



## Rough sleepers

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This note provides background information the problem of rough sleeping and outlines Government policy on this issue. .

Communities and Local Government (CLG) took over responsibility for housing matters on the disbandment of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in 2006. Prior to the creation of the ODPM in 2002 housing matters fell within the remit of the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) and before this, the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR).

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# 1 The causes of rough sleeping

Professor John Greve's 1990 report on homelessness noted the "striking degree" to which single people and families share the same kinds of reasons for becoming homeless.<sup>1</sup> The report listed the most important immediate causes as the breakdown of relationships (including those between young people and their parents or guardians), the failure of sharing arrangements in rented accommodation and unemployment.

In November 1990 the Department of the Environment (DoE) commissioned the Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York to conduct a survey of single homeless people in order to collect comprehensive and up to date information on single homelessness in England. The results of this research, which involved interviews with 1346 hostel or bed and breakfast dwellers, 351 users of day centres and 156 users of soup runs who were sleeping rough, were published in 1993. The survey's findings on the immediate causes of homelessness are set out in the table on page 3.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, a 1991 study of the experiences of 400 young people in the Surrey/Hampshire area who had left their family home<sup>3</sup> found that over 50 per cent had left before the age of 16. Most of these young people had left to go into care while nearly a quarter left at age 16. The most commonly cited reason for leaving was "because of arguments", but the researchers noted that this sometimes concealed reasons such as physical or sexual abuse. Over one quarter left home as a direct result of violence and 13 per cent indicated that they left (unprompted) because of sexual abuse. Over 80 per cent intimated that they would not return home or were unable to do so. Over half of the young people in the study had experienced some kind of family breakdown at some stage.

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<sup>1</sup> Professor John Greve *Homelessness in Britain*, February 1990, p15

<sup>2</sup> DoE *Single Homeless People*, 1993 , p71

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation Housing Research Findings No 89, *Young people at risk of homelessness*, May 1993

## Main reasons and final reason for leaving last home (%)

England: 1991

	Hostels and B&Bs		Day Centre		Soup run	
	Main reason	Final reason	Main reason	Final reason	Main reason	Final reason
<b>Family relationship reasons</b>						
Relationship breakdown	14	11	19	16	10	7
Domestic violence/abuse (a)	2	2	1	2	5	5
Parents - conflict	8	6	8	8	8	5
Parents - positive decision	5	6	6	5	5	2
Death	5	4	5	4	5	5
<b>Accommodation related reasons</b>						
End of tenancy/sharing	3	2	3	3	-	1
Move into other accom	3	3	1	1	2	2
Problems with rent/HB	5	4	12	8	6	5
Problems with mortgage	1	1	-	-	1	2
Eviction	5	7	8	8	8	9
Accommodation closed/changed	3	3	3	3	2	2
<b>Employment related reasons</b>						
Look for/take up work	10	9	9	8	13	10
Lost job/tied accom	5	3	5	4	3	3
Left armed forces	-	-	-	-	2	2
<b>Institutional related reasons</b>						
Discharge from psychiatric care	-	-	-	-	-	-
Discharge from custody	-	-	1	1	2	2
Discharge from hospital	-	-	1	1	2	1
Given custodial sentence	2	3	-	1	2	2
Had to leave care	1	1	1	-	2	2
<b>Other specific reasons</b>						
Political situation	7	7	1	-	-	-
harassed/insecure accom	5	3	6	4	7	9
Health reasons	3	3	2	1	2	2
Drink problem	3	3	6	4	4	4
Wanted to travel/change	7	5	7	7	8	8
Other	15	14	12	13	12	9
Vague	1	1	3	2	1	2
Total	na	100	na	100	na	100
Base	1,051	1,031	315	313	134	129

Notes: Base: all three samples (those who stated a last home)

na - not applicable as more than one response possible

(a) this category includes both domestic violence by a partner and physical sexual abuse of a young person by a parent/guardian

Sources: *Single Homeless People, DoE, 1993, Ch. 5*

The Social Exclusion Unit considered the issue of rough sleeping in 1998; the Unit's findings were reported in July 1998.<sup>4</sup> On the subject of who sleeps rough the Unit found:

- There were very few rough sleepers aged under 18;
- Around 25% are between 18 and 25;
- Six per cent were over 60; and

<sup>4</sup> SEU, *Rough Sleeping*, 1998

- Around 90 per cent were male.

The report confirmed the findings of earlier studies on the main causes of rough sleeping. The single most common reason given for the first episode of rough sleeping was relationship breakdown, either with parents or a partner. Research by CentrepoinT with homeless young people across the country found that 86 per cent had been forced to leave home rather than leaving out of choice. A survey in Scotland found that a quarter of young homeless people had a step-parent compared with the four per cent average for Scotland as a whole. Homeless agencies continue to report that physical or sexual abuse lies behind a significant minority of family conflicts.

Older homeless people have also identified family crises as a key factor in their situation. Widowhood and marital breakdown figure largely as causes of homelessness as do eviction, redundancy and mental illness.

A disproportionate number of rough sleepers have experienced some kind of institutional life such as being in local authority care, prison or the armed forces.

Around 30-50% of rough sleepers have been found to suffer from mental health problems, although very few of these people have ever been in a long-stay hospital and have become homeless upon discharge. A high percentage of rough sleepers (around 50%) have been found to have a serious alcohol problem. Drug problems are more prevalent amongst younger rough sleepers; the Unit noted that research carried out in 1996 found that 39% of people sleeping rough under 26 had a drug problem.

The Unit also highlighted the impact of changes to social security policy (eg the abolition of grants for rent deposits and furniture and the imposition of single room rent restrictions) on the ability of younger people to find privately rented housing.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM): Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Select Committee carried out an inquiry into homelessness in the 2004-05 parliamentary session.<sup>5</sup> Chapter 2 of the Committee's report considered, amongst other things, what factors can lead to homelessness. The Committee's findings can be accessed online.

## **2 The Rough Sleepers Initiative (RSI)**

### **2.1 Background to the RSI**

The Rough Sleepers Initiative (RSI) was originally developed in 1990 as a short-term response to the growing numbers of people sleeping rough in London. After consulting a variety of voluntary organisations the then Government announced that £96 million would be made available over 1990-93 for a range of initiatives which eventually became known as the RSI. RSI programmes included advice and outreach work with homeless people, the development of new emergency hostel places and a range of temporary and permanent accommodation comprising properties leased from private landlords and permanent lettings provided by housing associations. The broad aim of the RSI was to make it unnecessary for people to sleep rough on the streets of London.

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<sup>5</sup> ODPM: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Select Committee, HC 61-I, Third Report of Session 2004-05, [Homelessness](#)

The initial strategy adopted under the RSI involved a process of moving rough sleepers from the streets of central London through regular contact by voluntary sector outreach and resettlement workers funded by the initiative. Workers sought to persuade people to take up offers of accommodation provided by housing associations and funded by the RSI. A list of agencies known to work with people sleeping rough was compiled and a clearing house established at the Housing Services Agency (HSA) to ensure, as far as possible, that the target group was reached and that the accommodation provided for rough sleepers was "ring fenced" for that group within the associations' stock.

The RSI was due to end in March 1993; however, in his Autumn Statement on 12 November 1992 the then Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that a further £60m would be made available to continue the RSI in central London for an additional three years up to March 1996. It was expected that, by March 1996, a total of £186 million would have been expended by the Government under this initiative and that at least 3,300 bed-spaces in permanent accommodation would have been provided.

Independent research commissioned by the DoE into the effectiveness of the RSI was published in January 1993<sup>6</sup>; this report concluded that the RSI "was successful in providing accommodation for several thousand single homeless people, most of whom had a history of rough sleeping. As a result there was a significant reduction in the number of people sleeping rough in the target area."<sup>7</sup> However, the report also noted: "the initiative has not yet achieved its objective of making it unnecessary for anyone to sleep rough in central London. A continuing programme will be necessary to achieve this."<sup>8</sup> The DoE issued a discussion document in January 1993 on the future development of the RSI which drew heavily on the recommendations of the independent research.<sup>9</sup> A central aim of this paper's proposals was to ensure the closer targeting of resources on the client group.

On completion of the consultation exercise the then Minister for Housing, Sir George Young, outlined the future direction of the RSI in the following Parliamentary Answer:

**Mr. Fishburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the outcome of the recent consultation exercise on the next phase of the Government's rough sleepers initiative, and if he will make a statement.

**Sir George Young:** Under the first phase of the rough sleepers initiative, from 1990-91 to 1992-93, the Government provided resources of £96 million to assist people sleeping rough in central London.

Independent research, funded by this Department, into the effectiveness of the rough sleepers initiative, shows that it has been a success. Through the initiative, several thousand people with a history of sleeping rough have been provided with accommodation. The number of people sleeping rough in central London has fallen by more than a half, from estimates of over 1,000 before the initiative began, to around 420 at a count in November 1992.

The Government have made available a further £86 million over the next three financial years, 1993-94 to 1995-96, to continue the rough sleepers initiative in central London. On 18 January 1993 I issued a discussion paper "The Rough Sleepers Initiative: The Next Three Years". It contained a range of proposals, based on

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<sup>6</sup> DoE *The Rough Sleepers Initiative: An Evaluation* 1993

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, summary para 3

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*, summary para 102

<sup>9</sup> DoE *The Rough Sleepers Initiative the Next Three Years*, 18 January 1993

recommendations from the independent research, aiming to ensure closer targeting of resources on central London's street homeless.

Almost 100 organisations responded to the paper. There has been a broad measure of support for the main thrust of our proposals. In the light of those responses, I am today issuing a strategy document that outlines the way forward for the rough sleepers initiative over the next three financial years until 1995-96, to assist our aim to make it unnecessary for people to sleep rough in central London.

We will continue to concentrate on funding permanent accommodation in houses and flats, with outreach work and resettlement support from voluntary organisations, to allow people sleeping rough to make a successful transition to a settled life. To ensure the better targeting of resources we are concentrating help on a limited number of specialist agencies with referral rights into RSI permanent accommodation; making referral agencies responsible for upholding the eligibility criteria; focusing some of the resources on zones, commencing with the Strand, with particular encouragement for consortia to come forward with proposals to reduce significantly the numbers sleeping rough in a specific area; and reducing the number of housing associations to develop permanent move-on accommodation under the initiative. Also, we are aiming to move towards a more contractual relationship with agencies, in the form of grants with tight, clearly-defined objectives. This, along with regular counts of the number of people sleeping rough in central London, will assist the better monitoring of the initiative.

The further £86 million made available for this initiative, and the proposals in the strategy document to target resources more closely on those in need, will ensure that people sleeping rough in central London will continue to be helped to start a new life away from the streets. I am keen that this initiative should make a further significant impact on the problem of people sleeping rough in the capital.<sup>10</sup>

The June 1995 Housing White Paper, *Our Future Homes*, set out the then Government's commitment to continue the RSI in central London beyond 1996 and assist in the development of the RSI model in other areas where rough sleeping could be demonstrated to be a major problem. In October 1995 the Government published a consultation paper entitled *Rough Sleepers Initiative: Future Plans*. This paper recommended continued emphasis on outreach and resettlement work and the provision of winter shelters. Local authorities outside London were invited to produce evidence of rough sleeping within their areas that could not be addressed within existing resources. The third phase of the initiative was announced in March 1996; £73 million was allocated to develop the RSI and include work outside central London.

In June 1997 the new Labour Government announced the allocation of £20 million over the next two years under the RSI:

**Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what funding decisions have been reached for the 12 areas offered assistance under the third phase of the rough sleepers initiative.

**Ms Armstrong:** The Government's aim is to ensure that there is no necessity for people to sleep rough. I am therefore delighted to announce £17.2 million funding under the Rough Sleepers Initiative and the Rough Sleepers Revenue Fund for voluntary sector organisations and housing associations in Bath, Bournemouth, Brighton, Cambridge, Ealing, Exeter, Leicester, Manchester, Nottingham, Oxford, Richmond upon Thames and

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<sup>10</sup> HC Deb 16 June 1993 cc569-70W

West London, to alleviate the difficulties faced by people sleeping rough in those areas. Temporary and permanent accommodation, including specialist accommodation for people suffering mental ill health and drink and drugs misuse problems, will be funded in Brighton and West London. Outreach and resettlement workers will be funded in all 12 areas, and organisations in some of the 12 areas will also receive funding for additional hostel staff.

I am also particularly pleased that the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Health has confirmed that the Department of Health will be contributing nearly £3 million to the initiative. As part of the expansion of the Homeless Mentally Ill Initiative beyond central London, nearly £2 million will be allocated to local authorities over the next three years to provide extra services for people sleeping rough who have mental health problems. £2.5 million will be provided in 1997-98 under the Drug and Alcohol Specific Grant to 81 projects, with £740,000 of that going to 21 new projects providing services to people sleeping rough who have alcohol and drug misuse problems. The co-ordination of funding between the Departments of the Environment and Health will reinforce the partnership approach which is a key to the success of strategies to help people sleeping rough.

My Department and the Housing Corporation are writing today to each of the voluntary sector organisations and housing associations who submitted a bid for funding to let them know what decisions have been reached. My Department, in conjunction with the Department of Health, has also written today to the relevant local authorities explaining the funding allocations in detail. The Government welcomes the part played by local authorities and voluntary sector organisations in preparing strategies aimed at tackling rough sleeping and in working up the bids for funding.

I have considered a number of proposals to increase staffing in existing hostels for people sleeping rough. It is clear that more thought needs to be given to the co-ordination of provision in some areas and I have decided, therefore, to invite the local authorities in Bath, Bournemouth, Cambridge, Ealing, Exeter, Nottingham, Oxford and Richmond upon Thames to work with local hostel providers to develop further proposals to ensure that provision meets the needs of people sleeping rough in those areas. There will be a further opportunity for organisations in those areas to apply for additional hostel staff later in the year. Earlier this year, my Department produced guidance to enable local authorities to evaluate the extent of rough sleeping in their areas and develop strategies to ensure that there is no necessity for people to sleep rough. Ian Brady, deputy Chief Executive of Centrepoint, has been seconded to the Department to promote the guidance and encourage the development of local strategies. We will consider offering funding to support local strategies in further areas where major rough sleeping problems are identified. Mr. Brady is also chairing a Rough Sleepers Forum of homelessness charities to help co-ordinate national efforts to tackle rough sleeping. A list of the schemes being offered funding today has been placed in the House library.<sup>11</sup>

In November 1998 the then Housing Minister, Nick Raynsford, said that the Government intended to revise the Homelessness Code of Guidance<sup>12</sup> to make clear that care-leavers, with very few exceptions, should be regarded as 'vulnerable' and considered under the homeless provisions of the *1996 Housing Act*. He also said that homeless 16 and 17 year olds with no back-up support should normally be regarded as 'vulnerable'.<sup>13</sup> The Code of Guidance was subsequently revised to reflect this. The April 2000 Housing Green Paper,

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<sup>11</sup> HC Deb 3 June 1997 cc224-5W

<sup>12</sup> This Code provides guidance to local authorities in fulfilling their duties to homeless applicants under Part 7 of the *1996 Housing Act*. The Code is not legally binding but local authorities are required 'to have regard to it.'

<sup>13</sup> HC Deb 2 November 1998 cc312-3W

*Quality and Choice: a decent home for all*,<sup>14</sup> stated that the Government would extend the homeless priority need categories to include homeless people who are vulnerable as a result of having an institutionalised background, such as ex-servicemen and prisoners (this is discussed further in section 4 below).<sup>15</sup>

The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) commissioned research by Geoffrey Randall and Susan Brown of Research and Information Services into the effectiveness of the RSI (published 1999). Their main findings informed the Government's decision to replace the RSI with the Homelessness Action Programme from the end of March 1999. Over the nine years of its existence the RSI provided around 3,500 units of permanent accommodation in London in which 5,500 people were housed; many of these were young people.<sup>16</sup>

## **2.2 Evaluation of the RSI**

As noted above, the DETR commissioned research by Geoffrey Randall and Susan Brown of Research and Information Services into the effectiveness of the RSI and their findings were published in December 1999, a summary of which is provided below.

### ***Numbers of people sleeping rough***

It was found that no areas had detailed estimates of the supply of hostel beds and permanent accommodation needed to meet targets on the reduction in numbers of rough sleepers. The report proposed a method for making these calculations: in central London it indicated a need for around 510 direct access places in the first 3 years reducing to 360 thereafter.

### ***Outreach work***

A 'lack of clarity' was found in some areas in the aims and objectives of street outreach work. In some areas workers supported people with a street lifestyle but the DETR's aim was to get rough sleepers into accommodation. The researchers recommended more assertive focus on rough sleepers and contracting agencies to deliver results in defined geographical areas. A need to enhance specialist support to rough sleepers with mental health and substance abuse problems was identified as was the need for other services for rough sleepers to encourage resettlement rather than reinforce street lifestyles.

### ***Temporary accommodation***

There was a need for a wide range of hostel provision to meet different needs and to ensure access for people sleeping rough. A shortage of direct access beds was found in most areas and where beds were available they were of poor quality or were not available for rough sleepers. Not all RSI funded hostel provision was well targeted on rough sleepers. There was a need for specialist support services for people with mental health and substance abuse problems to help people retain their hostel places and move onto a resettlement programme.

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<sup>14</sup> Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR), April 2000

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*, para 9.55

<sup>16</sup> DETR, *Homes for Street Homeless People: An evaluation of the Rough Sleepers Initiative*, December 1999, p10 para 29



### ***Resettlement***

There was a need to ensure effective resettlement services for all former rough sleepers. The right sort of support could prevent the majority of tenancy failures but it needed to be properly focused and have clear outcome targets.

### ***Permanent housing***

The problem was not a shortage of accommodation in some areas but lack of support for former rough sleepers. The major gap was in the supply of supported and semi-supported accommodation. In London lack of supply remained a problem and there were problems over assessing eligibility for RSI stock. The profile of those re-housed did not match closely enough the known profile of rough sleepers, indicating that some of those re-housed were unlikely to have had a history of rough sleeping.

### ***Strategy and programme management***

RSI had improved inter-agency co-operation but there were still problems to be resolved. The achievement of the target of a two thirds reduction in rough sleeping would require detailed plans in each area to assess the level of accommodation and support services necessary and establish the organisational framework to deliver them. Neither central London nor the other areas were found to be in a position to do this at that point. It was 'widely recognised' in London that a more co-ordinated approach was needed: the Rough Sleepers Unit was welcome but views differed on how improved co-ordination should be achieved. Outside of London the replacement of the RSI with the Homelessness Action Programme (see below) was welcomed as offering scope to fund projects for a wider group of single homeless people but some saw a potential loss of targeting on the problems of rough sleeping. It was questioned whether local authorities would provide replacement funding when DETR funding was tapered.

## **3 After the RSI: reducing rough sleeping by two thirds by 2002**

The then Minister for Housing, Nick Raynsford, described the steps the Government was taking to tackle youth homelessness in response to a PQ in February 1999:

Mr. Raynsford: For young people to be without a suitable home can blight their lives and future development and lead to the social exclusion that this Government are determined to tackle. The problems of youth homelessness go beyond the simple provision of accommodation; many other factors are involved and all sectors, statutory, voluntary and business have a contribution to make.

That is why we have established the Youth Homelessness Action Partnership to bring together senior representatives of central governmental, local government and the voluntary sector. The Partnership is currently working on producing an agreed definition of youth homelessness and estimating the numbers involved. It will also identify what works in tackling and preventing youth homelessness, including the role of local strategies, and disseminate good practice to all the key players. The Partnership will also contribute towards the evaluation of the impact of Government policies on youth homelessness. The work of the Partnership will be underpinned by research to be commissioned later this year.

We have refocused our DETR section 180 grant programme, which provides grants to voluntary sector organisations concerned with homelessness, to give priority to projects that prevent and tackle youth homelessness £8.1 million is available in 1998/99 and over 200 projects around England are benefiting from these grants.

The Government are committed to reducing the most extreme example of homelessness--rough sleeping--to as near to zero as possible in our towns and cities. The Prime Minister asked the Social Exclusion Unit to address the issue of rough sleeping as one of its first priorities. Their report sets a tough initial target of reducing the number of people sleeping rough throughout England, to a third of its current level by 2002.

A new Ministerial Committee, chaired by my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Housing, has been established to ensure effective co-ordination of Government policy in preventing and tackling rough sleeping. The DETR will be responsible for co-ordination of the overall strategy for England on rough sleeping; including housing, health access to employment and training and benefits.

We will establish a new body for London which will be responsible for reducing the numbers of people sleeping rough in the Capital. The new body will have an integrated budget of £143 million over the three years until 2002 to combat rough sleeping and the causes of rough sleeping.

Outside London, the SEU confirmed that local authorities are in the best position to take the lead on tackling rough sleeping and single, including youth, homelessness. To support local authorities in achieving the target reduction in rough sleeping in their area we have launched a new Homelessness Action Programme which will provide £34 million over the next three years to help voluntary organisations outside London to tackle and prevent rough sleeping. We announced details of over 250 voluntary sector projects which will benefit from this programme on 5 February.

We have also strengthened the safety net for families and vulnerable individuals who are homeless unintentionally. The revised Code of Guidance on Allocations and Homelessness which will be issued later this year will provide more advice to help local housing authorities develop effective strategies to assist single homeless people including young people.<sup>17</sup>

In effect, the Homelessness Action Programme replaced the RSI and section 180 funding from the end of March 1999.

Annex C to the Social Exclusion Unit's (SEU) report, *Rough Sleeping*,<sup>18</sup> set out the Labour Government's action plan for dealing with rough sleeping. The Unit's recommendations for tackling rough sleeping contained three main strands. First, the relevant Government departments should address the major flows into rough sleeping – people leaving care, the armed forces and prisons. Second, the DfEE and DETR should disseminate 'best practice' in preventing and dealing with rough sleeping. Third, local bodies should co-ordinate the actions of central government, local authorities, voluntary agencies and business.

The SEU set a target of reducing the number of people sleeping rough by two-thirds by 2002. It had found that around 1,850 people slept rough each night and that 10,000 people slept rough over the course of a year (1998).

The Rough Sleepers Unit (RSU), headed by Louise Casey, was established within DETR in April 1999 and assumed responsibility for national rough sleeping policy from September 1999. The Unit was set the task of implementing the recommendations of the Social Exclusion Unit by working on a radical new approach to help vulnerable rough

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<sup>17</sup> HC Deb 8 February 1999 c9-10W

<sup>18</sup> Cm 4008, July 1998

sleepers off the streets, rebuilding the lives of former rough sleepers and preventing the new rough sleepers of tomorrow from developing.

The DETR published its first *Annual Report on Rough Sleeping* in August 1999. This report described the Government's work on tackling rough sleeping since the publication of the SEU report in July 1998. The report noted that the Government's achievements included:

- Better co-ordination of Government departments, local authorities and voluntary agencies;
- Setting up the Rough Sleepers Unit;
- Establishing the £34 million Homelessness Action Plan outside London;
- Tailoring the New Deal and other employment initiatives to meet the needs of rough sleepers.

The Labour Government published *Coming in from the cold: the Government's Strategy on Rough Sleeping* in December 1999. This report detailed a package of measures devised by the Rough Sleepers Unit to assist vulnerable rough sleepers with alcohol, drug and mental health problems. The key proposals included:

- Funding over 850 hostel beds with additional specialist help and 1,000 new housing association homes in London.
- Bringing over 4,000 beds nationwide into use by those sleeping rough on the streets.
- Funding 60 new specialist workers to help rough sleepers with alcohol, drug or mental health problems.
- Funding new 'Contact and Assessment Teams' who will help rough sleepers when they need it most.
- Piloting an emergency special needs response team for rough sleepers with acute medical problems and mental illness.
- Tackling prevention so that new people do not become tomorrow's rough sleepers, particularly those leaving care, prison, and the armed forces.<sup>19</sup>

A companion document, *Coming in from the Cold: delivering the strategy*, was published in January 2000. This strategy started in April 2000; it was hoped that it would achieve the Government's aim of reducing rough sleeping in England by at least two thirds by 2002.

In July 2000 the Rough Sleepers Unit unveiled schemes aimed at preventing ex-offenders from ending up on the streets.<sup>20</sup> Policy recommendations aimed at preventing ex-offenders from becoming rough sleepers can be found in the report, *Blocking the Fast Track from Prison to Rough Sleeping*.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> DETR Press Notice 1201, 15 December 1999

<sup>20</sup> Cabinet Office Press Release 258/00, 17 July 2000

<sup>21</sup> DETR, July 2000

In September 2000 the Unit announced schemes specifically aimed at preventing young people from ending up on the streets.<sup>22</sup> Safe Stop for young people sleeping rough in London provides short-term accommodation for people aged between 16–24. Centrepoint was given funds to provide a care-leaving strategy support service to local authorities in London to ensure young people make a successful transition from care to independent living.

Around the country the Unit funded schemes to educate young people on the challenges of independent living, i.e. in Newcastle, Brighton and Oxford. Alone in London was funded to provide family mediation and returning home services for young people in Safe Stop, rolling shelters and day centres. Emergency, 'Nightstop' accommodation was funded in Bristol and developed in new areas throughout the UK. The RSU published research into the specific needs of care-leavers in September 2000<sup>23</sup> to which the then Government responded later that month.

The RSU published its first progress report on the Labour Government's strategy for tackling rough sleeping in October 2000<sup>24</sup> and its second progress report in August 2001.<sup>25</sup>

A new Homelessness Directorate was established in January 2002 'to bring together and invigorate existing work to help homeless people, as well as develop new work to help prevent homelessness, and investigate its underlying causes.'<sup>26</sup> The Directorate brought together the RSU, Bed & Breakfast Unit and a new team to advise local authorities on tackling homelessness.

In 2003 the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions launched *More Than a Roof*, which set out the Labour Government's new approach to tackling homelessness. On sustaining the reduction in rough sleeping the report said:

Firstly, there are a number of people still sleeping rough and more needs to be done to establish why they are out there, and what the most effective response should be.

Secondly, critical to sustaining the reduction will be preventing people ending up on the streets in the first place and rebuilding the lives of former rough sleepers through education, training and employment.

In determining ways to sustain the reduction, the Government has taken into account the views of local authorities, voluntary organisations and others, an evaluation of the rough sleepers strategy, and the current extent and nature of rough sleeping.

In consultation with local voluntary agencies and other partner organisations, key local authorities will be asked to draw up strategies for their areas for the period up to 31 March 2004. These strategies will have to outline clearly how they will sustain the reductions in rough sleeping and also indicate how they will integrate into the new homelessness reviews and strategies under the Homelessness Act. They will also have to be linked in with future arrangements for *Supporting People*.

In some areas strategies will also need to link in with Community Safety and/or Crime and Disorder Partnerships, Drug Action Teams, Local Strategic Partnerships, or wider town centre initiatives.

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<sup>22</sup> Cabinet Office Press Release 303/00, 18 September 2000

<sup>23</sup> *Leaving Care: a Time for Change*

<sup>24</sup> *Coming in from the Cold: progress report*, 2000

<sup>25</sup> *Coming in from the Cold: progress report*, August 2001

<sup>26</sup> RSU Press release, *Government meets target on reducing rough sleeping*, 3 December 2001

Around the country there are wide ranging differences in the resources local authorities themselves allocate to rough sleeping services. In future, the Government will want them to identify the resources they will contribute to the local strategy.

Once these strategies have been agreed, in some areas funding will be allocated to local authorities to commission and pay for agreed services. Where this is the case, local authorities will enter into arrangements similar to local Public Service Agreement targets.

Although strategies may vary from area to area, reflecting the progress that has been made in reducing the level of rough sleeping, all will need to have a greater emphasis on preventing rough sleeping and rebuilding the lives of former rough sleepers.

In the areas of the country, where local authorities have so far not been able to reach a two-thirds reduction, the Government will want to work closely with them to identify future action and continue to directly commission some services. Work should be undertaken in London with boroughs, the Greater London Authority, the Association for London Government and the Government Office for London on cross-authority co-ordination and the commissioning of services.

Much has been learnt over the last three years in delivering effective policies and services to tackle rough sleeping. It will be important in the future to ensure that what has worked is replicated and promoted and lessons learnt about less successful work is disseminated. The RSU's good practice handbook, '*Preventing tomorrow's rough sleepers*', published in 2001 is a useful tool to identify the policies and services needed as part of local strategies.<sup>27</sup>

On 13 December 2004 the Labour Government announced a £150 million funding package for action to 'prevent and reduce' homelessness. An additional £90 million was targeted at improving the condition of hostel accommodation and services aimed at helping rough sleepers make a permanent move away from the streets. An allocation of £60 million was to be shared between local authorities and voluntary agencies over 2005/06 'to deliver front line services and take forward other initiatives to reduce homelessness.'<sup>28</sup> The press release stated that this funding came 'via the Spending Review 2002 and was confirmed through the Spending Review 2004.' A [policy briefing](#) on improving hostels through the Hostels Capital Improvement Programme was published in September 2006.

#### **4 Extending the priority need categories - 2002**

Local authorities have never had a duty to secure accommodation for all homeless people. To qualify for assistance as a homeless person an applicant has to fall into one of the 'priority need' categories currently set out in section 189 of the *1996 Housing Act*.

The Labour Government consulted on proposals to extend these categories to include homeless people who are vulnerable because they have an institutionalised or care background, all 16 and 17 year olds and people fleeing harassment or domestic violence, in 2001. A statutory instrument to introduce these new categories came into effect on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2002. The Government hoped that the extension of these categories would, in turn, reduce the number of people who are forced into rough sleeping.

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<sup>27</sup> DTLR, *More than a roof*, 2003

<sup>28</sup> ODPM Press Release 2004/0313, 13 December 2004

In addition, the *2001 Children (Leaving Care) Act* came into force in October 2001. This Act placed a new duty on local authorities to ensure that care leavers are provided with suitable accommodation, which does not include temporary accommodation.<sup>29</sup>

Organisations dealing with the homeless welcomed these changes, particularly the extension of the priority need categories, but expressed concern that the burden might be too great for some local authorities to cope with. Organisations giving evidence to the ODPM: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Select Committee's 2004-05 inquiry into homelessness repeated these concerns:

As the ODPM admitted in their evidence, the greater number of categories has led to a substantial increase in the number of acceptances. Local authorities complain that they have not been given adequate resources to cope with this foreseeable ramification of the 2002 Order. Norwich City Council said that the successful implementation of the Order was being affected by a 'lack of appropriate/suitable temporary and permanent accommodation.'<sup>30</sup>

A further criticism levelled at the then Government was that the extension of the categories did not go far enough and left out some groups. The Connection at St Martin's suggested the inclusion of:

A person who is vulnerable as a result of having become entrenched in a pattern of street living through a sustained period of rough sleeping.<sup>31</sup>

The Government's response to the Committee rejected further extensions to the priority need categories.<sup>32</sup>

## **5 A new target to end rough sleeping by 2012**

In April 2008 Communities and Local Government published a discussion paper *Rough Sleeping 10 years on: From the streets to independent living and opportunity*, to inform the development of an updated Government strategy. Responses received to this paper are summarised in *Rough Sleeping 10 Years On: From the streets to independent living and opportunity - Analysis of responses to discussion paper - Executive summary*.

On 18 November 2008 the Labour Government announced a new goal to end rough sleeping by 2012. A new action plan was issued, backed by an allocation of £200 million which included the following measures:

- increasing the options available to single people at risk of rough sleeping including help with deposits for renting a home and more supported lodgings
- expanding street rescue support teams run by charities and encouraging greater use of a 24 hour phone line for members of the public to get help to rough sleepers they are concerned about
- working with those on the streets and those coming off to put together personal achievable action plans, to help them back into housing and employment

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<sup>29</sup> HC Deb 10 June 2002 c1079W

<sup>30</sup> ODPM: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Select Committee, HC 61-I, Third Report of Session 2004-05, *Homelessness*, para 45

<sup>31</sup> *ibid* para 46

<sup>32</sup> Cm 6490, para 9

- charities, businesses and Government will work more closely in new and innovative ways to help rough sleepers off the street and into employment
- new action across Government departments to make sure people don't fall between different aspects of the support network. On health for example, this will be mean better healthcare access for the homeless.<sup>33</sup>

The full 15-point action plan, *No One Left Out: Communities ending rough sleeping*, which was developed with leading rough sleeping charities, involved action, advice and assistance across England to prevent the flow of people onto the streets, as well as to support those already there to get off the streets into stability. The plan called on communities to get more involved in supporting those in their area at risk of rough sleeping, to help stop the flow onto the streets, ensuring that the right resources reach the right people at the right time.

Progress against the 2008 action plan was set out in *No One Left Out: communities ending rough sleeping - An annual progress report: November 2008 - November 2009* (November 2009). CLG issued a press notice on the launch of this progress report which highlighted the following achievements:

One year on from the launch of the 'No One Left Out' strategy to end rough sleeping further action to stem the flow of new rough sleepers coming onto the street and reach entrenched rough sleepers is well underway, according to a progress report published today.

Funding has been provided to help hundreds of rough sleepers find homes in the private rented sector through the Small Grants programme. Through this, councils can help provide deposits so that rough sleepers are able to secure privately rented accommodation.

A mentoring and befriending scheme has also been established for vulnerable housed rough sleepers to help the stay in their accommodation and begin to make friends and new social support networks in their community.

Ian Austin, Homelessness Minister, said:

"We have achieved a lot in the past year, kick-starting the new and innovative ideas outlined in the Rough Sleeping Strategy. But meeting our target of ending rough sleeping by 2012 will depend upon the continued hard work of Government departments, local authorities, the voluntary sector and other agencies dealing with rough sleeping.

"Together we must maintain this momentum and continue the drive to find, and put in place, long-term solutions to tackle rough sleeping."

Other achievements outlined in the report include:

- Close working between the health service and other agencies to make sure that rough sleepers who find themselves in hospital or provision don't just end up back on the streets when they are discharged
- A bus outreach team in London funded by CLG and Transport for London to engage and help rough sleepers who are sleeping on the back of buses in the capital

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<sup>33</sup> CLG Press Release, *New Goal to end rough sleeping*, 18 November 2008

- Advisory visits by a team of experts to more than 80 local authorities across England to support councils in taking steps to tackle rough sleeping in their area
- The establishment of a variety of reconnections services for destitute rough sleepers from the Eastern European states that have seen hundreds of rough sleepers voluntarily returned to their home countries with the necessary support to make that move a positive one.

Jenny Edwards, Chief Executive of Homeless Link, the national umbrella organisation for agencies working to end homelessness, said:

"Tremendous progress has been made in the last year towards our goal of ending rough sleeping by 2012. We are particularly encouraged by CLG's leadership in driving support from other national government departments and their willingness to pilot new approaches, such as the hospital discharge protocol, in partnership with the NHS, which aims to prevent people leaving hospital with nowhere to go. We know we need to join up support so that people can rebuild their lives. But we must not become complacent, especially at this time of intense economic and social pressure. We must constantly seek to learn from others and push ahead if we are finally to close the door into rough sleeping in every community."<sup>34</sup>

Organisations working with the street homeless have drawn attention to the increased pressure they are facing as a result of recessionary pressures in terms of growing redundancies and repossessions.<sup>35</sup> Calls have been made for more help from the prison service and NHS to make sure patients and ex-offenders do not become homeless when they leave the system.<sup>36</sup> In 2009 Communities and Local Government published good practice guidance for local authorities on the prevention of homeless in respect of ex-offenders, *Homelessness Prevention and Meeting Ex-Offenders' Needs*. A key issue identified by commentators was how success would be defined in terms of achieving the 2012 target.<sup>37</sup>

In London, the area of the country with the highest number of rough sleepers, the London Delivery Board (LDB) is charged with meeting the 2012 target – this target has been endorsed by the Mayor, Boris Johnson. The LDB's annual progress report was published in February 2010; it listed the following achievements:

- Helped three quarters of London's 205 most entrenched rough sleepers off the streets;
- Created a new outreach service to tackle rough sleeping on London's buses;
- Established a street doctor service, starting in March, to work with vulnerable long term rough sleepers still living on the streets;
- Re-launched the Pan-London Reconnection Protocol to help rough sleepers reconnect with their home areas;
- Developed a targeted programme to prevent vulnerable rough sleepers returning to the streets from hostel or other accommodation;

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<sup>34</sup> CLG Press Release, 27 November 2009

<sup>35</sup> *Inside Housing*, "Everyone indoors", 26 February 2009

<sup>36</sup> *ibid*

<sup>37</sup> *Inside Housing*, "Everyone indoors", 26 February 2009



- Agreed a system with London's boroughs to help rough sleepers accessing services across several boroughs;
- Promoted volunteering opportunities for those wanting to end rough sleeping.

The full report and action plan up to 2010 can be accessed online.<sup>38</sup>

## 6 The number of rough sleepers

The DETR's evaluation of the Rough Sleepers Initiative<sup>39</sup> acknowledged that there were difficulties in producing accurate counts of the number of people sleeping rough. The problems include formulating a clear definition of rough sleeping, identifying a transient and often hidden population and distinguishing between stock counts taken at one point in time and flow counts of the number of people sleeping rough over a period of time.

Since 1996 local authorities have been asked to provide annual estimates of rough sleeping in their statistical returns to the Department as part of the Housing Investment Programme. Authorities have also been encouraged to work with voluntary sector homelessness agencies to conduct head counts of people sleeping rough in their areas where there is a known rough sleeping problem. Policy on how to conduct these counts is described below:

- at least two counts a year in areas with a substantial number of rough sleepers (20 or more on a single night);
- at least one count a year in areas with between 10 and 19 rough sleepers on a single night; and
- counts in a selection of areas estimating fewer than 10 rough sleepers on a single night to spot check the validity of those estimates.<sup>40</sup>

The figures from the single night street counts in 1998 produced an estimate of 1,850 rough sleepers in England on any one night. The same count in 1999 produced an estimate of 1,633 of which 635 were in Greater London.<sup>41</sup> The 1998 figure was taken as the baseline figure for the Labour Government's target to reduce rough sleeping by two thirds by 2002.

In May 2000 Hilary Armstrong, then Minister for Local Government and the Regions, reported that street counts in January 2000 showed a fall of around one third in the number of people sleeping rough in central London since June 1998.<sup>42</sup> The June 2000 street count found 546 rough sleepers in Greater London and 1,180 in England as a whole, indicating that the downward trend was continuing.<sup>43</sup> The Rough Sleepers Unit predicted that if the fall in rough sleeping continued at that rate the unit would have met its target by August 2001.<sup>44</sup>

On 3 December 2001 the Labour Government announced that the RSU *had* achieved its target of reducing rough sleeping by at least two-thirds by 2002. The November 2001 count found 532 people sleeping rough in England.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> <http://www.london.gov.uk/priorities/housing/ending-rough-sleeping>

<sup>39</sup> *Homes for street homeless people*, December 1999

<sup>40</sup> HC Deb 10 December 2001 c574W

<sup>41</sup> HC Deb 15 December 1999 c193-4W

<sup>42</sup> HC Deb 9 May 2000 c630

<sup>43</sup> HC Deb 15 November 2000 c655W

<sup>44</sup> 'Rough Sleepers Unit on schedule to achieve its goal', *Housing Today*, 24 August 2000

<sup>45</sup> RSU Press Release, *Government meets target on reducing rough sleeping*, 3 December 2001

On 12 September 2005 the ODPM reported that rough sleeping had fallen to its lowest level ever:

Annual rough sleeping figures for 2005 show a 75 per cent reduction in the number of people sleeping rough in England since 1998, from 1,850 to 459.

...National statistics also published today show the number of people becoming homeless was 17 per cent lower than in the same period the previous year.<sup>46</sup>

When announcing the new strategy to end rough sleeping by 2012, the then Homelessness Minister, Iain Wright, referred to street count figures which indicated that there are around 483 rough sleepers across the country on any given night.<sup>47</sup> Most recently, on 15 July 2010 CLG reported that the numbers of rough sleepers in England had hit an eleven-year low; 70 councils had conducted street counts and reported that there were 440 rough sleepers in England on any given night. In comparison, in 2009 76 councils conducted street counts and recorded 464 rough sleepers.<sup>48</sup>

Homelessness charities have long questioned whether street sleeping has been reduced by the extent claimed. Philip Burke of the Simon Community reportedly said that the 2001 figures 'do not reflect the full picture' because 'the figures centre on some major cities and London Boroughs, and is only a sample reflecting one night of the year.'<sup>49</sup> The Simon Community's July 2002 newsletter claimed that, prior to the November 2001 head-count, the RSU decanted rough sleepers into bed and breakfast accommodation and held all night parties to draw the homeless off the streets in order to push down the count figures.<sup>50</sup> The RSU and Lord Falconer (Minister for Housing at that time) denied these allegations.<sup>51</sup> Questions on the methodology of the counts were asked in the House:

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how those conducting the count, for the latest rough sleeping head count conducted by the RSU, chose the areas of the various cities in which their counts would take place; and if he will publish the guidance issued as to how the count areas were to be chosen.

**Mr. Byers:** Rough sleeping head counts are conducted by local authorities and voluntary sector agencies and the results are submitted to the DTLR.

The method used to conduct counts, including deciding which areas should be covered is clearly set out in our guidance, which was first published in 1996. This states that a working group of key local agencies should be formed and that this working group in consultation with other local agencies should:

"Agree on the boundaries of the area and identify segments of the area where people sleeping rough are likely to be found."

This is the guidance that was used for the latest rough sleeping head count.<sup>52</sup>

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how it was determined whether someone on the streets during the latest

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<sup>46</sup> ODPM Press Release 2005/190, 12 September 2005

<sup>47</sup> CLG Press Release, *New Goal to end rough sleeping*, 18 November 2008

<sup>48</sup> CLG Press Release, *Rough sleeping hits an eleven year low*, 15 July 2010

<sup>49</sup> 'Rough sleeping figures are 'quick fix' says charity chief', *Inside Housing*, 8 September 2000

<sup>50</sup> Simon Star, Issue 89, July 2002

<sup>51</sup> 'Falconer defends rough sleeper count,' *Housing Today*, 24 January 2002

<sup>52</sup> HC Deb 5 March 2002 c186W

rough sleeping headcount conducted by the Rough Sleepers Unit was a rough sleeper; and if he will publish the guidelines issued to those conducting the count, relating to whom should be included in the count.

**Mr. Byers:** Rough sleeping headcounts are conducted by local authorities and voluntary sector agencies and the results are submitted to the DTLR.

The definition of people who should be included in rough sleeper counts is clearly set out in Government guidance, which was first published in 1996. It is:

"people sleeping, or bedded down, in the open air (such as on the streets, or in doorways, parks or bus shelters); people in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations or 'bashes')".

This is the guidance that is still used today.<sup>53</sup>

In January 2007 *Inside Housing* reported that the number of people sleeping rough could be "as much as four times higher than the official figure because of the way the statistics are collected".<sup>54</sup> Authorities that had recorded between zero and ten rough sleepers during the June 2006 count had had their results rounded down to zero. CLG conceded that the counts do not represent a comprehensive picture of homelessness but "provide a useful snapshot of the number sleeping rough on a particular night."<sup>55</sup> [Revised guidance on evaluating the extent of rough sleeping](#) was published in March 2007.<sup>56</sup>

As part of the November 2008 announcement the Labour Government said it would adopt a new approach to assessing the number of rough sleepers:

While we will keep the local counts as a useful measure, we know that they provide a limited snapshot. They should be the start of the process not the end. We want to use the counts and other sources of data to bring together a fuller picture of the different needs of people sleeping rough, the services offered and the outcomes achieved. We want to make sure that people are getting the help that they need.

This information needs to drive further action to tackle rough sleeping. So we will:

- launch a new approach to help local authorities monitor progress and track people sleeping rough, ensuring that counts are not just an opportunity to identify levels of need but more importantly to do something about it
- launch "Street Needs Audits" to give us a much better understanding of the needs of people on the streets; and
- develop new ways of using data to understand and monitor outcomes for people who have slept rough.<sup>57</sup>

Alongside the publication of the rough sleeper counts in July 2010 the new Housing Minister, Grant Shapps, said that he would "shortly consult" on an overhaul of the rough sleeping count methodology. He said:

"Today's figures show that rough sleeping is at an eleven-year low - but I am sceptical that these figures reflect the situation on the streets.

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<sup>53</sup> HC Deb 5 March 2002 c186W

<sup>54</sup> *Inside Housing*, "Number of homeless could be four times official figure", 12 January 2007

<sup>55</sup> *ibid*

<sup>56</sup> CLG, [Guidance on evaluating the extent of rough sleeping](#) – 2007 revision, March 2007

<sup>57</sup> CLG, [No One Left Out: Communities ending rough sleeping](#), 18 November 2008

Only councils considered to have a rough sleeping problem have been required to conduct counts - so in some of our biggest cities, while local people would be acutely aware of the problem of rough sleeping, official street counts were not conducted.

"That's why I will shortly publish plans for a complete overhaul of the way the problem of rough sleeping is assessed so councils and charities can be given a credible measure of the problem in their area.<sup>58</sup>

A consultation document, [\*Proposed changes to guidance on evaluating the extent of rough sleeping: Consultation\*](#), was published on 23 July 2010 – consultation closes on 3 September 2010.

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<sup>58</sup> CLG Press Release, *Rough sleeping hits an eleven year low*, 15 July 2010