



# HOMELESSNESS - UNMET NEEDS IN A TIME OF CRISIS

PRACTICAL ACTION AGAINST  
POVERTY SINCE 1867

—  
QUAKER  
SOCIAL  
ACTION  
—

# Introduction

On 1 December 2020, Quaker Homeless Action joined Quaker Social Action as part of a planned merger. We are privileged to take on responsibility for advancing QHA's mission *to offer fellowship, practical assistance to and a voice for homeless and marginalised people in Britain*. We do so with humility, and with great respect for what QHA achieved over the past half century.

As part of the planning and preparation for the merger, QSA undertook a piece of research to identify areas of unmet need within the field of homelessness prevention and response. We were particularly keen to understand what had changed within homelessness provision due to lockdown, and the implications arising from that. We wanted to understand how we could creatively respond to unmet needs using QSA's existing strengths, with consideration to our parameters in terms of management capacity and infrastructure.

We convened online listening exercises former QHA trustees and volunteers, as well as QHA and QSA supporters and we thank everyone who contributed for their thoughtful questions and help in understanding homelessness. You can listen back to a recording of one of these sessions [here](#).

QSA colleagues, volunteers and trustees were also consulted as well as a range of people working in homelessness and related sectors. We reviewed news articles and reports on homelessness and on designing solutions to complex problems. The work was limited to desk research because of pandemic restrictions. The mobile library had been closed during the first lockdown and due to restrictions and the merger process it has not yet been able to reopen, so we were unable to speak to as many people with lived experience of homelessness as we would have liked, though we hope to do so in 2021.

We want to share what we learned during our research from August – December 2020 and what our current plans are for the future as well as letting you know how to stay up to date and involved if you wish. QSA has particular appreciation for the many volunteers and supporters who have made QHA's work possible and whom we hope will remain involved as we move forward. The passion and dedication of volunteers and supporters has come across very clearly, and we look forward to continuing this dialogue.

# Context

The **Covid19 pandemic** has caused the most severe economic downturn ever recorded<sup>1</sup>.

The government responded with the **Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme** (furloughing) and the **Self-Employment Income Support Scheme**, however these schemes do not cover certain vulnerable groups, such as those on zero hours contracts. Street homelessness and food poverty, namely school holiday hunger, have featured regularly in the media.

There were **eviction bans** and mortgage repossession pauses. These measures were intended to avoid people becoming homeless though there have been reports of an increase in illegal evictions<sup>2</sup>. Some groups are more vulnerable to illegal evictions because they are less likely to know their rights, and many in the hospitality industry will have lost their job and home at the same time if they lived at a hotel or pub. The Home Office paused evictions from asylum accommodation from March but began again in August, including for those with refugee status. Whilst the eviction ban was a positive policy for many, it has not protected some of the most vulnerable in society from homelessness.

The **'Everyone In'** initiative demonstrated a shift in the government approaching homelessness as a public health issue during the first lockdown. Funding was given to councils with the aim of housing every rough sleeper in emergency accommodation, including hotels where necessary. The intention was to house everyone based on need alone rather than through tests. This was a bold and innovative move, and there have been a number of stories of success mainly around individuals having the chance to recover from health and addiction problems from the comfort and stability of a safe place to stay with services and workers nearby. However, the initiative was not without its issues, many of which centred on a lack of clarity to local government about whether they could and should be using the funding to help those with No Recourse to Public Funds<sup>3</sup>.

The government also announced:

- **Cold Weather Fund** of £10million to help councils provide self-contained accommodation to rough sleepers<sup>4</sup>.
- **Protect Programme**; a £15 million fund to certain areas of the country, including London, with which 'Councils [are] asked to make sure every rough sleeper [is] offered somewhere safe to go'<sup>5</sup>.
- **Next Steps Accommodation Programme**, which intend to provide longer-term housing for those brought into temporary housing under Everyone In<sup>6</sup>.
- **Covid-19 Homelessness Response Fund**, £6 million of emergency funding to frontline homelessness charitable organisations who were affected by the Covid-19 outbreak<sup>7</sup>.

The pandemic has affected **how the homelessness sector delivers its services**, with some services stopping altogether and other services going online.

**Brexit** will also affect homelessness in the UK. There is a grace period for applying for the EU Settlement Scheme until 30 June 2021. However it is thought by some working in the homelessness sector that many vulnerable migrants won't apply in time and this will affect their healthcare, right to rent and right to work. The expectation is that many will become homeless, if not already.

The government announced **changes to the immigration rules** for rough sleeping to become grounds for refusal of, or cancellation of, permission to be in the UK for non-UK nationals from 1 December 2020, particularly if individuals have refused a voluntary return to their country<sup>8</sup>.

## Needs

People become homeless for a host of interlinked reasons and some people are more vulnerable to homelessness than others:

*'As homelessness is often the result of a series of systemic failures, groups who are marginalized in mainstream systems are generally overrepresented within the homeless population... In other words, **people who are the most affected by structural inequalities are also typically the most affected by homelessness** (Whaley 2002). These groups often face multiple points of exclusion: discrimination in the housing market, prejudice and administrative barriers when trying to access services, and increased financial strain.'*<sup>9</sup>

We identified the following groups (not exhaustive) as particularly vulnerable to homelessness, or having more vulnerabilities when homeless:

- People with **no recourse to public funds** cannot claim Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, so if they have a low income, or lose their jobs, there is no safety net to help them pay their rent.
- **Asylum seekers** are not permitted to work<sup>10</sup> so they have little chance to increase their daily budget of £5 and very little to do. Some stay destitute after a negative decision because it is preferable to returning to persecution, such as rape or torture in their home country.
- **Refugees** i.e. people whose asylum application has been successful *'have just 28 days to find accommodation and apply for mainstream benefits before they are evicted from asylum accommodation. Many refugees become homeless at this stage.'*<sup>11</sup>
- **Vulnerable migrants**, including those known as **'undocumented'**, including people who have lost documents proving their immigration status, and people who have overstayed a visa. *'Migrants are at greater risk of losing their income in the current crisis because they are more likely to be working in sectors affected by the lockdown and to be self-employed or in temporary work...Migrant homeless people face all the dangers that homeless people from the UK face and more. On a daily basis they must contend with suspicion about their motives, being excluded from almost all support services, and a constant threat of removal from the country.'*<sup>12</sup>
- The **Roma** are an ethnic group who receive notable discrimination. They are less likely to know their housing rights, more likely to have poor health, be in low paid and insecure employment and have limited knowledge of English.<sup>13</sup> There is often a misperception that Roma come to the UK in order to beg and many homeless organisations seem ill-equipped to work with this group due to cultural and language differences.
- *'A quarter of people making homelessness applications to local councils are from **Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME)** groups, even though they make up just over a tenth (11%) of all households in England.'* Shelter calls it *"deep inequality and systemic racism"* within the housing system<sup>14</sup>.
- **Young people** are also discriminated against in the housing market. *'Young people receive a reduced level of Universal Credit, are only entitled to the lowest rate of Local Housing Allowance (shared accommodation rate), and are at greater risk of benefit sanctions'*. They *'were more than twice as likely as older workers to have lost their job, while six in 10 saw their earnings fall during the pandemic'*<sup>15</sup>. Lockdowns have exacerbated family breakdowns and made it harder to identify young people at risk.
- People identifying as **LGBTQI+** are over-represented in the UK homelessness population<sup>16</sup> and *'one in four trans people (25 per cent) have experienced homelessness at some point in their lives'*<sup>17</sup>. Many feel excluded by gender-divided services and fear bullying and a number of young people becoming homeless because of family rejection when 'coming out'<sup>18</sup>.
- Those with **cognitive impairment** may be over-represented in the homeless population, though there is little research in this area. It is thought that those with **autism and learning disabilities** are over-represented<sup>19</sup>, as well as those with **speech, language and communication needs**<sup>20</sup>.
- **Single people** *'are less likely than families to be to be entitled to housing by their local authority'*<sup>21</sup>.

- Those with **multiple and complex needs** are often seen as the hardest to help within homelessness, especially rough sleeping. These are people who have experience in more than one of these categories: **homelessness, mental health needs, addiction**, and the **criminal justice system**. Many services are set up to address issues arising from one of these categories but those straddling more than one category are often passed from service to service<sup>22</sup>.
- Those at **transition points** in their life are also more likely to become homeless, for example those coming from institutions such as the **criminal justice system**, the **armed forces** and the **care system**.
- Those **escaping abuse or domestic violence** are also vulnerable to homelessness. Many refuges will not allow women to book ahead of time, meaning that those fleeing danger at home have to call a helpline on the day to find out whether there is a space available for them, and, if applicable, their children<sup>23</sup>.
- Those who are **engaged in sex work**, are particularly vulnerable at this time; those who are not homeless already are at higher risk of homelessness<sup>24</sup>. Sex workers generally cannot go on furlough, and have little to live on if waiting for Universal Credit<sup>25</sup>. Those who make ends meet by continuing to work are at higher risk of contracting Covid 19.

Clearly different groups of people experiencing homelessness have different needs, but in our research QSA identified some common **themes**:

We all need a **safe, warm, dry and private place to live** but for those who are street homeless or vulnerably housed, this need often goes unmet. It can be very difficult to retain **dignity** for someone who does not have such a place to sleep, wash and use a toilet. **Sanitation and hygiene** needs are more pressing in a pandemic and it can be difficult to access **toilet and handwashing facilities, especially outside of daytimes**. Likewise, people who are homeless can have difficulty easily accessing **physical and mental healthcare**.

The **cognitive energy** required to think about where you might bed down tonight or next week, where you might **wash your hands**, get a **hot meal** and **store your things** cannot be used for other things, such as applying for benefits or a job and escaping homelessness. Not having the **reliability of a stable home** can make **planning for the future** very difficult and the **stress** can take its toll on **physical and mental health**. Sleeping rough or precariously affects sleep and in turn **decision making**. Having very little income and no or poor kitchen facilities means people who are homeless also have much **less choice** in what they **eat**, an incredibly important part of a **healthy lifestyle** and of **basic control**.

**A lack of trust in people and institutions** is common amongst the homelessness population. Many people who are homeless are not **listened to** about what their needs are, or what they want, and they do not have much **control** over what services there are or how services are run.

**Trauma** is common within the homeless population, whether from childhood experiences, abuse, torture or experience of war. People can also be traumatised from street homelessness and re-traumatised by dehumanising experiences of systems, such as the housing, benefits and asylum systems. There is a need for **psychological safety** in individual responses as well as in our systems.

**System failings** were a recurrent theme, with the risk of individuals being institutionalised in housing, homelessness, prison and care systems. There is a need for more **joined up** services that put individuals and their relationships at the centre of their policies and practice. People need to be treated with **humanity, care and empathy** and there needs to be **inclusivity and equity** in the systems. People need access to **good quality, affordable housing, healthcare and employment**, and the advice that goes with them as well as a **safety net** for when things go wrong.

## Creatively responding at QSA

We are pleased to announce that QSA plans to resume the **mobile library** in London this year once it is safe enough to do so. The mobile library aims to increase wellbeing through connection, conversation and reading. We are in discussions with former mobile library volunteers about practicalities and hope to recruit additional volunteers. The library also provides an opportunity to continue our learning by speaking to people with lived experience of homelessness. We plan to create small innovations within this project to respond to some of the unmet needs that become apparent.

QSA has provided a **£10k grant** to the Covid-19 Homeless Taskforce which aims to have thousands of interactions over the winter months with people in London who are affected by homelessness. The Covid-19 Homeless Taskforce is a group of small, independent, community organisations and charities - Streets Kitchen, The Simon Community, The Outside Project and Museum of Homelessness - which work collectively with people sleeping rough but also intensively with marginalised communities within homelessness. Examples of interactions are: a conversation at bedding down time; a cup of tea and a meal; a breakfast; a bed at The Outside Project. As previously stated in our [frequently asked questions about the merger](#), it was unfeasible for QSA to plan a Christmas shelter activity in a matter of weeks, and so Quaker Open Christmas did not take place in 2020.

We have been struck by how many people wanted to learn from others, share ideas and put their values into action through responses to homelessness. Therefore QSA will facilitate a **regular online forum** where we will share learning, invite quest speakers, and provide practical information and inspiration for individuals and Quaker meetings who wish to plan their own response to homelessness. The aim is to create a **supportive space to share our own learning and that of others so that collectively more is done** to meet the needs of people who are homeless than we could do at QSA only. We hope to run our first forum in March and we will be announcing more details very soon.

A number of **other potential responses** are being considered and we will share further news in due course. If you would like to stay up to date with the latest news of our work on homelessness, please [sign up to our newsletter](#) to find out more.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 [www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/opinion/columnists/jobs-crisis-demands-more-boldness-rishi-sunak-rebecca-mcdonald-2945840](http://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/opinion/columnists/jobs-crisis-demands-more-boldness-rishi-sunak-rebecca-mcdonald-2945840)
- 2 <https://www.independent.co.uk/business/illegal-eviction-coronavirus-pandemic-housing-tenants-b487020.html>
- 3 Dickson, E, Jolly, A, Morgan, B, Qureshi, F, Sojka, B and Stamp, D, Local Authority Responses to People with NRPF During the Pandemic, Aug 2020
- 4 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/rough-sleepers-to-be-helped-to-keep-safe-this-winter#:~:text=The%20Cold%20Weather%20Fund%20was,emergency%20accommodation%20for%20rough%20sleepers>
- 5 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/jenrick-launches-protect-programme-the-next-step-in-winter-rough-sleeping-plan>
- 6 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/907977/NSAP\\_Guidance.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/907977/NSAP_Guidance.pdf)
- 7 <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2020-09-10.88409.h>
- 8 <https://www.pilc.org.uk/news/story/new-info-sheet-on-changes-to-immigration-rules/>
- 9 <https://ighhub.org/sites/default/files/attachments/An%20Overview%20of%20Global%20Homelessness%20and%20Strategies%20for%20Systemic%20Change.pdf>
- 10 <https://www.refugee-action.org.uk/about/facts-about-refugees/>
- 11 <https://www.refugee-action.org.uk/about/facts-about-refugees/>
- 12 [https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/242274/cr10432\\_home\\_for\\_all\\_campaign\\_policy\\_briefing.pdf](https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/242274/cr10432_home_for_all_campaign_policy_briefing.pdf)
- 13 [https://www.romasupportgroup.org.uk/uploads/9/3/6/8/93687016/covid\\_19\\_roma\\_public\\_statement\\_final.pdf](https://www.romasupportgroup.org.uk/uploads/9/3/6/8/93687016/covid_19_roma_public_statement_final.pdf)
- 14 Shelter press release : Black people are more than three times as likely to experience homelessness 1/10/20
- 15 <https://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Young%20and%20Homeless%202020.pdf>
- 16 <https://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Single%20Homelessness%20Support%20in%20England%20-%20Annual%20Review%202019.pdf>
- 17 [https://www.stonewall.org.uk/system/files/lgbt\\_in\\_britain\\_-\\_trans\\_report\\_final.pdf](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/system/files/lgbt_in_britain_-_trans_report_final.pdf)
- 18 <https://uk.news.yahoo.com/homeless-lgbt-kids-share-shocking-080126142.html>
- 19 <https://www.homeless.org.uk/connect/blogs/2019/apr/01/research-behind-autism-homelessness-toolkit>
- 20 Andrews, L and Botting, N, The speech, language and communication needs of rough sleepers in London, August 2020
- 21 <https://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Single%20Homelessness%20Support%20in%20England%20-%20Annual%20Review%202019.pdf>
- 22 <https://lankellychase.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Hard-Edges-Mapping-SMD-2015.pdf>
- 23 [https://england.shelter.org.uk/housing\\_advice/homelessness/temporary\\_housing\\_if\\_youre\\_homeless/refuges\\_if\\_youre\\_a\\_woman\\_suffering\\_from\\_domestic\\_abuse](https://england.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice/homelessness/temporary_housing_if_youre_homeless/refuges_if_youre_a_woman_suffering_from_domestic_abuse)
- 24 <https://www.vogue.co.uk/arts-and-lifestyle/article/sex-workers-covid-19-pandemic>
- 25 <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/covid19/2020/06/08/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-sex-workers/>

**Quaker Social Action** is an independent UK charity working with people on low incomes to seek solutions to the issues affecting their lives. Projects and services include crisis support for those unable to afford funerals, courses that empower people to manage their money and improve resilience, and the UK's first dedicated supported housing project for young adult carers.

## SUPPORT QUAKER SOCIAL ACTION

Please make a regular or single donation

[quakersocialaction.org.uk/donate](https://quakersocialaction.org.uk/donate)

Cheques can be made payable to  
Quaker Social Action and sent to:  
QSA  
17 Old Ford Road  
London  
E2 9PJ

Tel: 020 8983 5030  
[info@qsa.org.uk](mailto:info@qsa.org.uk)

Charity number 1069157

February 2021

## FOLLOW AND SHARE OUR WORK

 [facebook.com/quakersocialaction](https://facebook.com/quakersocialaction)

 [@QSA](https://twitter.com/QSA)

