continued...

MANY ROOMS GLOSSARY

Term	Definition	Further Information
NRPF (No Recourse to Public Funds)	Section 115 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 states that a person will have 'no recourse to public funds' if they are 'subject to immigration control'. This means they have no entitlement to most welfare benefits, including income support, housing benefit and a range of allowances and tax credits. However, NRPF has become an over-used term to describe just about anyone who isn't from the UK (or seems like they might not be). HJ advise not using the term or assuming a person's immigration status until a qualified immigration advisor has been able to make an assessment of an individual's current status and likelihood to be entitled if given adequate support.	NRPF Network - Who has no recourse to public funds
Outreach	The term given to the teams of trained professionals who engage with people sleeping rough, supporting them access accommodation and support. The service is typically run by a charity as part of contract with the local council.	St Mungos - Outreach Teams
PIEs	Psychologically informed environments (PIEs) are projects or services for people experiencing homelessness which are designed based on the psychological and emotional needs of the people who use or may use them.	What a PIE means and why
Priority Homeless	Those to whom the local authority must offer longer term housing if they are homeless through no fault of their own. The offer can be a housing association or council home or a privately rented one.	
PRS	The Private rented sector is housing let at a market rent to a tenant. A local council may house somebody to whom they have a duty in the private rented sector.	
Registered Provider	A registered provider is an organisation registered with the Homes and Communities Agency to provide affordable housing. They are subject to a regulatory framework and enforcement from the regulator of social housing.	
Statutory Duty	The term used to describe the legal responsibility a council holds to house or provide housing support to an individual, this is affected by a series of laws and regulation relating to the person's personal circumstances (e.g. immigration status, dependent children etc). The main duty a local council has is to provide temporary accommodation to relieve homelessness, they can do this with an offer of permanent or temporary accommodation to an eligible person.	Shelter - Local Authority Main Housing Duties

Continued...

MANY ROOMS GLOSSARY

Term	Definition	Further Information
StreetLink	Street Link is the primary way for members of the public to connect a person sleeping rough to services to support them. Via a text, the StreetLink app or a phone, the location of a person sleeping rough is provided. Street Link then contact the relevant local authority who send out a trained support worker to find and assist the person.	StreetLink
Strength-based Practice	Focussing on the strengths of a person using a service rather than any perceived issues of problems they may be experiencing.	Homeless Link - Strengths Based Practice Toolkit
Temporary Accommodation	Used by Local Authorities to house people in priority need before a more permanent solution is found. Temporary housing can include a private flat, a council or housing association flat and housing with support.	
The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017	This act reformed legislation by placing a duty on Local Authorities to provide services to everyone affected by homelessness not just those in priority need and a duty to prevent homelessness.	https://england.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_and_research/policy_library/briefing_homelessness_reduction_act_2017
Unintentionally Homeless	If the reasons behind your actions were beyond your control, you should be classed as unintentionally homeless. Examples of unintentional homelessness include your landlord evicting someone to sell their property.	
Universal Credit	Universal Credit is a means-tested benefit for people of working age who are on a low income. UC condensed 6 previous benefits (Job Seekers Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance, Housing Benefit, Child Tax Credit and working tax credit) into one monthly payment. Around 6 million people currently claim UC (Summer 2021), a near doubling since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.	What is Universal Credit?

MANY ROOMS GLOSSARY

COMMON TYPES OF IMMIGRATION STATUS

The UK's immigration laws are complex, and it can be difficult to establish whether a person has leave to remain, and if so, on what basis. It is the responsibility of the Home Office to decide what a person's immigration status is, usually after the person has made an application, and only a properly OISC regulated immigration adviser can lawfully advise an individual on their immigration matter. However, social workers and other local authority officers will need to be able to identify a person's immigration status and understand how this affects their entitlements, in order to determine what type of support and services may be available to migrants and their families.

The information in this section intends to provide a basic summary of the different types of status people may have.

BRITISH NATIONALITY/ CITIZENSHIP

A British citizen has the right of abode in the UK, which means that they can enter the UK when they wish to, even if they have never lived here before. British nationality law is complex and British citizenship may be acquired by birth, descent, or by making an application to the Home Office to register or naturalise. A child will not automatically be British solely by being born in the UK, following a change in the law that has applied since 1 January 1983.

NON-EEA NATIONALS

Most people who are nationals of countries that are outside of the European Economic Area (non-EEA nationals) are required to obtain permission to enter or remain in the UK. This will involve applying for entry clearance (if they are outside of the UK) and leave to enter (on arrival to the UK), or leave to remain (within the UK) under the UK Immigration Rules. These rules set out the categories under which a person can apply, for example, to work, study, visit, join family or seek international protection. There will also be some instances where the Home Office may grant permission to remain in the UK on a discretionary basis or to prevent a human rights breach. Some key terms are set out in the table below.

Certain citizens of Commonwealth countries may have the right of abode and will be free to enter and live in the UK without being required to obtain leave to enter or remain.

A person who is living in the UK without any immigration permission, when they are required to have this under the UK's immigration laws, may be unlawfully present and may also be described as having irregular immigration status or as a person without leave.

MANY ROOMS
A BASIC GUIDE TO SUPPORTING SOMEONE
IN EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

