



BRIEFING PAPER

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Coronavirus: Support for rough sleepers (England)

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Summary

Rough sleepers are vulnerable to coronavirus (Covid-19); they are more likely to have underlying health conditions than the wider population and to face difficulties in following public health advice on self-isolation, social distancing and hygiene. They can also face barriers in accessing public health information and healthcare. Shared facilities used by rough sleepers – such as day centres, hostels and night shelters – increase the risk of transmission of the virus.

The Autumn 2019 official count of rough sleepers in England recorded 4,266 people sleeping rough. The Covid-19 outbreak in Spring 2020 prompted an unprecedented public health response from the UK Government, local authorities and the voluntary sector to protect the rough sleeping population.

‘Everyone In’ Initiative

On 26 March 2020, the Government asked local authorities in England to **“help make sure we get everyone in”**, including those who would not normally be entitled to assistance under homelessness legislation. The Chief Executive of the charity Crisis, Jon Sparkes, described the Government’s request as a “landmark moment.”

In response, local authorities across the country sought to ensure that people sleeping rough and in accommodation where it was difficult to self-isolate (such as shelters and assessment centres) were safely accommodated to protect them, and the wider public, from the risks of Covid-19. This was an enormous challenge for local authorities, who block-booked hotel rooms, secured other en-suite accommodation (e.g. B&Bs, student accommodation, holiday rentals etc) and worked with partners to ensure that those accommodated had the food, medical care and support they required.

The Government supported the ‘Everyone In’ initiative with **£3.2 million in funding and guidance**. Announcing the emergency funding, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Robert Jenrick, said:

Public safety and protecting the most vulnerable people in society from coronavirus is this government’s top priority. We are working closely with councils and charities to ensure they have the support they need throughout this period.

Next Steps Accommodation Programme

The Government set up a **rough sleeping taskforce**, spearheaded by Dame Louise (now Baroness) Casey, to lead the next phase of the Government’s support for rough sleepers.

The taskforce is working with local authorities, charities, faith groups and other partners to ensure that as few people as possible return to life on the streets after the Covid-19 emergency. To enable this the **Next Steps Accommodation Programme** is providing two distinct funding streams for local authorities and their partners **in 2020/21**:

- **£105 million for shorter-term/interim accommodation and immediate support** (of which £91.5 million has been [allocated](#) to 274 local authorities and the remaining £13.5 million will be used to enable local authorities to tackle new or emerging challenges).
- **£161 million to deliver 3,300 units of longer-term, move-on accommodation and support** - to date over £150 million has been [allocated](#) to 276 schemes across England which are expected to deliver by March 2021.

The Government also made £23 million available in 2020/21 to tackle the substance dependence treatment needs of rough sleepers. The funding is administered by Public Health England and has been allocated to 43 areas across England

Winter provision for rough sleepers

On 13 October 2020, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) [announced](#) a package of support to protect rough sleepers over the winter:

- A **£10 million Cold Weather Fund** to support local authorities to provide self-contained and Covid-secure accommodation.
- **£2 million to enable faith and community groups** to provide Covid-secure accommodation.
- **Operating guidance to the sector** to help night shelters open more safely, as a last resort and where not doing so would endanger lives.

A new '**Protect Programme**', announced in November 2020 and backed by £15 million, will target support at local areas with high numbers of rough sleepers, with a particular focus on protecting those deemed clinically vulnerable. The Government also asked all local authorities to update their rough sleeping plans and carry out a rapid assessment of need for everyone they accommodate.

As of 17 December 2020, the Government had allocated £7.3 million of the Cold Weather Fund to over 260 local authorities and £9.8 million of the Protect Programme funding to 19 local areas, including the Greater London Authority.

Following the announcement of a third national lockdown for England on 4 January 2021, the Government committed an **additional £10 million funding for local authorities** and urged authorities to **"redouble their efforts"** to help accommodate all those currently sleeping rough. Authorities were also asked to ensure that those accommodated are registered with a GP and factored into local area vaccination plans.

In total, the Government has allocated over £700 million ring-fenced funding in 2020/21 to support rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping.

Funding in 2021/22

At [Spending Review 2020](#) the Chancellor confirmed an additional £254 million of resource funding to tackle rough sleeping and homelessness. The Government also committed £87 million of capital funding in 2021/22 to support the delivery of long-term accommodation for rough sleepers.

The Government subsequently announced a further £310 million [Homelessness Prevention Grant](#), which takes the total resource funding for rough sleeping and homelessness in 2021/22 to over £750 million.

Impact of measures to support rough sleepers

The Government's 'Everyone In' initiative has been credited with protecting rough sleepers and saving lives during the Covid-19 emergency.

On 18 April 2020 the Government reported that in England over 90% of rough sleepers (more than 5,400) known to local authorities at the beginning of the crisis had been offered accommodation as a result of 'Everyone In'.

By November 2020, 9,866 people were in emergency accommodation and 23,273 people had moved on into settled accommodation or supported housing.

Homelessness organisations report that bringing everyone in has given them the opportunity to engage with and support many people who had previously been hard to reach, helping them to move on from rough sleeping. However, they also report that the

flow of new rough sleepers onto the streets has continued and they have experienced increased demand for their services.

According to the National Audit Office, since June 2020 MHCLG has collected data on a weekly basis from local authorities which appears to confirm an upward trend in numbers of rough sleepers. The data was gathered at speed and has not been independently validated or published. Local Government Association (LGA) discussions with councils suggest a varying picture across the country, with levels of rough sleeping in some areas much reduced from the start of the pandemic, whilst in other areas levels remain the same or have increased.

Comment

Local authorities have welcomed the additional emergency funding to help them respond to the Covid-19 outbreak. However, the level of funding for homelessness services remains a concern. In addition, the LGA has criticised the fragmented, short-term and resource-intensive competitive nature of current funding and called for long-term and sustainable homelessness funding.

Following the first national lockdown, the approach taken by local authorities to those who newly presented as rough sleeping increasingly diverged, with some continuing to take people into emergency accommodation regardless of eligibility, and others assessing people's eligibility for support. Housing lawyers and homelessness charities have called for greater clarity from the Government on the legal duties and powers local authorities should be using to accommodate rough sleepers during the pandemic. Support for those with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) due to their immigration status is a particular cause for concern.

The Government's decision to allow communal night shelters for rough sleepers to reopen has been criticised.

The shortage of suitable move-on accommodation in many areas of the country remains a significant problem. Furthermore, the sector is concerned that homelessness levels may surge once the Government's temporary coronavirus housing, welfare and employment support measures come to an end and the full economic impact of the Covid-19 outbreak starts to take effect.

Stakeholders have called for further measures to prevent homelessness, including: the national roll-out of Housing First; changes to the UK welfare system; protections for private renters; and increased investment in social rented housing.

The House of Commons Housing, Communities and Local Government (HCLG) Select Committee published the interim report of its [inquiry to assess the impact of the coronavirus crisis on homelessness, rough sleeping and the private rented sector](#) on 22 May 2020. The report urged the Government to implement three key measures to protect rough sleepers against the impact of coronavirus:

- Provide local authorities with an annual £100 million dedicated funding stream to end rough sleeping in England once and for all.
- Compensate local authorities for provision offered to rough sleepers with no recourse to public funds as a result of the crisis and publish guidance on councils' use of discretion in these circumstances.
- Boost the immediate availability of appropriate supported housing, by providing targeted grant funding for local authorities and housing associations to acquire properties and removing restrictions on Right to Buy receipts.

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[The Government's response](#) to the Committee was published on 25 June 2020.

The HCLG Committee has issued a [further call for evidence](#) to understand how effective Government support has been in tackling the negative impact of Covid-19 on tenants, landlords, rough sleepers and the homelessness.

The National Audit Office (NAO) has published a report on its [investigation into the housing of rough sleepers during the Covid-19 pandemic](#), in order to support Parliament's scrutiny of the Government's Covid-19 response. The investigation concluded that Everyone In was "a considerable achievement". Nevertheless, it also identified several key issues that the Government needs to address if it is to achieve its goal of ending rough sleeping by the end of this Parliament.

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

Housing policy is a devolved area. The paper briefly outlines the key measures in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to protect rough sleepers during the Covid-19 emergency.

1. Support for rough sleepers

1.1 Background

Rough sleeping is the most extreme form of homelessness and many rough sleepers have high levels of complex needs. Many people who sleep rough do not have a statutory right to accommodation under the homelessness legislation,¹ for example because they are not deemed to be in a 'priority need' category or are ineligible due to their immigration status.

Successive governments have put in place initiatives to tackle rough sleeping. In 2018 the Government published a [Rough Sleeping Strategy](#) which was described as "the beginning of a nine year policy to ensure no one has to sleep rough again".² The current Conservative Government has committed to end rough sleeping by the end of this Parliament (2024), and announced in February 2020 that Dame Louise (now Baroness) Casey would be leading a review to advise what more can be done to reduce rough sleeping.³

The Autumn 2019 official count of rough sleepers in England recorded 4,266 people sleeping rough, this represents a fall of 9% on 2018 but an increase of 141% on the 2010 count (1,768).⁴ The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Robert Jenrick, welcomed the decrease in numbers of rough sleepers saying, "the Government's strategy is working" but acknowledged that "We are acutely aware of the scale of the challenge before us."⁵

1.2 'Everyone In' Initiative

Rough sleepers are vulnerable to coronavirus (Covid-19); they are more likely to have underlying health conditions than the wider population and to face difficulties in following public health advice on self-isolation, social distancing and hygiene. They can also face barriers in accessing public health information and healthcare. Shared facilities used by rough sleepers – such as day centres, hostels and night shelters – may increase the risk of transmission of the virus.

The Covid-19 outbreak in England in Spring 2020 prompted an unprecedented emergency public health response from the UK Government, local authorities and the voluntary sector to protect the rough sleeping population.

On 17 March 2020 the Government [announced £3.2 million in emergency funding for local authorities to help rough sleepers](#) during the Covid-19 outbreak. The funding was intended to reimburse

¹ Local authorities' duties towards homeless people are contained in Part 7 of the *Housing Act 1996* (as amended).

² MHCLG, CM 9685, [Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018](#), August 2018, Executive Summary

³ [HC Deb 27 February 2020 cc501-2](#)

⁴ House of Commons Library briefing paper SN02007: [Rough Sleeping \(England\)](#), April 2020, Summary

⁵ [HC Deb 27 February 2020 cc501-3](#)

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authorities for the cost of providing accommodation and services to rough sleepers, and those at risk of rough sleeping, who were at risk of, or who had been diagnosed with, Covid-19.

Announcing the emergency funding, the Communities Secretary, Robert Jenrick, said:

Public safety and protecting the most vulnerable people in society from coronavirus is this government's top priority. We are working closely with councils and charities to ensure they have the support they need throughout this period.

The initial funding that I've announced today will ensure councils are able to put emergency measures in place to help some of the most vulnerable people in our society to successfully self-isolate.

I would urge anyone who is concerned about someone sleeping rough to use the government's StreetLink app⁶ to alert local support services who can reach out to those in need at this difficult time.⁷

On 26 March 2020 local authorities and homeless charities received an email from Dame Louise (now Baroness) Casey, who was appointed to spearhead the Government's response to rough sleeping, calling on them to ensure rough sleepers were "inside and safe" by the weekend. "These are unusual times so I'm asking for an unusual effort," she wrote. "Many areas of the country have already been able to 'safe harbour' their people, which is incredible. What we need to do now is work out how we can get 'everyone in'."⁸

On the same day the Minister for Rough Sleeping and Housing, then Luke Hall, [wrote to local authority leaders](#) to update them on plans to protect rough sleepers during the Covid-19 pandemic. The letter asked local authorities to **"bring in those on the streets to protect their health and stop wider transmission"** and to **support rough sleepers and other vulnerable homeless people into appropriate accommodation by the end of the week.**

The letter set out the following principles and actions for local authorities:

The basic principles are to:

- focus on people who are, or are at risk of, sleeping rough, and those who are in accommodation where it is difficult to self-isolate, such as shelters and assessment centres
- make sure that these people have access to the facilities that enable them to adhere to public health guidance on hygiene or isolation, ideally single room facilities
- utilise alternative powers and funding to assist those with no recourse to public funds who require shelter and other forms of support due to the COVID-19 pandemic

⁶ StreetLink can be accessed via the app or online: www.streetlink.org.uk/.

⁷ MHCLG, [£3.2 million emergency support for rough sleepers during coronavirus outbreak](#), 17 March 2020

⁸ ['Homeless swap the streets for hotel suites during coronavirus lockdown'](#), The Times, 26 April 2020

- mitigate their own risk of infection, and transmission to others, by ensuring they are able to self-isolate as appropriate in line with public health guidance

This should be done by taking the following programme of actions:

1. Convening a local coordination cell to plan and manage your response to COVID and rough sleeping involving the local authority (housing, social care and public health) and local NHS partners together. This would then report in to wider local COVID structures.
2. Seeking to stop homeless people from congregating in facilities such as day centres and street encampments where there is a higher risk of transmission.
3. Urgently procuring accommodation for people on the streets if you have not already done so – MHCLG will support you to do so if you are struggling to procure sufficient units.
4. Triaging people where possible into three cohorts driven by medical advice:
 - those with symptoms of COVID19;
 - those with pre-existing conditions but without symptoms; and
 - those without any of the above.

Attached to this letter is additional guidance on the approach that agencies should be taking to triaging agreed with NHS England and Public Health England.

5. Getting the social care basics such as food, and clinician care to people who need it in the self-contained accommodation. It is likely that you will need to utilise your commissioned homeless services to provide support to people in this accommodation and we urge you to work with the commissioned and non-commissioned sector to make sure there are adequate levels of support provided.

6. If possible, separating people who have significant drug and alcohol needs from those who do not.⁹

In response to the Minister's letter, the Chair of the Local Government Association, Cllr James Jamieson, said that this would be "a huge task".¹⁰ The Chief Executive of Crisis, Jon Sparkes, described the Government's request as a "landmark moment – and the right thing to do."¹¹

Local authorities across the country sought to secure accommodation for those who were sleeping rough or in accommodation where it was difficult to self-isolate, by block-booking hotel rooms and other en-suite accommodation (e.g. B&Bs, student accommodation, holiday rentals etc).¹² Under the Government's emergency coronavirus measures this

⁹ MHCLG, [Letter from Minister Hall to local authorities on plans to protect rough sleepers](#), 27 March 2020

¹⁰ *Inside Housing*, '[Government 'tells councils to house all rough sleepers by the weekend'](#)', 27 March 2020 [subscription only]

¹¹ '[Councils told to house all rough sleepers in England by weekend](#)', The Guardian, 27 March 2020

¹² See for example: *Inside Housing*, '[Greater Manchester to put 1,000 rough sleepers in hotels amid coronavirus outbreak](#)', 26 March 2020 [subscription required]

type of accommodation was allowed to remain open when providing rooms to support homeless and other vulnerable people.¹³

Local authorities also worked with existing services for rough sleepers, health services and the voluntary sector to ensure that rough sleepers who used this emergency accommodation had the support, medical care and food they needed.

The Government has issued and updated guidance for those delivering homelessness services during the pandemic:

- On 29 June 2020 the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) updated the statutory [Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities](#), advising local authorities to account for the impact of Covid-19 on vulnerability when assessing those in priority need for accommodation.¹⁴
- Public Health England (PHE) and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) published [COVID-19: guidance for commissioners and providers of hostel services for people experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping](#) (last updated 6 January 2021).
- PHE and the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) published [COVID-19: guidance for commissioners and providers of services for people who use drugs or alcohol](#) (last updated 6 January 2021).

1.3 Next Steps Accommodation Programme

On 2 May 2020 the Government [announced](#) a **specialist taskforce**, headed by Dame Louise (now Baroness) Casey, would lead the next phase of the Government's support for rough sleepers during the Covid-19 pandemic. The taskforce is working with local authorities, charities, faith groups and other partners on plans to ensure those accommodated through the Everyone In initiative are helped into longer-term accommodation and as few people as possible return to life on the streets.¹⁵

The Minister for Rough Sleeping and Housing, then Luke Hall, [wrote to local authority chief executives in England](#) on 28 May 2020 asking them to set out next-step plans for accommodating and supporting rough sleepers brought off the streets during the pandemic. Authorities were requested to carry out individual assessments and consider a range of options to ensure people's housing, health and care needs are met:

...I am now asking that you put in place a plan of support for all rough sleepers accommodated in hotels and other forms of emergency accommodation during the response to the pandemic.

I understand that designing and delivering these plans represents another big challenge, and that many of you have begun this

¹³ CO & MHCLG, [Coronavirus guidance – closing certain businesses and venues](#), updated 27 March 2020

¹⁴ MHCLG, [Updates: Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities](#), 29 June 2020, new paragraphs 8.44 and 8.45

¹⁵ MHCLG, [Dame Louise Casey to spearhead government taskforce on rough sleeping during pandemic](#), 2 May 2020

preparation. We currently have an opportunity for an unprecedented level of engagement with individuals who might otherwise be sleeping rough. Understanding people's needs now and planning the next steps will be crucial for continuing to save lives and supporting some of the most vulnerable people.

[...]

We are asking for these initial plans to be set out by 11 June in a co-production process with our team. Where appropriate, you should start moving people into accommodation as soon as they are able to do so, following the completion of a joint housing, health and care plan. I know that several of you have already begun this planning in earnest and initial discussions have taken place.

I appreciate that these are challenging timescales and that your plans will develop over time – but we need this information so we can work with you to support your next steps work over the coming weeks.¹⁶

The Government's **Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP)**¹⁷ will provide funding to local authorities and their partners to ensure that those placed in emergency accommodation during the pandemic continue to have a safe place to stay and are helped into longer-term accommodation. The programme is comprised of two distinct funding streams:

i) £105 million in revenue funding for shorter-term/interim accommodation and immediate support.

On 24 June 2020 the Government [announced](#) **£105 million for local authorities in England in 2020/21** to enable them to provide immediate accommodation and support to the approximately 15,000 vulnerable people who were being provided with emergency accommodation at that time.¹⁸

The funding can cover a range of interventions:

The following types of short-term accommodation will be considered eligible for funding under the programme. Funding can be used for both the provision of new accommodation, and the extension of existing accommodation:

- **Accommodation owned by a university, RP or private landlord and available for interim use.**
- **PRS Access.** This includes guaranteed rent or deposit schemes, mediation support and training, or landlord incentives.
- **Supported Housing.** Additional support can be offered to enable access to supported accommodation or social housing.

¹⁶ MHCLG, [Letter from the Minister for Rough Sleeping and Housing to all Local Authority Chief Executives in England](#), 28 May 2020

¹⁷ MHCLG, [Jenrick launches £266 million housing fund for vulnerable people](#), 18 July 2020

¹⁸ [HCWS311 24 June 2020](#)

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- **Modular housing units** where these can be made available with necessary facilities, including power and waste connections. These can usually be placed with temporary planning permission.
- **Hotels.** This includes funding to extend contracts, where this is the only or best solution to keep people in safe accommodation.
- **Other forms of short-term accommodation** to ensure that no one returns to the streets. Bidders are encouraged to be creative in their proposed response to reflect the expressed needs of individual rough sleepers.
- **Employment support and training** either to access work directly or to improve individuals' employability.
- **Reconnections with friends and family**, including local, national and international reconnections.
- **Other forms of immediate support** including tenancy sustainment support and immigration advice.¹⁹

On 17 September 2020, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Robert Jenrick, [announced](#) that **274 local authorities had been allocated £91.5 million for interim accommodation and support in 2020/21.**²⁰ The remaining £13.5 million will be used to enable local authorities to tackle new or emerging challenges.²¹

ii) £161 million for longer-term move-on accommodation and support linked to this accommodation.

The March 2020 budget had allocated £381 million over four years for rough sleeping services (comprised of £237 million for accommodation for up to 6,000 rough sleepers and £144 million for associated support services).²²

On 24 May 2020, the Government [announced](#) that this funding would be increased to £433m, **with £161 million²³ brought forward to 2020/21 to enable 3,300 units of longer-term, move-on accommodation to be delivered in the next 12 months.**²⁴ Of the £161 million, £130 million is capital funding for the acquisition or renovation of homes and £31 million is revenue funding for tenancy-sustainment support.²⁵

The following types of accommodation are eligible for funding:

¹⁹ MHCLG, [Next Steps Accommodation Programme: Guidance](#), 18 July 2020, para 31

²⁰ The local authority funding allocations are available on the Gov.uk website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/next-steps-accommodation-programme-guidance-and-proposal-templates>

²¹ MHCLG, [274 councils set to receive housing support for vulnerable people](#), 17 September 2020

²² [HC 121, March 2020](#), para 2.63, p75

²³ Nb. The MHCLG press notice referred to £160 million in funding the Next Steps Accommodation Programme guidance refers to £161 million in funding.

²⁴ [Written Question 52570, 4 June 2020](#)

²⁵ MHCLG, [Next Steps Accommodation Programme: Guidance](#), 18 July 2020, para 11

- **Purchase and repair of properties, either as freehold or on a long lease**, where repairs may be required to bring the properties up to good standard to be let.
- **Refurbishment and repurposing of existing stock.** This includes purchasing white goods and furnishings for ready to use units. This could include schemes such as conversion of a former sheltered housing scheme into supported or move-on accommodation.
- **Private Sector Leasing.** i.e. where the bidder enters into a contract with a Private Sector Landlord agreeing to rent units over multiple years.
- **Development of new build properties.** Bidders should take account of the potential use of modular housing. In some instances, this can be commissioned and built faster than traditional house building, especially where units are ordered in bulk. Many types of units can be moved between sites depending on demand, and using temporary planning permission, or used as regular housing stock.
- **Contribution towards social investment programmes that deliver the aims of the Next Steps Accommodation Programme.** This applies only to local authorities who should consider blending grant with their own sources of funding for onwards investment to deliver housing. For example, there are a variety of property funds and initiatives that have the expertise to help deliver the programme's objectives while providing a revenue return on investment. These may include one or more of the types of accommodation listed above. Local authorities should explore this approach with their adviser before continuing.²⁶

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's (MHCLG) ambition is that this part of the NSAP fund is used "to secure a long-term national asset, maintained in perpetuity as supported move-on homes for people recovering from rough sleeping".²⁷

On 29 October 2020, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Robert Jenrick, [announced](#) that **over £150 million had been allocated to 276 schemes across England to deliver more than 3,300 new long-term homes for rough sleepers and other vulnerable people. The homes will be available by 31 March 2021.**²⁸

Alongside the NSAP funding, MHCLG is making available the expertise from MHCLG's Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) and Homelessness Advice and Support (HAST) Adviser Teams to help coproduce plans for accommodation provision and related support services, under the oversight of the taskforce.

²⁶ MHCLG, [Next Steps Accommodation Programme: Guidance](#), 18 July 2020, para 40

²⁷ Ibid., para 41

²⁸ MHCLG, [Funding allocated for 3,300 new homes for rough sleepers](#), 29 October 2020. The funding allocations are available on the Gov.uk website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/next-steps-accommodation-programme-guidance-and-proposal-templates>

The Government also **made £23 million available in 2020/21 to tackle the substance dependence treatment needs of rough sleepers**.²⁹ The funding is administered by Public Health England and has been allocated to 43 areas across England.³⁰

It was [reported](#) on 20 August 2020 that Dame Louise (now Baroness) Casey had stepped down from her role as head of the specialist taskforce which is leading the next phase of the Government's support for rough sleepers during the Covid-19 pandemic.³¹ To date a successor has not been announced.

1.4 Winter provision for rough sleepers

On 13 October 2020, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) [announced](#) a package of support to protect rough sleepers, and those at risk of becoming homeless, from life-threatening cold weather and the risks posed by coronavirus. The package is comprised of:

- A **£10 million Cold Weather Fund**³² to support local authorities to provide self-contained and Covid-secure accommodation.
- **£2 million for faith and community groups** to help them provide Covid-secure accommodation for rough sleepers.
- **Comprehensive guidance to the sector**, produced with Public Health England, Homeless Link and Housing Justice, to help shelters open safely, where not doing so would endanger lives.³³

Alongside the announcement the Minister for Housing and Rough Sleeping, **Kelly Tolhurst**, said:

Winter is clearly a dangerous time for people who sleep rough. These extra measures will help to protect this vulnerable group from life-threatening cold weather, as well as the risk of contracting COVID-19, and also provide them with support into move-on accommodation.

The work councils, providers, and the NHS has done since the start of the pandemic has saved lives and through this extra funding we will continue help them to rebuild their lives, part of our commitment to end rough sleeping for good.

In periods of severe cold weather local authorities, working with the voluntary sector, normally provide emergency accommodation for rough sleepers. The [Severe Weather Emergency Protocol](#) (SWEP) is triggered by the forecast of freezing, near freezing or otherwise severe weather conditions. Some areas offer 'extended winter provision' which is the provision of additional services over an agreed time period e.g. every

²⁹ MHCLG, [£105 million to keep rough sleepers safe and off the streets during coronavirus pandemic](#), 24 June 2020

³⁰ MHCLG, [Extra help for rough sleepers with drug and alcohol dependency](#), 14 December 2020

³¹ ['Fears over 'vacuum' as top UK homelessness adviser steps down'](#), The Guardian, 20 August 2020

³² The Cold Weather Fund was launched in 2018 and provided £5 million in winter 2018/19 and £13 million in winter 2019/20.

³³ MHCLG, [Rough sleepers to be helped to keep safe this winter](#), 13 October 2020

night from November to March. Emergency night shelters are often provided in settings which require people to share the space with others.

On 13 October 2020, MHCLG published [Operating principles for commissioners and providers of night shelters for people experiencing rough sleeping](#). The principles provide guidance to support commissioners, staff and volunteers of night shelters should the decision be taken to open a shelter. The guidance states that “These settings should only be used as a last resort to protect against the risk to health and life of individuals remaining on the streets when other alternative options are unavailable, for example in very cold weather.”³⁴

On 5 November 2020, the Government [announced](#) a new scheme - the ‘**Protect Programme**’ – to support the ongoing efforts to provide accommodation for rough sleepers during the pandemic. The Programme will provide £15 million of additional support to local areas with high numbers of rough sleepers, with a particular focus on protecting those deemed clinically vulnerable. It will continue throughout the winter until March 2021.³⁵

In addition, **local authorities were asked to update their rough sleeping plans by the end of 2020:**

All councils will have to update their rough sleeping plans by the end of the year, providing an overview of their support for those sleeping rough. They will also be asked to carry out a rapid assessment of need for everyone they accommodate and to consider time limited interventions for those rough sleeping now or new to rough sleeping.³⁶

As of 17 December 2020, the Government had allocated £7.3 million of the Cold Weather Fund to over 260 local authorities³⁷ and £9.8 million of the Protect Programme funding to 19 local areas, including the Greater London Authority.³⁸

The Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, announced a third national lockdown for England on 4 January 2021, following a rapid rise in infections, hospital admissions and case rates across the country.³⁹

On 8 January 2021, the Communities Secretary, Robert Jenrick, announced **an additional £10 funding for local authorities as part of the ongoing Everyone In initiative**. The funding is intended to assist authorities to “redouble their efforts” to help accommodate all those currently sleeping rough, including those who have previously refused help.⁴⁰

³⁴ MHCLG, [COVID-19: provision of night shelters](#), 13 October 2020

³⁵ MHCLG, [Jenrick launches 'Protect Programme': the next step in winter rough sleeping plan](#), 5 November 2020

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ [PQ 130770, 11 January 2021](#)

³⁸ MHCLG, [Extra help for rough sleepers with drug and alcohol dependency](#), 14 December 2020

³⁹ Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street, [Prime Minister announces national lockdown](#), 4 January 2021

⁴⁰ MHCLG, [Extra covid protections for rough sleepers and renters](#), 8 January 2021

Local authorities were also asked to ensure that those accommodated are swiftly registered with a GP, where they are not already, and are factored into local area vaccination plans, in line with the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) prioritisation for Covid-19 vaccinations.

In total, the Government has allocated over £700 million ring-fenced funding in 2020/21 to support rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping. Alongside this funding, the Government has allocated £4.6 billion in un-ringfenced funding to help local authorities respond to coronavirus pressures across all their services, including homelessness services.⁴¹

1.5 Support for the voluntary sector

The voluntary sector plays a key role in providing emergency accommodation and other support services, including food assistance, to those experiencing homelessness.

The Government included 'charities and workers delivering key frontline services' in the [list of key workers](#) who are critical to the Covid-19 response. During the Spring national lockdown, schools and childcare providers were asked to continue to provide care for children of these key workers, if required.

On 8 April 2020 the Chancellor, Rishi Sunak, announced a £750 million package of support for frontline charities across the UK.⁴² £6 million of this funding has been allocated to support **frontline** homelessness charities. A total of 132 homelessness charities have successfully bid for funding from the [Covid-19 Homelessness Response Fund](#).⁴³ According to Inside Housing magazine, an additional £5.5 million was subsequently made available to homelessness charities (£4.82m from The National Lottery Community Fund and £680,000 from Comic Relief).⁴⁴ The funds are being administered by Homeless Link, the largest national membership charity for frontline homelessness services.

A number of initiatives have emerged to help charities access pools of volunteers and emergency funds during the Covid-19 outbreak. The charity Crisis, for example, established an [emergency grants fund](#) to support local groups who provide services to those experiencing homelessness. Homeless Link has collated current information on potential funding sources: [Homelessness and Covid-19 funding opportunities](#).

⁴¹ [HCWS694, 11 Jan 2021](#)

⁴² HM Treasury, [Chancellor sets out extra £750 million coronavirus funding for frontline charities](#), 8 April 2020

⁴³ MHCLG, [Charities to benefit from support for rough sleepers during pandemic](#), 7 June 2020 and Homeless Link, [COVID-19 Homelessness Response Fund to provide £6 million to charities](#), 14 May 2020

⁴⁴ ['Additional £5.5m in funding made available for homelessness charities'](#), Inside Housing Magazine, 14 July 2020 [subscription only]

1.6 Funding in 2021/22

At [Spending Review 2020](#) the Chancellor announced an additional £254 million of resource funding to tackle rough sleeping and homelessness.⁴⁵ This additional funding will support frontline services through the Rough Sleeping Initiative and enable local authorities to fund their statutory duties to prevent homelessness.⁴⁶

The Spending Review also confirmed that the Government will commit £87 million of capital funding in 2021/22 primarily to support the delivery of long-term accommodation for rough sleepers.⁴⁷

Following the Spending Review the Government has made two further funding announcements:

- an additional £52 million in 2021/22 to tackle the substance dependence treatment needs of rough sleepers.⁴⁸
- a £310 million [Homelessness Prevention Grant](#).⁴⁹ This takes total resource funding for rough sleeping and homelessness in 2021/22 to over £750 million.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ The Spending Review 2020 notes that this includes the £103 million announced earlier in 2020 for accommodation and substance misuse, to support rough sleepers and those at risk of homelessness during Covid-19. [See para 6.58]

⁴⁶ HM Treasury, [Spending Review 2020](#), CP 330, 25 November 2020 para 6.58

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ MHCLG, [Extra help for rough sleepers with drug and alcohol dependency](#), 14 December 2020

⁴⁹ The £310m Homelessness Prevention Grant combines and uplifts what was previously the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant and Homelessness Reduction Grant.

⁵⁰ MHCLG, [Government pledges further £310 million to tackle homelessness](#), 21 December 2020

2. Impact of measures to support rough sleepers

On 18 April 2020 the Government reported that in England over 90% of rough sleepers (more than 5,400) known to local authorities at the beginning of the Covid-19 outbreak had been offered accommodation as a result of the 'Everyone In' initiative to protect rough sleepers.⁵¹

The Government subsequently reported that in May 2020 a total of 14,610 people in England who were sleeping rough, or at risk of sleeping rough, had been provided emergency accommodation in response to the pandemic.⁵² **By November 2020, 9,866 people were in emergency accommodation and 23,273 people had been supported to move into settled accommodation (such as social housing or the private rental sector) or a 'rough sleeping pathway' (including hostels and supported housing, or moving in with family or friends).**⁵³

The coronavirus emergency accommodation data includes people coming in directly from the streets, people previously housed in shared night shelters and people who had become vulnerable to rough sleeping during the pandemic. It is based on management information provided by local authorities and is not comparable to the Government's official annual statistics on rough sleeping.⁵⁴

Inside Housing magazine provides a more detailed breakdown of the outcomes for a cohort of people who were housed in emergency accommodation by the charity St Mungo's, which ran 28 hotels across England and provided support for a further 10:

Of the 3,085 individuals supported by the charity across these projects, 893 (29%) are still in the accommodation provided, while 2,951 have moved on in some way. Of these people, 751 (25.4%) moved to other COVID-19 emergency hotel accommodation, 311 (10.5%) moved to the private rented sector, 214 (7.3%) moved into interim accommodation and 201 (6.8%) to shared supported accommodation.

A total of 181 (6.1%) returned to sleeping rough, while the move-on location of 447 (15.1%) was unknown. The remainder of people mainly moved on to various other accommodation types, such as hostels and B&Bs, except for three who passed away.⁵⁵

Homelessness organisations have reported that bringing everyone in has given them the opportunity to engage with and support many people who had previously been hard to reach:

⁵¹ MHCLG, [Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick on COVID-19 response](#), 18 April 2020

⁵² MHCLG, [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) emergency accommodation survey data: May 2020](#), 3 June 2020

⁵³ MHCLG, [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) emergency accommodation survey data: November 2020](#), 8 January 2021

⁵⁴ [HCWS263 3 June 2020](#)

⁵⁵ 'Rough sleeping in lockdown 2.0: is the government's Everyone In policy on the way out?', Inside Housing, 20 November 2020 [subscription only]

Providing this kind of wrap-around care has not only meant people have been physically protected from the pandemic, but also that they have been able to get closer to leaving homelessness behind for good, with many having done so already. Every day staff and volunteers have been able to help residents with important issues like applying for EU settled status or Universal Credit, looking for employment or helping to sort more long-term accommodation. All these things are so much harder to do when people are rough sleeping, living hand to mouth and moving from place to place. Providing unconditional accommodation first and support after has enabled many people to thrive.⁵⁶

Despite the success of the 'Everyone In' initiative, **homelessness organisations report that the flow of new rough sleepers onto the streets has continued throughout the summer and autumn of 2020** and they are experiencing increased demand for their services.⁵⁷

According to the National Audit Office, since June 2020 MHCLG has collected data on a weekly basis from local authorities which appears to confirm an upward trend in numbers of rough sleepers. The data was gathered at speed and has not been independently validated or published.⁵⁸

A report by the Local Government Association, published on 19 November 2020, concluded that it was difficult to assess the impact of 'Everyone In' on levels of rough sleeping:

... in most areas, rough sleeper counts have been suspended. Our discussions with councils suggest a varying picture, with rough sleeping numbers much reduced in some areas, but in other places having returned to previous levels, or even exceeding them. This is due to some people returning to the streets, some intermittent rough sleepers not being accommodated during Everyone In because they were not rough sleeping at the time, and some new rough sleepers. The impact of the new English national lockdown is yet to be seen.⁵⁹

Data from the Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN), a multi-agency database funded by the Mayor of London and managed by the charity St Mungo's, show there was an initial sharp rise in the number of people seen sleeping rough in London around the start of the Covid-19 outbreak. Between April to June 2020, 4,227 rough sleepers were seen sleeping rough by outreach workers in London - a 33% increase on the same period the previous year.⁶⁰

Between July and September 2020 the number of people seen

⁵⁶ Everyone In – protecting people sleeping rough across England during the pandemic by Matt Downie, Director of Policy and External Affairs at Crisis UK published in FEANTSA, Homeless in Europe magazine: [The impact of Covid-19 on homeless people and services](#), Autumn 2020

⁵⁷ Homeless Link, [Comprehensive Spending Review 2020: Homeless Link submission](#), November 2020,

⁵⁸ National Audit Office, [Investigation into the housing of rough sleepers during the COVID-19 pandemic – Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General Session 2019–2021](#), HC 1075, para 2.9

⁵⁹ Local Government Association, published [Lessons learnt from councils' response to rough sleeping during the COVID-19 pandemic](#), 19 November 2020, Impact on rough sleeping to date

⁶⁰ ['Third more rough sleepers on London's streets in lockdown'](#), Greater London Authority Press Release, 18 September 2020

sleeping rough in London fell to 3,444, a 14% decrease from the same period the previous year. 55% (1,901) were seen rough sleeping for the first time.⁶¹

It is widely acknowledged that without ‘Everyone In’ the loss of life as a result of the Covid-19 outbreak would have been much higher. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) [reported](#) that of deaths involving Covid-19 in England and Wales registered up to 26 June 2020, 16 were identified as of people who were homeless. All 16 of the identified deaths were in England and most were of men.⁶² Responding to the data the Chief Executive of Crisis, Jon Sparkes, said:

Every one of these deaths is a tragedy - behind these figures are individuals, each with families, hopes and dreams. When the outbreak started, it was a stark reminder of the risk people who are homeless face from the virus – with no access to a place to self-isolate nor, in some cases, basic sanitation.

The situation could have been much worse had the government, local councils and charities not worked to quickly move many people sleeping rough and in night shelters into hotels, providing safe, emergency accommodation. This undoubtedly saved lives. We must now build on this...⁶³

Research, published in The Lancet, sought to model the avoided deaths and health-care use among people experiencing homelessness during the first wave of Covid-19 in England (i.e. the peak of infections occurring between February and May 2020). The study estimated that, as a result of measures implemented to protect the homeless population, 266 deaths were avoided, as well as 21,092 infections, 1,164 hospital admissions and 338 admissions to Intensive Care Units.⁶⁴

⁶¹ [‘Rough sleeping decreased by 14% in London this summer’](#), Inside Housing, 2 November 2020 [subscription required]

⁶² Office for National Statistics, [Coronavirus and deaths of homeless people, England and Wales: deaths registered up to 26 June 2020](#), 10 July 2020

⁶³ [‘ONS release number of deaths of people experiencing homelessness involving coronavirus during outbreak – Crisis response’](#), Crisis News Release, 10 July 2020

⁶⁴ The Lancet, [COVID-19 among people experiencing homelessness in England: a modelling study](#), 23 September 2020, Lewer, D., Braithwaite, L., Bullock, M., Eyre, M.T., White, P.J., Aldridge, R.W., Story, A., and Hayward, A.C.

3. Comment

3.1 Stakeholders

The Government's 'Everyone In' initiative has been credited with protecting rough sleepers and saving lives during the Covid-19 emergency.

Local authorities expect to spend around £170 million rehousing rough sleepers in response to the pandemic in 2020/21, paid for by a combination of emergency grants, existing homelessness funding streams, and their own internal resources.⁶⁵

Local authorities have welcomed the additional emergency funding to help them respond to the Covid-19 outbreak. However, the **funding of homelessness services remains a concern**. [Research by the charity Crisis](#) concluded that:

There was also a concern over funding a homelessness response in the immediate future. In England, local authorities and voluntary sector organisations were concerned about the sustainability of funding emergency accommodation over winter. In many areas they had already overspent and even with additional funding announcements from MHCLG it is not clear if the procurement of temporary accommodation can continue at this pace.⁶⁶

The Local Government Association's submission to the [Comprehensive Spending Review 2020](#) said that the 'Everyone In' initiative had "created a significant strain on councils' resources, adding to existing financial pressures".⁶⁷ The submission criticised the fragmented, short-term and resource-intensive competitive nature of current funding and **called for long-term and sustainable homelessness funding**.⁶⁸

The LGA has also published [Lessons learnt from councils' response to rough sleeping during the COVID-19 pandemic](#) (November 2020) which concluded that "The success of Everyone In demonstrates that, given the mandate and funding, councils, working with their partners, have the means to end the vast majority of rough sleeping."⁶⁹ The report highlighted the following outstanding issues:

- Difficulties with assisting people with no recourse to public funds – who represent a significant proportion of those at risk of rough sleeping in some areas.

⁶⁵ National Audit Office, [Investigation into the housing of rough sleepers during the COVID-19 pandemic – Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General Session 2019–2021](#), HC 1075, 14 January 2021, Executive Summary, para 9

⁶⁶ Crisis, [The impact of COVID-19 on people facing homelessness and service provision across Great Britain](#), Boobis, S. and Albanese, F., 19 November 2020, Executive Summary

⁶⁷ Local Government Association, [Comprehensive Spending Review 2020: LGA submission](#), 29 September 2020, para 4.4

⁶⁸ Ibid., section 4

⁶⁹ Local Government Association, published [Lessons learnt from councils' response to rough sleeping during the COVID-19 pandemic](#), 19 November 2020, Executive Summary

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- The shortage of affordable housing (particularly one-bed accommodation in both the public and private rented sectors) is an inevitable blocker in finding move on accommodation.
- A one-off exercise will not be enough to maintain long-term reductions in rough sleeping in most areas - a more sustained effort is needed. Whilst there was enthusiasm for maintaining a more proactive approach to accommodating rough sleepers and those at risk, the resources were not there in most councils to be able to achieve this.
- Many councils are concerned about their ability to provide adequate cold weather provision this winter in a way which does not increase the risk of Covid-19 infection.
- It was often difficult to get access to appropriate health services, and especially mental health services, to work with the cohort accommodated during 'Everyone In'.⁷⁰

According to the National Audit Office, following the MHCLG letter of 28 May 2020 to local authorities, the approach taken by local authorities to those who newly presented as rough sleeping increasingly diverged, with some continuing to take people into emergency accommodation regardless of eligibility, and others assessing people's eligibility for support.⁷¹

The homelessness charity Shelter also reported inconsistent support from local authorities:

Shelter has been contacted by people at risk of sleeping rough, who were refused emergency accommodation by council housing options services. People at risk of the street have faced a lottery, with some people offered support and some refused even within the same council area. There were instances where individuals were required to 'bed down' on the street in order to be 'verified' by Streetlink as a rough sleeper before accommodation was offered.⁷²

Housing lawyers and homelessness charities have called for clear guidance to local authorities on the legal duties and powers they should be using to accommodate rough sleepers during the pandemic.⁷³

In particular, there is widespread concern about how local authorities can continue to support those with no recourse to public funds (NRPF).⁷⁴ Individuals who have NRPF because of their immigration status are not entitled to homelessness assistance and other support such as welfare benefits and social housing. Under the Government's 'Everyone

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ National Audit Office, [Investigation into the housing of rough sleepers during the COVID-19 pandemic – Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General Session 2019–2021](#), HC 1075, 14 January 2021, Executive Summary, para 13

⁷² Shelter, [Briefing - Westminster Hall Debate: Support for homelessness during the winter months](#), December 2020, p1

⁷³ See transcripts of [HCLG Committee oral evidence sessions on 14 and 17 December 2020 to their inquiry into Impact of COVID-19 \(Coronavirus\) on homelessness and the private rented sector](#).

⁷⁴ See for example: Citizens UK, [Open letter to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government Robert Jenrick](#), 12 June 2020 and ['London councils call on Government to suspend NRPF immigration status'](#), The Guardian, 8 July 2020

In' initiative, local authorities were encouraged to assist all rough sleepers into emergency accommodation, regardless of their immigration status. However, moving people with NRPF into settled accommodation is challenging because they cannot claim welfare benefits and might struggle financially to move into the private rental sector. This was a particular issue in London where, by the end of September 2020, around 2,000 people (or around half of the 4,000 in total) who remained in hotels and other emergency accommodation were ineligible for benefits.⁷⁵

A broad range of Parliamentarians and external stakeholders have called on the Government to suspend NRPF conditions in response to the pandemic. In response the Government has asserted that the legal position with regards to NRPF has not changed and local authorities have discretion to assist individuals in certain circumstances:

Local authorities have powers to use their judgment in assessing what support they may lawfully give to each person on an individual basis, considering that person's specific circumstances and support needs. Local authorities will already be used to making such judgements on accommodating individuals who might otherwise be ineligible, during extreme weather for example, where there is a risk to life.

Local authorities also have powers to provide basic safety net support, regardless of immigration status, if it is established that there is a genuine care need that does not arise solely from destitution, for example, where there are community care needs, migrants with serious health problems or family cases.⁷⁶

The House of Commons Housing, Communities and Local Government (HCLG) Committee interim report on '[Protecting Rough Sleepers and Renters](#)' (22 May 2020) noted that "While the Government believes the legal position is clear, local authorities do not" and called on the Government to "urgently publish guidance on councils' use of discretion in these circumstances and clarify what people can or cannot claim when they have no recourse to public funds."⁷⁷

Gov.UK provides information on the support available for migrants living in the UK: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): get support if you're a migrant living in the UK](#).

The Government's decision to allow communal night shelters for rough sleepers to reopen has been criticised. Eighteen leading health and homelessness organisations, include the British Medical Association and the Faculty of Public Health, wrote an [open letter to the Prime Minister](#) (October 2020) warning of the double threat of coronavirus and cold weather to rough sleepers, and urging the

⁷⁵ National Audit Office, [Investigation into the housing of rough sleepers during the COVID-19 pandemic – Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General Session 2019–2021](#), HC 1075, 14 January 2021, Executive Summary, para 15

⁷⁶ [Government Response to the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee Report on Protecting Rough Sleepers and Renters](#), CP 248, 25 June 2020, p7

⁷⁷ House of Commons Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, [Protecting rough sleepers and renters: Interim Report - First Report of Session 2019–21](#), HC 309, 22 May 2020, Para 13

Government to provide self-contained accommodation as a priority due to the high risk of coronavirus transmission in communal night shelters.⁷⁸

Labour's Shadow Secretary of State for Housing, Thangam Debbonaire, criticised the Government's package of support to protect rough sleepers over winter, pointing out that the £10 million Cold Winter Fund was less than the funding provided the previous year:

"It is extraordinary that, during a global pandemic that is exacerbated by cold weather, the government has given less ... than last year," she said. "As we enter a second Covid spike, the government's failure to prepare for a winter homelessness crisis risks lives and public health. We need strong leadership from the government to keep its promise to end rough sleeping for good."⁷⁹

Inside Housing reports that, due to the risks to clients and staff, "a number of the biggest homelessness charities, including Crisis and St Mungo's, have said they will not be opening their shelters this year."⁸⁰

The Government's direction to local authorities to ensure that rough sleepers are registered with a GP to enable them to receive a Covid-19 vaccine was welcomed by the Chief Executive of Crisis, Jon Sparkes:

What is very welcome here is the two-pronged approach – a continued commitment to getting everyone into safe accommodation but also now making sure people are registered with a GP so they can quickly access the vaccines.

We know through our services that people facing homelessness often are not registered with a doctor's surgery. Addressing this issue will be a lifesaving intervention and a step towards ensuring people who are homeless are protected in the longer-term.⁸¹

The shortage of suitable move-on accommodation in many areas of the country remains a significant problem. Furthermore, the sector is **concerned that homelessness levels may surge** once the Government's temporary coronavirus housing,⁸² welfare and employment support measures come to an end and the full economic impact of the Covid-19 outbreak starts to take effect.⁸³

The charity Crisis has launched a ['Home for All' campaign](#) calling on the Government to protect people experiencing homelessness for the duration of the pandemic and prevent further homelessness through:

⁷⁸ Crisis, [Medical and homelessness organisations sign letter to Prime Minister warning of 'risk to life' without action to protect people sleeping rough this winter](#), 8 October 2020

⁷⁹ ['Winter fund of £12m for rough sleepers in England 'not enough', say charities'](#), The Guardian, 13 October 2020

⁸⁰ Inside Housing, [Rough sleeping in lockdown 2.0: is the government's Everyone In policy on the way out?](#), 20 November 2020 [subscription only]

⁸¹ Crisis, [Government announces additional protections for people facing homelessness during third national lockdown – Crisis response](#), 8 January 2021

⁸² The House of Commons Library briefing paper CBP08867: [Coronavirus: Support for landlords and tenants](#) examines the housing support measures put in place during the coronavirus outbreak.

⁸³ Crisis, [The impact of COVID-19 on people facing homelessness and service provision across Great Britain](#), 19 November 2020

- The introduction of a new duty on local authorities in England, backed by funding, to provide emergency accommodation for people with nowhere safe to stay in the next 12 months;
- The national roll-out of Housing First in England;
- Changes to ensure no one across Britain is left without a safe place to stay because of their immigration status; and
- Changes to the UK welfare system, and protections for private renters alongside increased investment in the provision of homes for social rent in England to ensure everyone can afford a home.⁸⁴

Homelessness organisations have also voiced concerns about a **leadership vacuum** after Dame Louise (now Baroness) Casey - who was leading the Government's coronavirus response to rough sleeping – stepped down from the role. They have called on the Government to reaffirm its commitment to carrying out a review of rough sleeping policy and update its Rough Sleeping Strategy.⁸⁵

3.2 Parliament

HCLG Committee

The [interim report](#) of the Housing Communities and Local Government (HCLG) Select Committee's inquiry into the Impact of Covid-19 on homelessness and the private rented sector (published on 22 May 2020), urged the Government to implement three key measures to protect rough sleepers against the impact of coronavirus:

- **Use this crisis to end rough sleeping in England once and for all.**

The Government's taskforce must take advantage of this golden opportunity to ensure every single person taken from the streets does not return to rough sleeping. The Government must estimate the cost of a housing-led solution with appropriate wrap-around support, likely to be at least £100m a year, and provide this as a dedicated funding stream to councils.

- **We appeal on humanitarian grounds for the Government to improve its support to councils for people with no recourse to public funds during this crisis, or hundreds will return to the streets with potentially disastrous consequences.**

We recommend that the Government should guarantee it will compensate councils for provision offered to rough sleepers with no recourse to public funds as a result of the current crisis. The Government needs to urgently publish guidance on councils' use of discretion in these circumstances and clarify what people can or cannot claim when they have no recourse to public funds.

- **The Government must ensure that rough sleepers do not end up back on the streets due to a lack of suitable housing.**

⁸⁴ Crisis, [Home for All](#), 3 June 2020

⁸⁵ ['Charities urge government not to 'abandon' homelessness review following Dame Louise Casey's departure'](#), Inside Housing, 17 September 2020

The Government needs to act to boost the immediate availability of appropriate supported housing, by providing targeted grant funding for councils and housing associations to acquire properties, using the National Clearing House Scheme from 2008 as a starting point. We also ask the Government to remove restrictions on Right to Buy receipts to provide councils with more flexibility.⁸⁶

[The Government's response](#) to the Committee was published on 25 June 2020.⁸⁷

The HCLG Committee has issued a [further call for evidence](#) to understand how effective Government support has been in tackling the negative impact of Covid-19 on tenants, landlords, rough sleepers and the homelessness. Submissions were invited by 27 November 2020.

National Audit Office

The National Audit Office (NAO) has published a report on its [investigation into the housing of rough sleepers during the Covid-19 pandemic](#), in order to support Parliament's scrutiny of the Government's Covid-19 response.

The investigation concluded that Everyone In was "a considerable achievement" and demonstrated "what can be done when central government, local authorities and voluntary organisations work together to respond to an extremely urgent priority." Nevertheless, it also identified several key issues that the Government needs to address if it is to achieve its goal of ending rough sleeping by the end of this Parliament:

- Everyone In has for the first time provided data on the potential scale of the population in England which either sleeps rough or is at risk of doing so. The Department needs to build upon this knowledge to understand fully the size and needs of this population and communicate this to local authorities.
- Everyone In has resulted in a large number of people remaining in emergency accommodation and not being able to move on from it because they have no recourse to public funds. The government needs to establish what action it will take with this population.
- The response to the resurgence of COVID-19 does not appear as comprehensive as the initial Everyone In in the spring. The Department will need to keep under close review whether its more targeted approach will protect vulnerable individuals as decisively as the approach it took in the early stages of the pandemic.
- It is clear that there is significant learning available from the experience of Everyone In for the Department and all partners involved. The Department should use this knowledge towards its goal of ending rough sleeping by the end of this Parliament, when it returns to its review of

⁸⁶ House of Commons Housing Communities and Local Government Committee, [Protecting rough sleepers and renters: Interim Report](#), First Report of Session 2019–21, HC 309, 22 May 2020, Summary, p3

⁸⁷ [Government Response to the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee Report on Protecting Rough Sleepers and Renters](#), CP 248, 25 June 2020

rough sleeping. Also, as the Department revisits its rough sleeping strategy, and to support its new objective for this, it should seek to align the initiatives and funding streams announced during COVID-19 into a cohesive plan.⁸⁸

Responding to the NAO report, the Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts (PAC), Meg Hillier, said:

MHCLG, Local Authorities and the voluntary sector all rose to the challenge. Their staff went the extra mile and may have saved hundreds of lives. And two thirds of people supported by 'Everyone in' have since moved into long-term accommodation.

However, MHCLG can't rest on its laurels and it was caught off guard by just how many people needed help. Now rough sleeping is on the rise again, and the pandemic is far from over.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ National Audit Office, [Investigation into the housing of rough sleepers during the COVID-19 pandemic – Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General Session 2019–2021](#), HC 1075, Executive Summary, para 20

⁸⁹ ['Covid: officials underestimated number of rough sleepers in England needing help'](#), The Guardian, 14 January 2021

4. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

The Scottish Government, Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Executive are working with the UK Government to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Housing policy is a devolved area and further information on the Covid-19 response in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is available online:

Scotland - the Scottish Government [provided £350 million](#) for local authorities, charities, businesses and community groups to support “welfare and wellbeing” in local communities. £300,000 of this fund was [allocated](#) to the homelessness charity, Simon Community Scotland, to provide hotel accommodation for all rough sleepers in Edinburgh and Glasgow during the pandemic, with “move on plans” for everyone. The Scottish Government also published: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): information for homelessness services](#) (31 March 2020). The reconvened Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG) published a [report on tackling homelessness in Scotland following the coronavirus pandemic](#) (14 July 2020). The Scottish Government [accepted](#) all HARSAG’s recommendations in principle. In October 2020 the Scottish Government published an updated [Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan](#) which, amongst other measures, outlines its intention to end night shelter provision and replace it with ‘rapid rehousing welcome centres’.⁹⁰ The Scottish Government’s [Winter Plan for Social Protection](#), announced on 20 November 2020, included an additional £5m to help those at risk of homelessness find a settled home.

Wales - the Welsh Government [announced](#) initial funding for local authorities of up to £10 million to help secure accommodation for rough sleepers and those in temporary accommodation, and published guidance on: [COVID-19 Response – Homelessness and Rough Sleepers](#) (20 March 2020) and [Continuing to support homeless people during the coronavirus pandemic: local authority guidance](#) (3 June 2020). The Welsh Government has allocated £50 million to [phase 2 of its homelessness response](#), and asked local authorities to develop plans to ensure that no-one in emergency shelter during the coronavirus crisis has to return to the streets or unsuitable accommodation. An article published by the Welsh Parliament Research Service (Senedd Research) - [Coronavirus: homelessness](#) (last updated 9 December 2020) - provides further information.

Northern Ireland - £7.6 million has been made available in additional funding for homelessness to cover the period until March 2021.⁹¹ The Northern Ireland Executive has published [COVID-19: Guidance for Homeless Providers in Northern Ireland](#) (Updated 15 December 2020) and [Housing support crucial in this crisis](#) (27 March 2020).

⁹⁰ The Scottish Government, [Night shelters to be phased out](#), 8 October 2020

⁹¹ Local Government Association, published [Lessons learnt from councils' response to rough sleeping during the COVID-19 pandemic](#), 19 November 2020,

5. Background information on rough sleeping and homelessness in the UK

The following House of Commons Library briefing papers provide further information about homelessness and rough sleeping:

- [Households in temporary accommodation \(England\)](#) (November 2020)
- [Statutory Homelessness in England](#) (November 2020)
- [Applying as homeless from an assured shorthold tenancy \(England\)](#) (July 2020)
- [Rough Sleeping \(England\)](#) (April 2020)
- [Rough sleepers: access to services and support \(England\)](#) (October 2019)
- [Housing first: tackling homelessness for those with complex needs](#) (July 2018)

The **Scottish Parliament Information Service** has published a briefing on [Homelessness in Scotland](#) (November 2019).

The **Welsh Parliament Research Service (Senedd Research)** has published [‘What’s being done to end homelessness in Wales’](#) (November 2019).

The **Northern Ireland Research and Information Service** has published [The many faces of homelessness in Northern Ireland](#) (March 2017) and [What do we know about homelessness in Northern Ireland?](#) (June 2016).

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