ROUGH SLEEPING TRACKER

A plan to restore control, order, and hope to England's streets

9,369

The number of people sleeping rough over the course of September 2026. This figure is a record high for this time of year, and a one per cent increase from the year before.

3,591

The number of people sleeping rough long-term over September 2026. 38 per cent of individuals were long-term rough sleepers, the single largest group on the streets.

1,604

The number of non-UK nationals sleeping rough in England over the course of September 2026. 985 individuals held unknown nationalities.

CSJ The Centre for Social Justice

November 2026

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2001 - 2026
Steve Morgan
FOUNDATION
CHANGING LIVES FOR 25 YEARS

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Wates Family
Enterprise Trust

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We are grateful to Andy Preston and CEO Sleepout for their ongoing support of the CSJ's work on tackling homelessness and reforming the social housing system. In 2027, we will publish *Social Housing 2030*, setting out a series of long-term reforms to the affordable housing system in England.

CEOSleepout

Disclaimer: Please note that the views, findings, and recommendations presented in this report are those of the CSJ alone, and not necessarily those of any organisation or individual who has fed into or enabled our research. Any errors remain our own.

About the Centre for Social Justice

Established in 2004, the CSJ is an independent think tank that studies the root causes of Britain's social problems and addresses them by recommending practical, workable policy interventions.

The CSJ's vision is to give people in the United Kingdom (UK) who are experiencing the worst multiple disadvantages and injustice every possible opportunity to reach their full potential. The majority of the CSJ's work is organised around five 'pathways to poverty', first identified in our ground-breaking 2007 report, *Breakthrough Britain*. These are: educational failure; family breakdown; economic dependency and worklessness; addiction to drugs and alcohol; and severe personal debt.

Since its inception, the CSJ has changed the landscape of our political discourse by putting social justice at the heart of British politics. This has led to a transformation in government thinking and policy. For instance, in March 2013, the CSJ report *It Happens Here* shone a light on the horrific reality of human trafficking and modern slavery in the UK. As a direct result of this report, the government passed the *Modern Slavery Act 2015*, one of the first pieces of legislation in the world to address slavery and trafficking in the 21st century.

Our research is informed by experts including prominent academics, practitioners and policymakers. We also draw upon our CSJ Alliance, a unique group of charities, social enterprises, and other grassroots organisations that have a proven track-record of reversing social breakdown across the UK.

The social challenges facing Britain remain serious. In 2026 and beyond, we will continue to advance the cause of social justice so that more people can continue to fulfil their potential.

Foreword

Liverpool is one of the proudest and most generous cities in the country. But it is not immune to the crisis on our streets. Like the rest of England, rough sleeping is on the rise, increasingly visible across our city centre, in shop doorways, and outside our stations. It is the clearest symptom of our broken social fabric.

The number of people sleeping rough across England is at a record high for this time of year. Tragically, this has been driven by a growing number of people sleeping rough long-term. Often this is the result of plummeting mental health and substance misuse, yet only half of those with an addiction have received treatment.

That is why the Prime Minister's commitment to give every rough sleeper a route off the street by Christmas is a genuine turning point. Recovery can only truly begin once the stable foundation of a home is in place. Backed by over £870 million in funding, we now have a generational opportunity to end this crisis.

In the Liverpool City Region, we have shown what works through our Housing First programme. Picture someone who has been through every hostel, referral, and waiting list and is still on the street. The state pays for failure every time. Housing First inverts this model by offering them a secure home first, building dedicated support around the individual from there. For many, that is the first time any service has stayed with them long enough to make recovery possible.

Across the three city-region pilots, 84 per cent of those helped by Housing First sustained permanent housing after three years, and the service has proven to be 3.5 times more effective than conventional hostels. Success pays for itself, with £2 returned for every £1 invested.

The Prime Minister knows better than anyone what Housing First can achieve, and the new Rough Sleeping Programme is an ambitious first step. But like governments before, the new funding sets no explicit requirement for local areas to scale up Housing First.

I welcome this report by the CSJ which shows how the government can deliver up to 3,000 new Housing First places within the Rough Sleeping Programme. Only by investing in the interventions that work can we end rough sleeping for good.

Liverpool has been a leading light on this. Now it is up to the government to take that torch and raise its ambitions further to ensure no one on our streets walks alone.



Paula Barker MP
Labour MP for Liverpool Wavertree
Co-Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Ending Homelessness

Executive summary

Rough sleeping is at a record high for this time of year.

9,369 people were sleeping rough across England over September 2026, a one per cent increase from the same time a year earlier.[1] In July 2026, numbers hit an all-time high, with 9,798 people recorded sleeping rough.[2]

These figures should sound alarm bells for the Prime Minister (PM), who has promised to end long-term rough sleeping and has pledged to give "everyone who needs it" a route off the street by Christmas.[3] They underline the scale of the challenge facing the government – a task complicated by a growing number of entrenched, long-term rough sleepers whom it is difficult to house.

While the number of people seen sleeping rough for the first time fell by two per cent from September 2025 to 2026, the number of long-term rough sleepers increased by six per cent.[4] Long-term rough sleepers are the single largest group on the streets. These are people who have been seen sleeping rough in three or more months out of the last 12.[5]

Rising long-term rough sleeping is being fuelled by an addiction crisis and the second-order effects of badly designed government policy. A survey of people sleeping rough in 2025 found that over half had a substance misuse need, yet of this group, only 52 per cent reported receiving treatment.[6] In addition, frontline services are responding to the fallout caused by the government's criminal justice reforms, in particular the new early release scheme, which reports suggest is driving up rough sleeping across the country.

> *"We've just had a second rollout of releasees. In the last week we've had 13 people released with no fixed abode who are now sleeping rough. All our staff looked at the early release scheme and thought that is not going to work."*
>
> **Charity leader, Light for Life, Liverpool City Region**

In addition, a failure to control immigration and asylum has fundamentally changed the demographics of rough sleeping. Annual figures reveal a 396 per cent increase in the number of non-EU rough sleepers from 2021 to 2025,[7] while 17 per cent of the total number of people sleeping rough in September 2026 were non-UK nationals.[8]

1 MHCLG, Rough sleeping data framework, July to September 2026 – release, November 2026.
2 Ibid.
3 Prime Minister's Office, PM confident every rough sleeper will have route off the street by Christmas as funding doubles, October 2026. Accessed: gov.uk/government/news/pm-confident-every-rough-sleeper-will-have-route-off-the-street-by-christmas-as-funding-doubles.
4 MHCLG, Rough sleeping data framework, July to September 2026 – release, November 2026.
5 Ibid.
6 MHCLG, Rough sleeping questionnaire 2025: Headline findings, May 2026.
7 MHCLG, Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2025, February 2026.
8 MHCLG, Rough sleeping data framework, July to September 2026 – release, November 2026.

Rough sleeping among non-UK nationals poses one of the greatest challenges for the government in ending long-term rough sleeping. 51 per cent of non-UK nationals sleeping rough in September 2026 had unknown, restricted or no recourse to public funds (NRPF) status.[9] Many in this group are effectively barred from statutory homelessness support, as well as the wider welfare and social housing systems.

In this report we show how the government can strengthen its new Rough Sleeping Programme to restore control, order, and hope to our streets. The PM has rightly led from the front, asking Whitehall to raise its ambition on this issue. However, he must continue to lead as local areas begin commissioning local services, setting clear expectations for strategic and local authorities.

This should begin with a targeted expansion of Housing First in England, a new approach to restore control over non-UK national rough sleeping, and a stronger commitment to prevent long-term rough sleeping in the first place.

Scale up Housing First

Housing First was first piloted at scale in England through three city-region pilots in Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region, and the West Midlands. It was profoundly successful, with 84 per cent of service users sustaining settled housing after three years on the programme.[10]

Housing First provides ordinary settled housing alongside intensive, person-centred support for people whose homelessness is compounded by multiple and complex support needs. Housing First is different from conventional interventions as it offers permanent housing from the start, dependent on an individual's willingness to maintain a tenancy.

Internationally, Housing First is one of the most proven and evidenced interventions to end long-term and complex rough sleeping.[11] However, in England, its rollout has been stymied by government hesitance to explicitly favour it over conventional services.

The government has pledged to create 3,000 intensive support placements for people with long-term and complex histories of rough sleeping.[12] This presents a unique opportunity to scale up Housing First and ensure that long-term rough sleepers can access proven support that provides a permanent route off the streets.

However, the Rough Sleeping Programme sets no explicit expectation that funding for long-term rough sleepers should go towards Housing First. Without such an expectation, the government risks falling short of its mission to end long-term rough sleeping, as every other government in recent years has done.

To ensure that people experiencing long-term rough sleeping are given the best possible opportunity to exit homelessness, we recommend that the Rough Sleeping Programme adopts an explicit presumption that all accommodation and services provided under its settled accommodation component are Housing First or Housing First-informed. We estimate that this would cost around £27.4 million in ongoing revenue costs from 2028/29 onwards, approximately 40 per cent of total annual revenue funding for the Rough Sleeping Programme.[13]

9 Ibid.

10 MHCLG, Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots: Final synthesis report, October 2024, p. 31.

11 CSJ, No Place Like Home: Scaling up Housing First in England, July 2025, p. 37.

12 Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street, et al., New PM says government can bring back hope to Britain, and launches drive to end rough sleeping at the earliest opportunity, July 2026. Accessed: gov.uk/government/news/new-pm-says-government-can-bring-back-hope-to-britain-and-launches-drive-to-end-rough-sleeping-at-the-earliest-opportunity.

13 See Table 4, p. 28.

Scale up returns and reconnection services for non-UK nationals sleeping rough

The government should restore control over non-UK national rough sleeping by both enforcing immigration law, and by meeting its legal obligations to those owed support. Our plan draws on a pilot in the Netherlands, where municipalities have successfully supported migrants sleeping rough back into work or helped them return to their country of origin.

We propose the government tackle non-UK national rough sleeping and enforce immigration law by:

1. Resolving the immigration status of non-UK nationals sleeping rough by setting a new legal duty on local authorities and frontline homelessness services to work with the Home Office.
2. Enforcing immigration law by ensuring every frontline homelessness service has a working relationship and dedicated point of contact within the Home Office's Voluntary Returns Service.
3. Setting a preferential option for voluntary return by introducing a new priority outcome metric for local government on reconnecting non-UK nationals sleeping rough to their home countries.

Prevent long-term rough sleeping

To end long-term rough sleeping for good, the government must prevent it more effectively. Two of the most significant barriers to meeting that ambition are an addiction crisis on the streets and the impact of the government's own sentencing reforms. This report sets out how addiction and failures within the criminal justice system are contributing to rising rough sleeping, issues the CSJ will continue to examine over the coming year.

Rough sleeping data review

Rough sleeping is a specific type of homelessness where someone is bedded down in the open air, in buildings, or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, sheds, and stations). Rough sleeping is the most dangerous and visible form of homelessness, and in 2025, it hit a record high in England.[14]

In this report we analyse the latest data from England, which covers the period from July to September 2026. This data is taken from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's (MHCLG's) Rough Sleeping Data Framework (RSDF) which is derived from monthly management information provided by local authorities.[15] While less robust than the annual Rough Sleeping Snapshot, it provides a more regular update of rough sleeping trends in England, as well as a monthly estimate.

In February 2026, we analysed the Rough Sleeping Snapshot, published annually by MHCLG on people seen sleeping rough in England. Please see that report for the latest yearly analysis on rough sleeping in England.[16]

1.1 Total number of people sleeping rough

1.1.1 Monthly and single night totals

In September 2026, the number of people seen sleeping rough was 9,369, a new record high for this time of year.[17] This is an increase of one per cent from the year before and 77 per cent compared to September 2021.[18]

In addition to monthly totals, the number of people sleeping rough on a single night was also at a record high for this time of year, hitting 4,156 people, an increase of three per cent from September 2025, and 73 per cent from September 2021.[19]

14 MHCLG, Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2025, February 2026.
15 MHCLG, Rough sleeping data framework, July to September 2026 – release, November 2026.
16 CSJ, Rough Sleeping Tracker: A plan to restore control, order, and hope to British streets, February 2026.
17 MHCLG, Rough sleeping data framework, July to September 2026 – release, November 2026.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.

Figure 1: The number of people sleeping rough over the month and on a single night

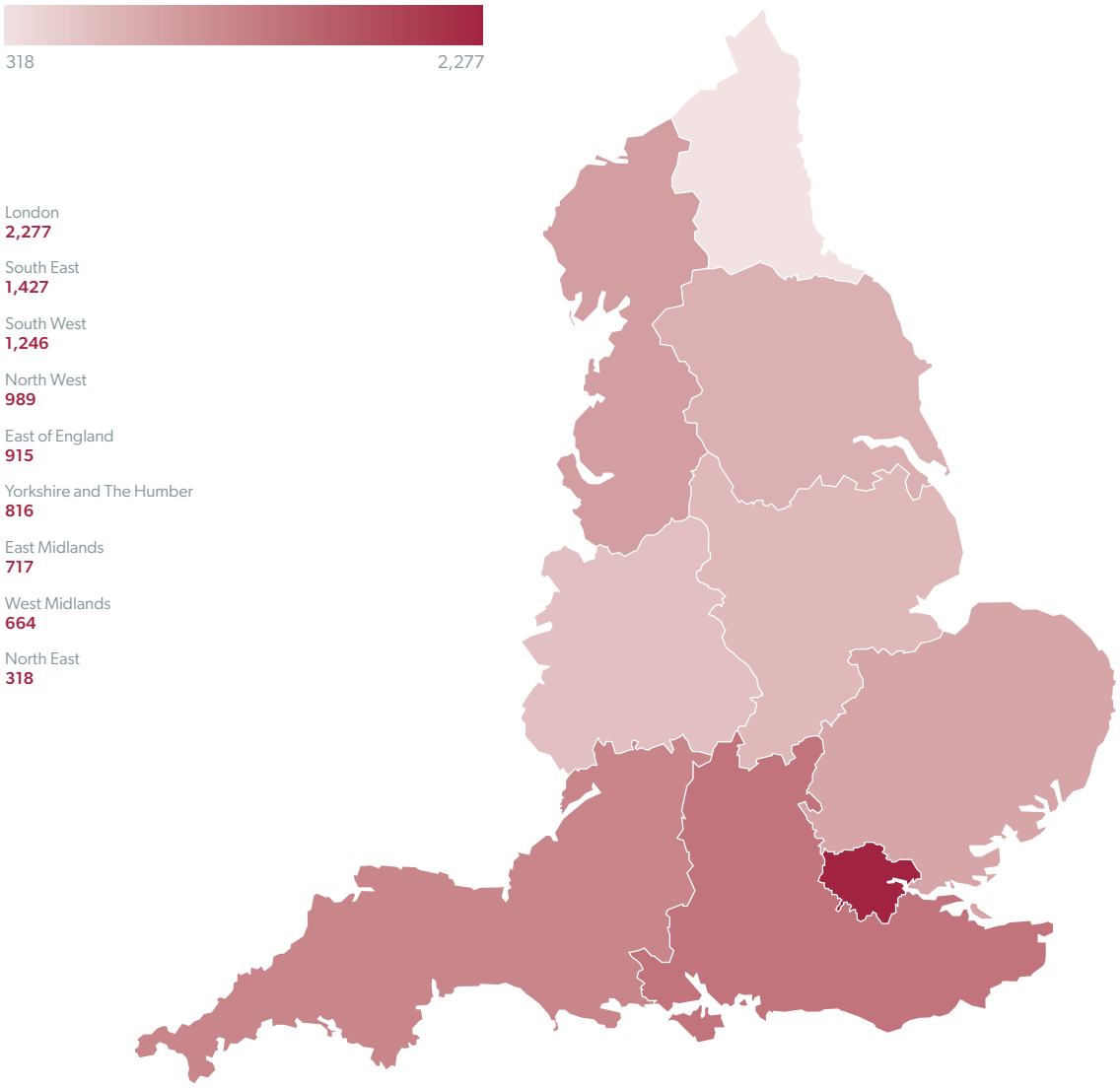


Source: CSJ analysis. MHCLG, Rough sleeping data framework, July to September 2026 – release, November 2026.

24 per cent of all people seen sleeping rough over September 2026 were in London.[20] Compared to the year before, rough sleeping increased in every region of England apart from the South East, North West, East Midlands, and the West Midlands.[21] The region with the largest increase in the number of people sleeping rough in September 2026 compared to the year before was the South West, with an 11 per cent increase.[22]

20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.

Figure 2: The number of people sleeping rough over the course of September 2026, by region



Source: CSJ analysis. MHCLG, Rough sleeping data framework, July to September 2026 – release, November 2026.

The local authority with the highest number of people sleeping rough over the course of September 2026 was Westminster (536 people).[23]

23 Ibid.

Table 1: Local authorities with the highest number of people sleeping rough over the course of September 2026

Rank	Local authority	Number of people sleeping rough over the course of September 2026
1	Westminster	536
2	Bristol, City of	237
2	Camden	237
3	Leeds	179
4	Manchester	177
5	Somerset	171
6	Brighton and Hove	129
7	Liverpool	128
8	Sheffield	127
9	City of London	120

Source: CSJ analysis. MHCLG, Rough sleeping data framework, July to September 2026 – release, November 2026.

1.1.2 Types of rough sleeping

The RSDF breaks down the population sleeping rough by type. This includes whether a person is new to rough sleeping, sleeping rough long-term, returning to rough sleeping, or sleeping rough after leaving an institution. This typology helps us to understand the profile of people sleeping rough and to gauge how well the homelessness system is functioning in response.

Definitions

New people sleeping rough: a person is considered new if they have not been seen sleeping rough in the local authority in the five calendar years preceding the date they were seen sleeping rough.

People sleeping rough long-term: a person is considered to have slept rough long-term if they have been seen sleeping rough in three or more months of the last 12.

People returning to sleeping rough: a person is considered to have returned to rough sleeping if they are seen sleeping rough again after no contact for two or more quarters.

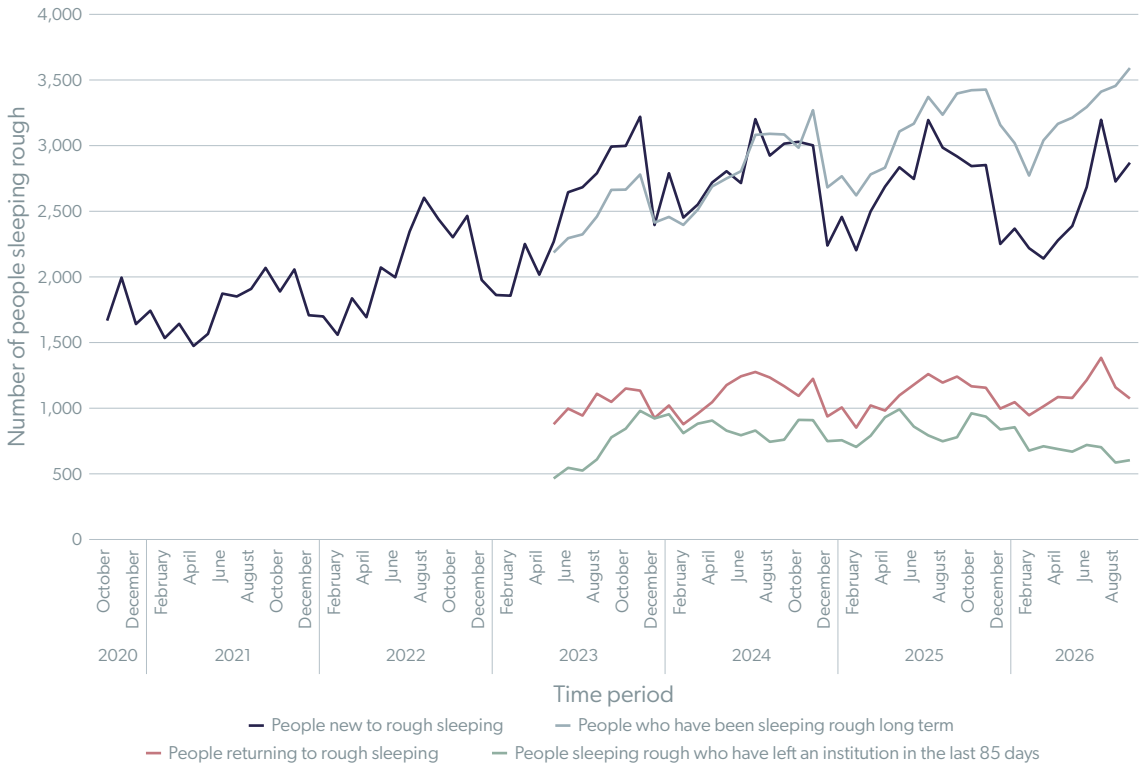
People sleeping rough who have left an institution: a person is counted as having left an institution if they report being discharged from prison, justice accommodation, general and psychiatric hospitals, the UK Armed Forces, the care system, or asylum accommodation in the last 85 days.

For full definitions and disclaimers on potential overlaps in groups please see: MHCLG, Rough sleeping data framework, July to September 2026 – release, November 2026.

In recent years, new rough sleepers have constituted a declining proportion of the total number, while long-term rough sleepers are now the largest group as a proportion of the total.[24] In September 2023, new rough sleepers outnumbered long-term rough sleepers by 330, whereas in September 2026, long-term rough sleepers outnumbered new rough sleepers by 721.[25]

As a proportion of the total number of people seen sleeping rough in September 2026, 31 per cent were new, 38 per cent were long-term, 11 per cent were returners, and six per cent had left an institution.[26] This trend reveals a growing concentration of long-term rough sleepers on England's streets.

Figure 3: The number of people sleeping rough over the course of the month, by type



Source: CSJ analysis. MHCLG, Rough sleeping data framework, July to September 2026 – release, November 2026.

Figure 3 shows:

- A six per cent increase in the number of people sleeping rough long-term over the course of the month in September 2026 compared to the same period a year before, and a 35 per cent increase since 2023.
- A two per cent decrease in the number of people sleeping rough over the course of the month who are new to rough sleeping in September 2026 compared to the same period a year before, and a 39 per cent increase since 2021.

24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.

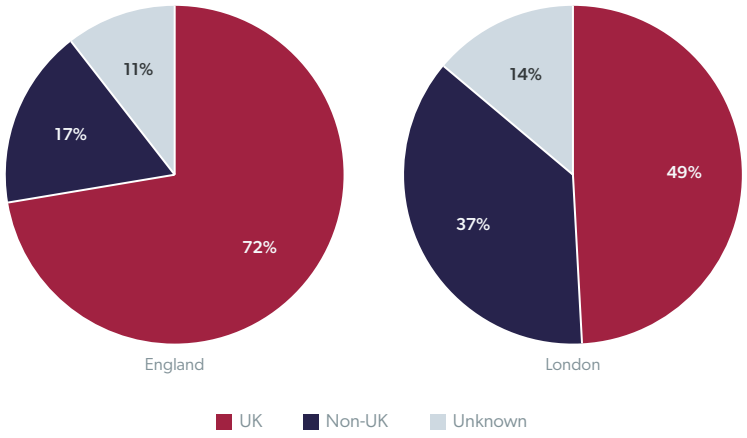
- A 13 per cent decrease in the number of people returning to rough sleeping over the course of the month in September 2026 compared to the same period a year before, and a two per cent increase since 2023.
- A 22 per cent decrease in the number of people sleeping rough who have left an institution in September 2026 compared to the same period a year before, and a 22 per cent decrease since 2023.

1.2 Demographics of people sleeping rough

1.2.1 Nationality and immigration status

Non-UK nationals make up a significant and disproportionate share of the total number of people seen sleeping rough in England. While in England and Wales, the foreign national share of the population was estimated to be 13.5 per cent in 2025,[27] 17 per cent of people seen sleeping rough in England in September 2026 were non-UK nationals, while 11 per cent were of an unknown nationality.[28] Non-UK national rough sleeping is particularly prevalent in London, where 37 per cent of people seen sleeping rough in September 2026 were non-UK nationals.[29]

Figure 4: The proportion of UK, non-UK, and unknown nationalities as a percentage of the total number of people seen sleeping rough over the course of September 2026



Source: CSJ analysis. MHCLG, Rough sleeping data framework, July to September 2026 – release, November 2026.

While non-UK nationals are overrepresented in rough sleeping statistics relative to their share of the population, there has been a decline in the number sleeping rough in September 2026 compared to the same time a year before. The number of EEA (European Economic Area) nationals fell by 132, while the number of non-EEA nationals fell by 137.[30] Despite this, the number of rough sleepers with an unknown nationality increased by 172.[31] While some counted within this latter group could be UK nationals, it is likely that many in the unknown group hold non-UK nationalities. For example, in their own collection of

27 The Migration Observatory, How many foreign nationals live in England and Wales?, August 2026. Accessed: migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/commentaries/how-many-foreign-nationals-live-in-england-and-wales.

28 MHCLG, Rough sleeping data framework, July to September 2026 – release, November 2026.

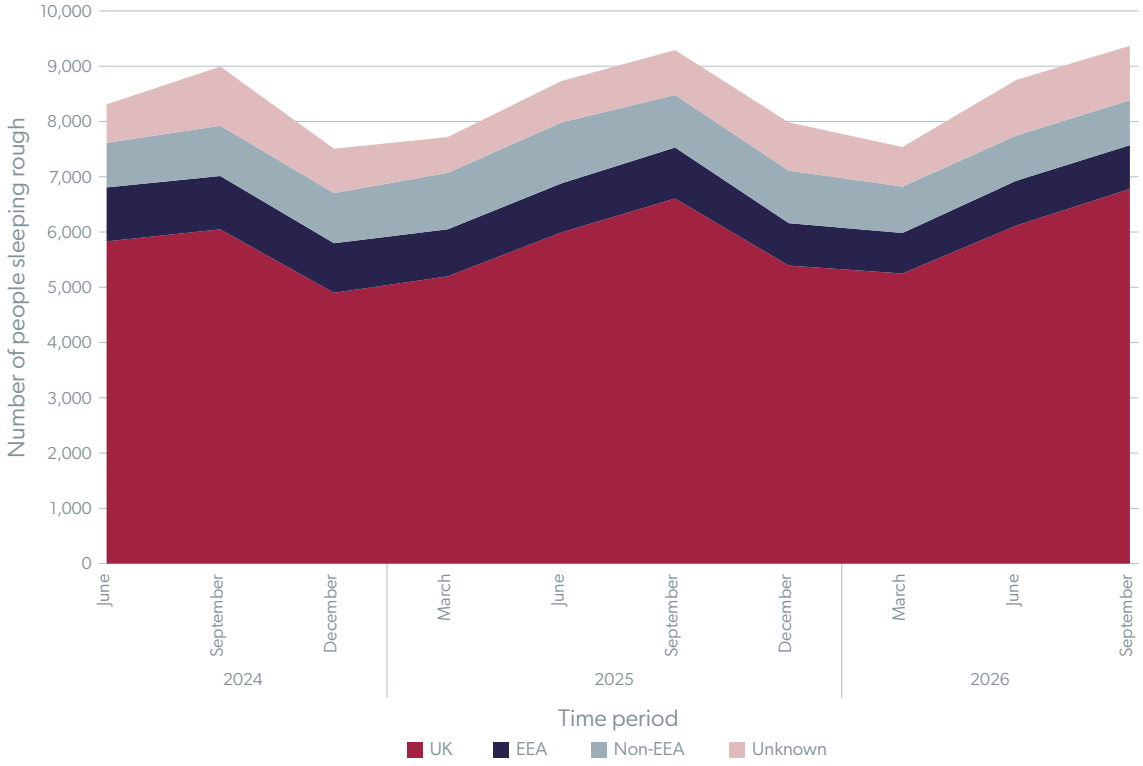
29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

rough sleeping data, the Greater London Authority has stated that non-UK nationals tend to be more likely than UK nationals to be recorded as having an unknown nationality.[32]

Figure 5: The number of people sleeping rough over the course of the month, by nationality



Source: CSJ analysis. MHCLG, Rough sleeping data framework, July to September 2026 – release, November 2026.

Using longer-term data from the Rough Sleeping Snapshot, Figure 6 shows the change in rough sleeping by nationality, indexed to 2017, which until 2025 was the record high for rough sleeping. The index shows how the composition of nationality has changed between the two high points. While the number of non-EU nationals sleeping rough has increased substantially, alongside the number of people whose nationality is not known, the number of UK and EU nationals sleeping rough has actually declined.[33] This means that the rise in non-EU and not known nationals sleeping rough more than accounts for the entire increase in rough sleeping between 2017 and 2025.

32 Greater London Authority (GLA), CHAIN Annual Report: Greater London April 2025 – March 2026, June 2026, p. 36.

33 EU vs EEA: The Rough Sleeping Snapshot uses EU/non-EU, while the Rough Sleeping Data Framework uses EEA/non-EEA.

Figure 6: Index of rough sleeping by nationality (2017 = 100)



Source: CSJ analysis. MHCLG, Rough sleeping snapshot in England, autumn 2025, February 2026.

The RSDF also provides data on the immigration status of non-UK national rough sleepers, in particular if they are eligible for public funds. In September 2026, 35 per cent of non-UK nationals had restricted or NRPF status, while 17 per cent had unknown eligibility.[34] This data is important for understanding how many non-UK nationals sleeping rough are able to access statutory homelessness support, rather than rely on discretionary shelters funded through non-statutory pathways. While some argue that conditions limiting access to public funds should be waived, we do not believe this is a fair, sustainable, or popular policy to tackle rough sleeping. Instead, we argue below that the government should scale up reconnection services to give non-UK nationals sleeping rough a dignified route to voluntarily return home.

1.2.2 Institution leavers

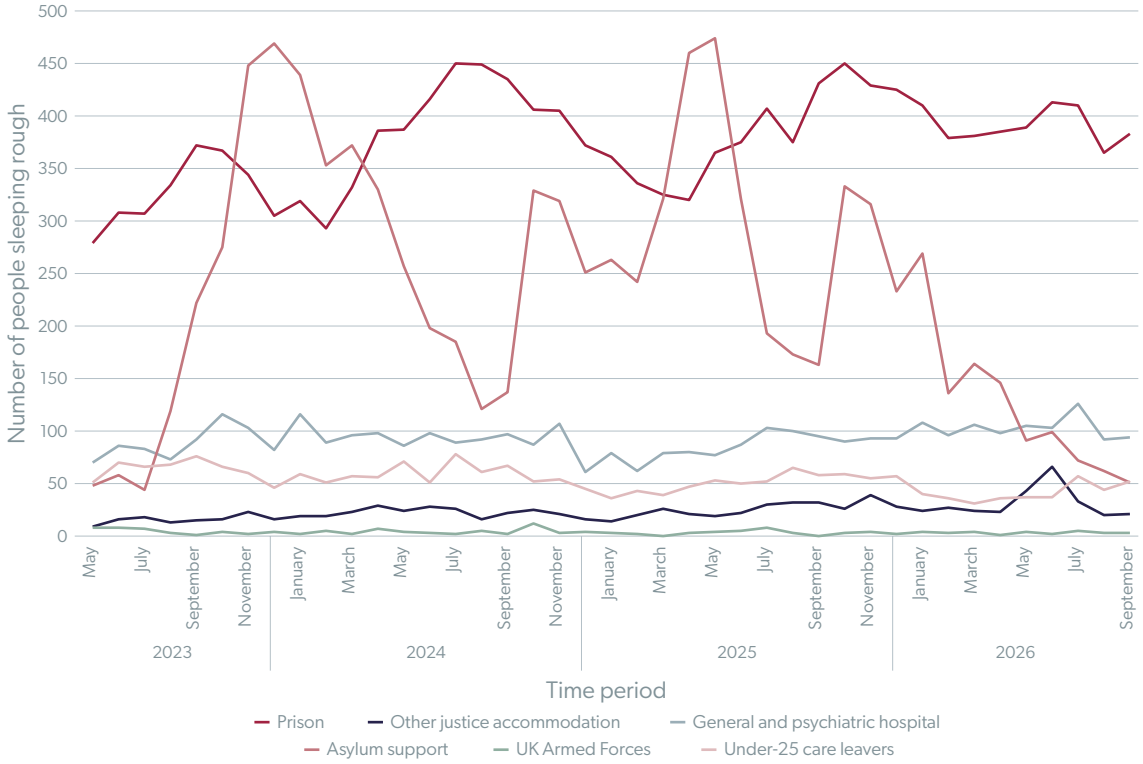
The RSDF provides data on the number of people sleeping rough after leaving an institution in the last 85 days. In September 2026, 604 people were estimated to have slept rough after leaving an institution, with 63 per cent of this group being prison leavers.[35] The number of people sleeping rough after leaving prison has fallen by 11 per cent in September 2026 compared to the same period a year before but remains three per cent greater than in 2023.[36]

Following prison leavers, the next largest group seen sleeping rough over September 2026 as a proportion of the total leaving an institution were hospital leavers (16 per cent), followed by care

34 MHCLG, Rough sleeping data framework, July to September 2026 – release, November 2026.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.

leavers (nine per cent), people leaving asylum support accommodation (eight per cent), other justice accommodation (three per cent), and then the UK Armed Forces (0.5 per cent).[37]

Figure 7: The number of people sleeping rough over the course of the month, by institution



Source: CSJ analysis. MHCLG, Rough sleeping data framework, July to September 2026 – release, November 2026.

1.2.3 Age and sex

There were 337 people under the age of 25 sleeping rough over the course of September 2026, 70 fewer than the same period a year before.[38] 52 people in this age category were care leavers, 15 per cent of the total under-25 cohort seen sleeping rough in September 2026.[39]

The vast majority of people seen sleeping rough over the course of September 2026 were men (78 per cent), although the proportion of women has increased from 18 per cent in September 2025 to 19 per cent in 2026.[40] MHCLG states that the sleeping patterns of women experiencing rough sleeping are more hidden, transient, and intermittent, and therefore may not be fully captured by the data.[41]

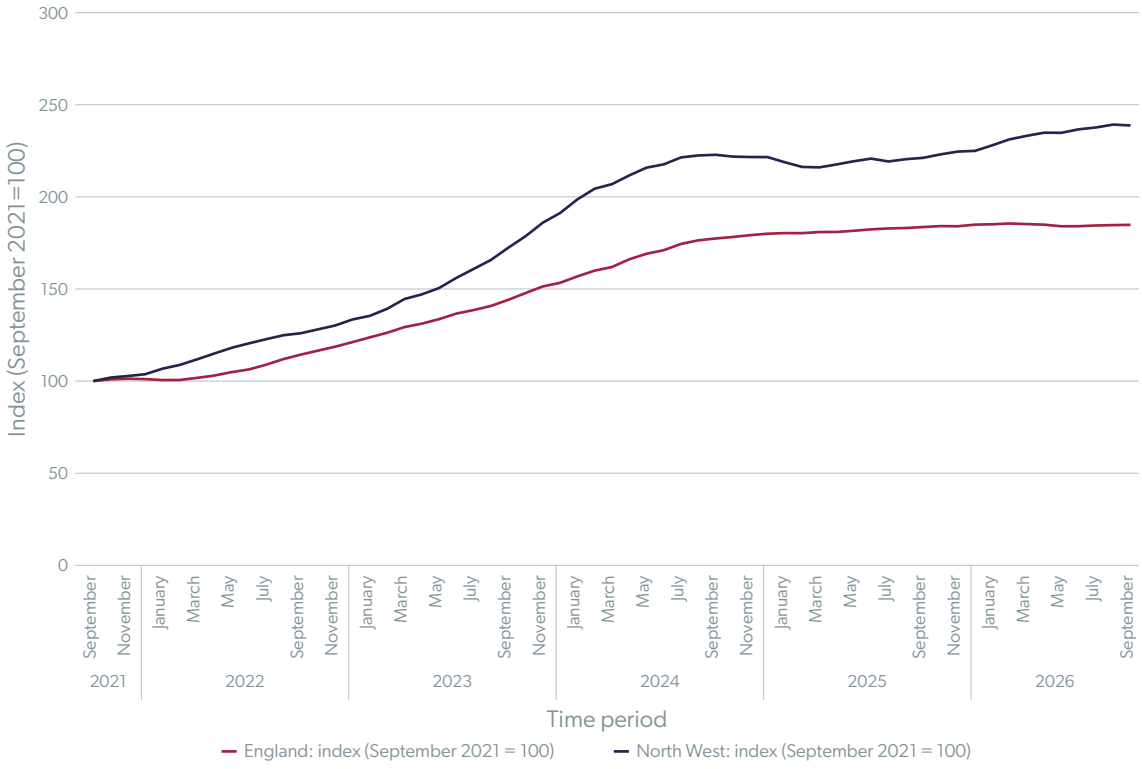
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.

1.3 Regional deep dive: the North West

The North West of England faces significant and entrenched challenges with rough sleeping, despite having piloted one of the most effective interventions to end homelessness: Housing First. One reason for this is the effect of national drivers of rough sleeping. For example, the region accounts for two fifths of rough sleepers in England who have recently left asylum accommodation.[42]

These distinct regional challenges have caused overall numbers of people sleeping rough in the North West to surge over the last five years. The average monthly number of people sleeping rough in the North West in the year to September 2026 was 139 per cent higher than in the year to September 2021, compared with 85 per cent across England.

Figure 8: 12-month rolling average of people sleeping rough over the month in England and the North West, indexed (September 2021 = 100)

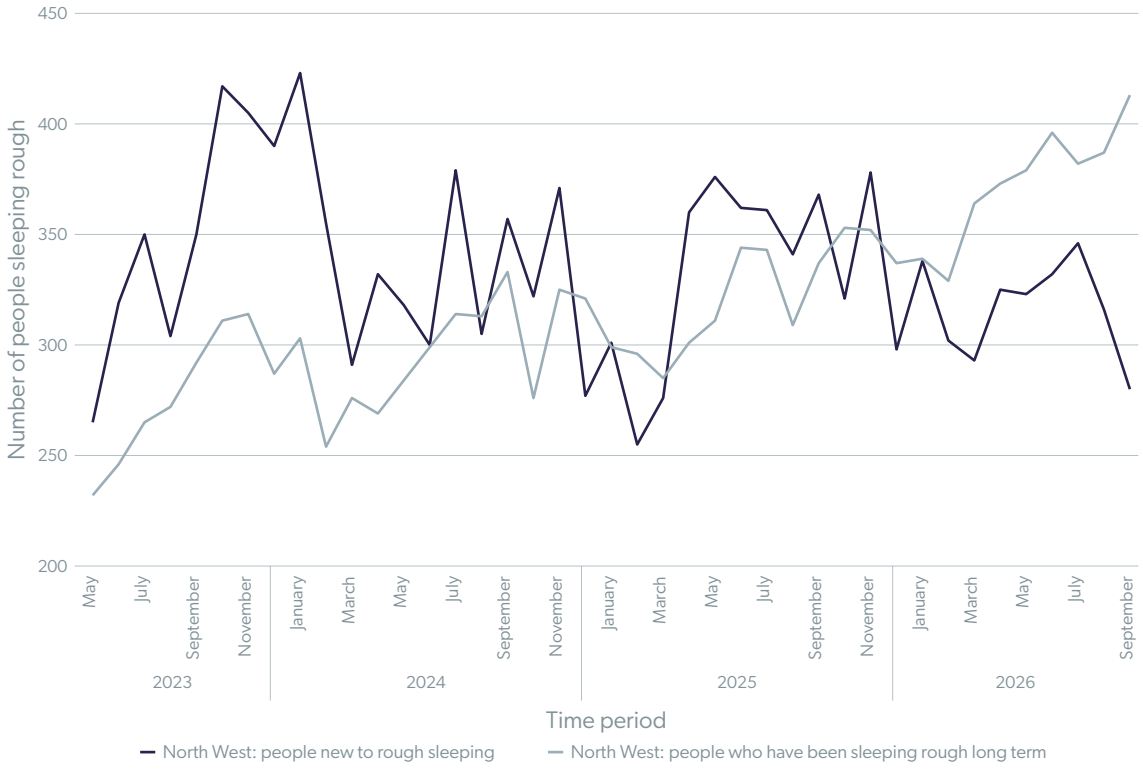


Source: CSJ analysis. MHCLG, Rough sleeping data framework, July to September 2026 – release, November 2026.

The swelling of rough sleeping in the North West reflects a growing number of long-term rough sleepers, an increase that has outpaced England as a whole. From September 2025 to 2026, the number of people sleeping rough long-term increased by 23 per cent, compared to six per cent across England as a whole.[43]

42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.

Figure 9: The number of people sleeping rough (new and long-term) over the month in the North West



Source: CSJ analysis. MHCLG, Rough sleeping data framework, July to September 2026 – release, November 2026.

A disproportionate increase in rough sleeping in the North West has been driven by institution leavers, particularly from prison and asylum accommodation. The region accounts for 18 per cent of all people sleeping rough after leaving an institution in the last 85 days across England as a whole, despite representing just 11 per cent of all people seen sleeping rough nationally.[44]

Leaving asylum accommodation is a significant driver of rough sleeping in the region. On average, the North West accounted for 40 per cent of all asylum leavers sleeping rough in England across July, August, and September 2026.[45] London had the next highest share, accounting for an average of 28 per cent of all asylum leavers sleeping rough in England over the three-month period. This broadly reflects the general distribution of asylum accommodation across England, with the North West hosting the largest share of asylum accommodation as of December 2025 (20 per cent), followed by London (15 per cent).[46]

Prison leavers have also contributed to a rise in rough sleeping in the North West. In the year to September 2026, the number of people sleeping rough after leaving prison increased by 10 per cent in the North West, compared to falling by 11 per cent across England as a whole.[47]

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 The Migration Observatory, Asylum accommodation in the UK, May 2026. Accessed: migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/asylum-accommodation-in-the-uk.

47 MHCLG, Rough sleeping data framework, July to September 2026 – release, November 2026.

Table 2: Institution leavers as a share of everyone sleeping rough, average of July to September 2026

Left in the last 85 days	North West (%)	England (%)	NW share of England's total (%)
Any institution	10.9	6.7	18
Asylum support	2.4	0.7	40
Prison	6.4	4.1	17
Hospital	1.2	1.1	12
Other justice accommodation	0.4	0.3	18
Under-25 care leavers	0.4	0.5	8
Armed forces	0.1	0.0	18

Source: CSJ analysis. MHCLG, Rough sleeping data framework, July to September 2026 – release, November 2026.

The North West's difficulties are symptomatic of national issues, particularly rough sleeping following move-on from asylum accommodation and prison. These issues show the need for further policy efforts to stop the flow from institutions onto the street, as well as the scaling-up of interventions to tackle the most complex forms of long-term street homelessness.

The region is home to local initiatives which are developing solutions to these regional and national problems. These include its Housing First programmes, where 84 per cent of service users retained long-term housing after three years,[48] and frontline charities that are developing innovative responses to prevent rough sleeping among prison leavers. We turn to these in our plan for reform.

48 MHCLG, Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots: Final synthesis report, October 2024, p. 31.

The government's plan to end rough sleeping

In July 2026, Andy Burnham formed a new government, and on the steps of 10 Downing Street announced that his first action in government would be to "end long-term rough sleeping across the UK at the earliest opportunity."[49] This was followed by an additional investment of £442 million over three years with the headline ambition of giving everyone a route off the streets by Christmas 2026.[50]

In September 2026, the PM's ambition was formalised through the introduction of a new Rough Sleeping Programme.[51] The Programme is the means by which MHCLG is funding mayoral strategic authorities and local authorities to provide an immediate route off the street for all people experiencing rough sleeping before Christmas 2026. It is then designed to continue this support beyond Christmas, with long-term settled accommodation and intensive support. In particular, the Programme provides for:

a. A 'route off the streets', to ensure every area can make an offer of support or accommodation before Christmas 2026, as well as longer-term support to quickly provide accommodation and routes into permanent housing for people experiencing rough sleeping.

b. Settled accommodation with intensive wraparound support, to fund the delivery of settled homes and intensive support for those rough sleepers who have experienced long-term homelessness and have complex needs like addiction and mental ill-health.

In October 2026, the government announced a further £432 million in the Budget to extend the Rough Sleeping Programme up to 2028/29.[52] On 26th October 2026, the Secretary of State, Angela Rayner, confirmed that this new money would sit alongside the initial upfront investment, taking new committed spending to £874 million since Andy Burnham was appointed PM.[53] This is a significant additional investment into rough sleeping services and builds upon £2 billion over three years to prevent and address homelessness and rough sleeping within the Homelessness, Rough Sleeping, and Domestic Abuse Grant announced in the 2025 homelessness strategy, *A National Plan to End Homelessness*.[54]

Prior to the Burnham premiership, *A National Plan to End Homelessness* set a government target to halve long-term rough sleeping by the end of the Parliament.[55] The strategy also marked a shift towards prevention and addressing wider forms of homelessness, like families in temporary accommodation, rather than rough sleeping.

49 Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street, et al., New PM says government can bring back hope to Britain, and launches drive to end rough sleeping at the earliest opportunity, July 2026. Accessed: gov.uk/government/news/new-pm-says-government-can-bring-back-hope-to-britain-and-launches-drive-to-end-rough-sleeping-at-the-earliest-opportunity.

50 MHCLG, Prime Minister launches national drive to get everyone in for Christmas, August 2026. Accessed: gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-launches-national-drive-to-get-everyone-in-for-christmas.

51 MHCLG, Rough Sleeping Programme Guidance, September 2026.

52 HM Treasury, Budget 2026: Breathing space for today fresh hope for the future, October 2026, p. 91.

53 House of Commons, Rough Sleeping Update: Statement made on 26 October 2026 (UIN HCWS419), October 2026.

54 MHCLG, A National Plan to End Homelessness, December 2025, p. 50.

55 Ibid, p. 67.

The 2025 strategy's commitment to halve long-term rough sleeping was both under-ambitious and under-resourced. There was little explanation of how the government would meet its pledge, and the strategy included no commitment to scale up the most proven intervention to tackle long-term rough sleeping, which is Housing First.

The new Rough Sleeping Programme has both raised the ambition and provided the resources to match. It is now critical that taxpayers' money is used responsibly and is invested in the interventions which are most likely to end long-term rough sleeping.

While the Programme's guidance states that additional settled homes and support for people experiencing long-term rough sleeping should be based on Housing First principles, it retains a longstanding departmental resistance to favouring a particular intervention. The guidance states that "local areas will have flexibility to design accommodation routes in line with need in their area."[56]

In this report, we argue that the most responsible and effective investment would be into scaling up Housing First and Housing First-informed services nationwide. This would require the government amending the Rough Sleeping Programme's guidance to set an explicit presumption in favour of Housing First.

2.1 The need for Housing First

Housing First provides ordinary settled housing alongside intensive, person-centred support for people whose homelessness is compounded by multiple and complex support needs. Housing First is different from conventional interventions as it offers permanent housing from the start, dependent on an individual's willingness to maintain a tenancy. Housing is sustained by intensive support, with staff having low caseloads of four to six service users, rather than between the usual 20 to 40.

Housing First is one of the most proven and evidenced interventions to end long-term and complex rough sleeping in the world.[57] In England, the evidence base is strong, with 84 per cent of service users across three city-region pilots in Greater Manchester, the West Midlands, and Liverpool City Region sustaining housing after three years, falling to 69 per cent of all clients, including those who left the service.[58] An evaluation of the Liverpool City Region service found that Housing First was 3.5 times more effective than conventional interventions.[59]

With impressive long-term housing outcomes, Housing First offers good value for money. In *No Place Like Home,* our cost-benefit analysis showed that for every £1 spent on Housing First, £2 was returned, including both savings to public services like the National Health Service, criminal justice system, and police, as well as enhanced personal wellbeing.[60]

56 MHCLG, Rough Sleeping Programme Guidance, September 2026.

57 Centre for Homelessness Impact, Housing First, n.d. Accessed: homelessnessimpact.org/intervention/housing-first.

58 MHCLG, Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots: Final synthesis report, October 2024, p. 31.

59 Campbell Tickell, LCRCA Housing First Pilot: Local Evaluation, April 2022, p. 9.

60 CSJ, No Place Like Home: Scaling up Housing First in England, July 2025, p. 55.

Table 3: Comparison of nominal costs and benefits of Housing First national pilots and forecasted national Housing First programme

Cost/benefit	Actual: Based on pilot data, 2018/19-2022/23		Forecast: Based on pilot data and forecast assumptions for wider rollout, 2026/27-2029/30	
	£ per person	Ratio of benefits: costs	£ per person	Ratio of benefits: costs
Cost of Housing First service	£7,036		£7,036	
Cost of Housing Benefit	£3,095		£2,184	
Cost of Housing First per client	**£10,131**		**£9,221**	
Reduced costs of public services	£7,920		£7,920	
Enhanced personal wellbeing	£6,246		£6,246	
Benefit of Housing First per client	**£14,166**		**£14,166**	
Net benefit/Cost of				
Public sector savings and enhanced personal wellbeing less cost of Housing First and housing benefit payments [all benefits and cost basis]	**£4,035**	**1:40**	**£4,945**	**1:54**
Public sector savings and enhanced personal wellbeing less Housing First spend [all benefits and cost excl. housing benefit payments]	**£7,130**	**2:01**	**£7,130**	**2:01**

Source: CSJ, No Place Like Home: Scaling up Housing First in England, July 2025, p. 55.

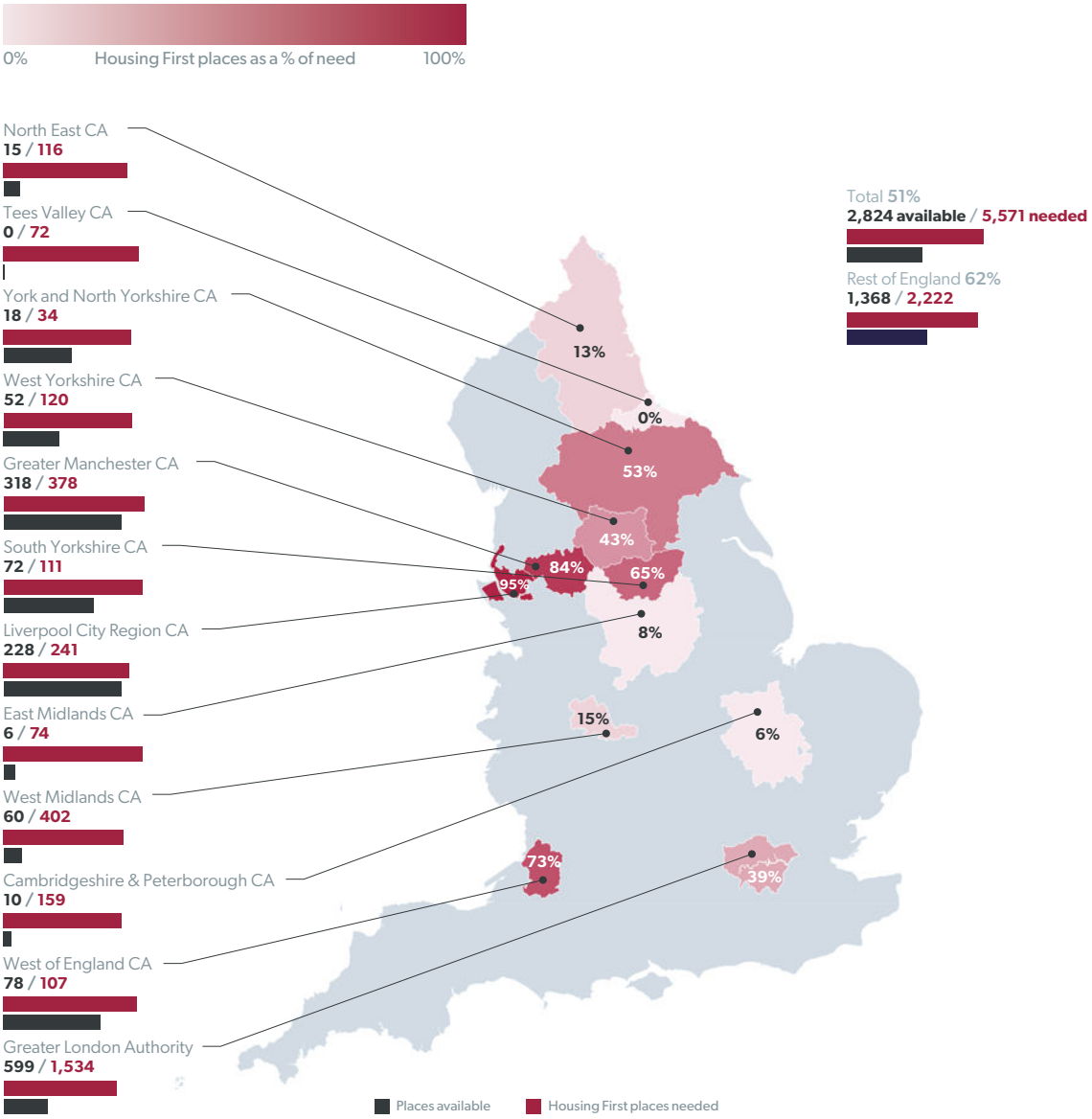
Housing First is an effective intervention, but there are not enough places available across the country. Using the provision of the national pilot programmes as a baseline for scaling up similar-sized services across the rest of England, in *No Place Like Home* we estimated that a further 2,747 places are needed.[61] If scaled up, this would take total Housing First provision to around 5,571 places and ensure a similar-sized programme to the national pilots exists in every region of the country.[62] The 'Housing First gap', between places available and those required, broadly reflects the government's commitment to provide intensive support for at least 3,000 people.[63]

61 Ibid, p. 51.

62 Ibid, p. 51.

63 MHCLG, Ending rough sleeping: What the government's new plan means for people sleeping on our streets, July 2026. Accessed: mhclgmedia.blog.gov.uk/2026/07/22/%F0%9F%8F%A0-ending-rough-sleeping-what-the-governments-new-plan-means-for-people-sleeping-on-our-streets.

Figure 10: Regional distribution of Housing First



Source: CSJ, No Place Like Home: Scaling up Housing First in England, July 2025, p. 51.

Housing First is an unconventional intervention, which is why local areas have not scaled it up sufficiently. It turns conventional support services on their head, providing long-term housing upfront, rather than asking individuals to meet certain conditions to prove their housing-readiness.

Access to long-term housing for complex service users, intensive resourcing for support, and the open-ended and permanent nature of the service mean it is considered a riskier intervention for local authorities to commission.

This is why in countries where Housing First has been scaled up successfully, central governments have taken responsibility for providing a degree of national stewardship and clear expectations for local areas.[64] Without such a commitment from national government, Housing First will be unlikely to scale up

64 See Finland case study in CSJ, No Place Like Home: Scaling up Housing First in England, July 2025, p. 31.

organically in England. For example, a survey of accommodation providers by the homelessness sector membership body, Homeless Link, found that in 2025, Housing First was the service least likely to be offered by providers, with only 20 per cent of respondents saying they offered a type of Housing First provision.[65]

The government has taken a welcome step forward towards scaling up intensive support for people experiencing long-term and complex rough sleeping through its Rough Sleeping Programme and has made a commitment to doing so in line with Housing First principles. However, it retains a conventional caution characteristic of MHCLG by refusing to back Housing First explicitly.

It is our view that the government should set an expectation that all accommodation and support services provided under the settled accommodation component of the Rough Sleeping Programme be explicitly Housing First or Housing First-informed provision, while retaining local control and agency over the type of accommodation and support, be that scattered site or congregate accommodation within the broad Housing First principles. We set this out in our plan for reform below.

65 Homeless Link, Support to End Homelessness 2025, June 2026, p. 47.

The CSJ's plan for reform

In this report we set out our plan for reform of the homelessness system, to build on the Rough Sleeping Programme, and ensure that the government meets its ambition to end long-term rough sleeping. This plan draws upon our *No Place Like Home* report, which sets out how the government can scale up Housing First services in England, tackle non-UK national rough sleeping, and better prevent long-term rough sleeping.

3.1 Scale up Housing First to end long-term rough sleeping

The Rough Sleeping Programme marks a significant change in the government's policy on tackling long-term rough sleeping. An emphasis on settled housing and intensive support broadly mirrors the foundational principles of Housing First, which the Programme explicitly says it is building on.[66]

This is a welcome change, as the evidence base on long-term rough sleeping suggests that for many in this cohort, conventional interventions and stepping-stone accommodation are not sufficient to end persistent rough sleeping.[67] However, in other ways the Programme is similar to the previous government's strategy, by failing to set any expectation on local areas to scale up Housing First provision. Instead, it opts for local flexibility, allowing areas to invest in the interventions they want to.[68]

The decision to give local areas flexibility would be understandable if funding were not tied to a particular cohort, since areas could then decide how best to fund a range of accommodation and support options for people sleeping rough with differing needs. However, the Programme explicitly commits areas to providing housing options for people experiencing long-term rough sleeping, which makes the degree of flexibility within the settled accommodation component surprising.

For example, floating support is listed as a potentially appropriate service for people sleeping rough long-term, even though it is traditionally less intensive than Housing First.[69] Evidence shared with the CSJ by frontline charities suggests that low-level support for people with high needs can actually do more harm than good. One example shared was that of an individual with a severe substance misuse problem who was placed in their own home without the appropriate support, and who then overdosed as a result.[70] The academic evidence reflects this: one systematic review found that low-intensity interventions without conditions can risk harm.[71] Accordingly, it is extremely important that within the settled accommodation component, the government funds interventions that appropriately reflect the level of client need.

66 MHCLG, Rough Sleeping Programme Guidance, September 2026.

67 CSJ, No Place Like Home: Scaling up Housing First in England, July 2025, pp. 28–30.

68 MHCLG, Rough Sleeping Programme Guidance, September 2026.

69 Ibid.

70 CSJ, No Place Like Home: Scaling up Housing First in England, July 2025, p. 34.

71 Keenan, C., et al., "Accommodation-based interventions for individuals experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homelessness," Campbell Systematic Reviews, 17:2 (June 2021), e1165.

To ensure that people experiencing long-term rough sleeping are given the best possible chance to recover from complex homelessness, we recommend that the government amend the Programme's guidance by setting an explicit presumption that all accommodation and support provided under the settled accommodation component are Housing First or Housing First-informed. This would also provide better value for money for the taxpayer, as Housing First has a 2:1 benefit-cost ratio.[72]

Delivering 3,000 Housing First places within the Rough Sleeping Programme would guarantee a baseline level of support and settled housing that is appropriate for people with complex needs and experiences of long-term rough sleeping. It is also possible to retain a level of local flexibility, with the type of Housing First or Housing First-informed provision decided by strategic and local authorities.

For example, a local area might choose to invest in a scattered site Housing First model, similar to the national pilot services run in the Liverpool City Region and Greater Manchester. Or an area might choose to invest in a congregate Housing First model, more similar to the Finnish approach, where support is provided on site. The capital element of the Rough Sleeping Programme may lend itself to congregate Housing First schemes by funding the delivery of several units on one site.

Your Place, based in east London, has developed a successful congregate Housing First model which first opened its doors in May 2025.

Case study: the Harbour Project, Newham

Your Place is a homelessness charity based in the London Borough of Newham. In May 2025, it welcomed its first residents to The Harbour Project, a congregate Housing First service in Canning Town.

The project emerged from collaboration with the GLA and London Councils who identified gaps in London's accommodation provision for people with complex needs and long histories of homelessness. The research found that a significant group of people were unable to move on successfully from hostel accommodation, and who were also at risk of isolation in independent housing.

In response, Your Place repurposed an existing accommodation block into 23 self-contained flats with shared communal space and 24/7 on-site support. The service is for people who have previously slept rough and have spent at least a year in the hostel system, and require long-term housing, support and stability. It is one of very few congregate Housing First services in England, and it received more than 100 referrals for its first tenancies.

The results of the first 18 months have been impressive. 100 per cent of residents have sustained their tenancy, and two have entered paid employment. Every resident has engaged in meaningful activities, including health, social, volunteering, training, and employment-related activities.

Resident feedback has also been overwhelmingly positive. Surveys found that 100 per cent of respondents were satisfied with the service, 100 per cent reported feeling safe in their home and 100 per cent agreed they were treated fairly and with respect. Residents consistently describe it as a place where they feel secure, supported and connected:

"There are people here to support me, and I've made friends. I'm not isolated."

72 MHCLG, Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots: Cost Benefit Analysis – Final Report, October 2024, p. 45.

"From the moment I walked in, I've only experienced kindness. Now I feel hope."

Your Place attributes this to the combination of stable housing with community, connection and choice. Both the building and day-to-day life are built around social interaction and communal activities, including shared meals, volunteering, and education and employment classes. Taking part is voluntary, and residents lead many of the activities themselves.

Although tenancies are long-term and residents are under no obligation to move on, Your Place has developed a dedicated move-on service for those who choose to. It guarantees nine months of support from a tenancy sustainment support worker, and every resident who has moved on from Your Place's other services has sustained their new accommodation.

The project was even highlighted in the government's homelessness strategy as an example of best practice.

CEO Amanda Dubarry highlights three elements for the success of similar services:

- Funding and partnerships aligned to long-term outcomes, not throughput.
- Intentional community-building, with structured activities and peer support.
- Housing design that balances independence with shared space.

The Harbour Project's success reinforces international evidence which suggests that congregate Housing First models can be associated with wider benefits than just housing sustainment. For example, a 2017 study found that only congregate Housing First was associated with significant improvements concerning severe disability, mental health, community integration and recovery.[73]

Delivering an additional 3,000 Housing First places within the new Rough Sleeping Programme would take provision across England to comparable levels to the national pilot city-regions. We estimate that this would cost £27.4 million in ongoing revenue costs from 2028/29 onwards, adjusted for forecasted price changes in 2028/29. Assuming Housing First expands at a similar rate to the national pilots,[74] we estimate that Housing First costs would equate to 10 per cent of the total Programme revenue funding in year one, 36 per cent in year two, and 40 per cent in year three.

73 Somers, J. M., et-al., "A Randomized Trial Examining Housing First in Congregate and Scattered Site Formats", PLoS One, 12:1 (January 2017), e0168745.

74 The national pilots delivered 46 per cent of peak capacity in the first full year of delivery (year two of the overall pilot), 89 per cent in year three, and reached peak delivery in year four before falling in year five. Please see CSJ, No Place Like Home: Scaling up Housing First in England, July 2025, p. 53 for more details. We assume a Housing First expansion within the Rough Sleeping Programme delivers 46 per cent of total new places in year one.

Table 4: Forecasted costs for delivering 3,000 Housing First places through the Rough Sleeping Programme

	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
Places delivered per year of programme	1,380	2,670	3,000
Cost per person (nominal, £7,036 in 2020/21 prices uplifted)	£8,773	£8,959	£9,134
Total cost	£12,106,746	£23,920,326	£27,403,475
Total Rough Sleeping Programme revenue funding	£120,869,612	£66,534,982	£68,175,406
Proportion of yearly revenue funding (RSP)	10%	36%	40%

Source: CSJ analysis of underlying data in Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots: Cost Benefit Analysis – Final Report, October 2024; HM Treasury, GDP deflators at market prices, and money GDP October 2026. Average per person spend in 2020/21 prices adjusted to 2026/27 prices, cost per person in 2026/27 prices adjusted to reflect forecasted prices in 2027/28 and 2028/29.

RECOMMENDATION

MHCLG should amend the Rough Sleeping Programme's guidance to set an explicit presumption that all accommodation and support services delivered under the settled accommodation component be Housing First or Housing First-informed. Section 5.3 of the Programme's guidance should be amended to read: "Local areas are expected to design accommodation and support services in line with Housing First or Housing First-informed provision."

Setting an explicit presumption for Housing First or Housing First-informed provision would ensure a baseline of housing security and intensive support which reflects the principles of Housing First, as well as grant local areas sufficient flexibility to invest in different types of provision. This could include scattered site or congregate Housing First services, or Housing First-informed provision which offers abstinence-based treatment programmes to encourage service users to progress towards full recovery.

The settled accommodation component of the Rough Sleeping Programme should set a target that every relevant region or local authority area has a functioning Housing First programme by the end of the Parliament, equating to approximately 3,000 additional places by the end of rollout.

3.2 Scale up returns and reconnection services for non-UK nationals sleeping rough

Non-UK nationals sleeping rough are overrepresented in England's homelessness system and present a major challenge for the government in meeting its commitment to end long-term rough sleeping.

Without addressing the growing number of non-UK nationals sleeping rough, the government will be unable to meet its ambition to end rough sleeping. Inaction also risks provoking public discontent on immigration and asylum issues as failures within this system become more visible on the country's streets.

Many of the drivers of rough sleeping are the same for UK and non-UK nationals: for example, housing unaffordability and insecurity, addiction, and family breakdown. However, among migrants, rough sleeping is also a sign of systemic failures within the UK's immigration and asylum system that are driving homelessness.

Two features of the immigration system have contributed particularly to rough sleeping this decade. The first is the asylum system. The second is the set of post-Brexit immigration rules which brought about a major shift in the demographics of migrants to the UK, now predominantly from outside Europe with restricted or NRPF status.

Firstly, the asylum system. While the number of people sleeping rough after leaving asylum accommodation in the last 85 days has fallen, there remains a large cohort of people sleeping rough who have moved through the asylum system.[75] For example, in London in 2025/26, over 1,000 people seen sleeping rough over the course of the year reported their last previous settled base as being asylum support accommodation.[76]

Secondly, the post-Brexit immigration rules which permitted millions of new arrivals with restricted or NRPF status in the early years of the 2020s complicate the offer of support to migrants in this category who are sleeping rough. This makes extending support more difficult and ending homelessness nearly impossible without abolishing NRPF status or scaling up voluntary and enforced returns.

3.2.1 The government's approach to non-UK national rough sleeping

While the Rough Sleeping Programme uses the language of the Covid-19 'Everyone In' initiative, there is no similar waiving of NRPF conditions to extend offers of accommodation and support. Instead, the Programme is explicit in saying that nothing in the guidance "alter[s] existing legal duties, powers, or restrictions".[77] This implies that there will be no government-backed blanket offer of accommodation or support to non-UK nationals with NRPF conditions, meaning temporary shelters and non-statutory support options will be necessary to provide this group with a route off the streets.

Beyond the Rough Sleeping Programme, the 2025 homelessness strategy included a headline commitment from the Home Office to share information about refugees at risk of homelessness in advance of a discontinuation of support notification, a "homeless migrants capability training package for councils and voluntary sector organisations" and "a pilot in four council areas on access to immigration advice, short term accommodation and a named point of contact within the Home Office."[78] This pilot

75 MHCLG, Rough sleeping data framework, July to September 2026 – release, November 2026.

76 GLA, CHAIN Annual Data Tables 2025/26, June 2026.

77 MHCLG, Rough Sleeping Programme Guidance, September 2026.

78 MHCLG, A National Plan to End Homelessness, December 2025, pp. 45-46.

programme is expected to publish its final evaluation in the new year.[79] There was also a reference in the homelessness strategy to supporting "trusted and willing civil society organisations" to work with the Voluntary Returns Service, the Home Office's central support mechanism to help migrants return to their home countries.[80]

While these reforms and pilot programmes are welcome, ultimately, the strategy fell short of the comprehensive package of reforms needed to restore control over non-UK national rough sleeping. Without further action, the government risks entrenching long-term rough sleeping among non-UK nationals.

To solve this problem, some have called for an extension of statutory support to a greater number of non-UK nationals sleeping rough, and for reforms to, or even the abolition of, NRPF status. Writing in The Big Issue, a representative from the migrant advocacy charity Praxis argued that "first and foremost, the immigration policies that drive housing insecurity – like the NRPF condition, expensive visa fees and long settlement routes – need urgent reform."[81]

While taking such an approach could open up access to long-term housing and benefit income, we believe it is misguided. Leaving aside the financial cost of such a policy, or the ability of statutory services to respond to a dramatic increase in their statutory homelessness obligations, this approach would be in direct conflict with the government's policy to restore order and control to the UK's immigration system and, at worst, create a significant new pull factor for migrants and asylum seekers.

Instead, the government should resolve to scale up the use of reconnection programmes and the Voluntary Returns Service to help non-UK nationals sleeping rough make a dignified return to their country of origin.

Reconnection services are designed to work intensively with non-UK nationals to help them reconnect with family, friends, and support services in their home country, navigate complex bureaucratic hurdles to making a return (e.g. accessing a passport or the Voluntary Returns Service), and provide follow-up support once an individual has left the country.

Alongside scaling up reconnection services, the government should continue to implement in full the Home Secretary's reforms to the immigration and asylum system and the reform of perverse incentives which cause people to sleep rough. It is our view that this approach would uphold the integrity of the UK border and immigration system, protect the homelessness system from overwhelming levels of need, and support vulnerable foreign nationals sleeping rough on British streets.

3.2.2 Restoring control: the principles of a new approach to tackling non-UK national rough sleeping

To restore control, the government must be willing to enforce immigration law, as well as meet its legal obligations to non-UK nationals who are eligible for support and accommodation. We believe that such an approach is most conducive to the common good of UK society and the interests of the British taxpayer, while also adopting a proper humanitarian concern for non-UK nationals who are sleeping rough.

79 Centre for Homelessness Impact, Support for non-UK nationals, n.d. Accessed: homelessnessimpact.org/projects/support-for-non-uk-nationals.

80 MHCLG, A National Plan to End Homelessness, December 2025, pp. 45-46.

81 Big Issue, Andy Burnham won't end rough sleeping with Shabana Mahmood's brutal immigration reforms, November 2026. Accessed: bigissue.com/news/housing/shabana-mahmoods-immigration-rough-sleeping-praxis.

There are three principles that we recommend the government adopts in its response to non-UK national rough sleeping. Enforcing these principles will ensure that the system can administer support in the most effective way possible.

1. Non-UK nationals sleeping rough should be able to access emergency support and accommodation, alongside an expectation that their immigration status will be resolved.
2. Those who have had their asylum claim rejected, have overstayed their visa, or who are in the UK unlawfully should be returned to their country of origin.
3. In doing the above, the government should adopt an explicit presumption in favour of voluntary return in its policy toward non-UK nationals sleeping rough.

To implement this approach, MHCLG and the Home Office should create a cross-departmental Migrant Rough Sleeping Unit (MRSU) to coordinate the following activity across government and to support strategic and local authorities in administering accommodation and support to non-UK nationals sleeping rough.

3.2.3 Principle one: extend support to non-UK nationals sleeping rough

As a first principle, the government should ensure that non-UK nationals sleeping rough are able to access emergency accommodation and support to resolve their immigration status, so that their permission to stay in the UK is determined. Every person sleeping rough, regardless of nationality or status, should be able to access immediate safe accommodation and basic support prior to having their immigration status checked. Immigration status checks should be used to unlock further support and routes home, not to deny emergency assistance.

Some local areas across the country are developing unique accommodation approaches targeted at individuals with restricted or NRPF status. As stated above, a pilot is currently underway across four local authority areas, and in Greater Manchester the strategic authority has developed schemes like A Bed Every Night, which provides immediate shelter to those at imminent risk of rough sleeping, including those with NRPF status.[82] Accommodation services like these are critical in providing immediate shelter and support to those with no access to mainstream services or homelessness assistance.

Where accommodation services for non-UK nationals fall short is that they very rarely provide support to help a migrant reconnect and return to their country of origin. For example, Manchester City Council told the CSJ that 431 non-UK and unknown nationals were identified sleeping rough over the course of 2025/26, and while one service was commissioned which could support people with NRPF status to reconnect to their country of origin, not a single individual made a return.[83]

One reason reconnection services do not operate at scale in England is mistrust between the homelessness sector and the Home Office. For example, in the past the Mayor of London has refused to collaborate with the Home Office regarding information sharing about non-UK national rough sleepers.[84] Suspicion between frontline homelessness organisations, regional politicians, and the Home Office prevents the government from actively enforcing immigration law and creates a culture of unease around voluntary returns and reconnection services.

82 Greater Manchester Mayor's Charity, A Bed Every Night: Our Impact, n.d. Accessed: gmmayorscharity.org.uk/latest/a-bed-every-night-our-impact.

83 Freedom of Information Request made to Manchester City Council on 14th October 2026.

84 Inside Housing, London and Greater Manchester vow not to co-operate with plan to deport rough sleepers, December 2020. Accessed: insidehousing.co.uk/news/london-and-greater-manchester-vow-not-to-co-operate-with-plan-to-deport-rough-sleepers-68984.

We recommend that within accommodation services for non-UK nationals with restricted or NRPF status, one of the first interactions with a rough sleeper should be to resolve their immigration status to then triage the right support service for them, including reconnection. To operationalise this, the Home Office must be permitted to interact and engage with homelessness services across the country.

We recommend that this takes place through reforming the Homelessness Escalations Service (HES) to provide more comprehensive case management for non-UK nationals who are sleeping rough. Currently, the HES exists within the Home Office to identify non-UK nationals sleeping rough who qualify for public funds. It helps to quickly prove the immigration status of rough sleepers, ensuring services are able to distinguish between those eligible to receive support, and those who are not.[85]

The HES was identified as a positive programme in a recent systems-wide evaluation of homelessness and rough sleeping.[86] We recommend that this becomes the first point of contact for all homelessness services when they identify a non-UK national sleeping rough. The HES should be reformulated as a triage service to help present an individual with a range of options relevant to their case.

To mandate engagement with the Home Office, the government should create a new statutory duty on local authorities and frontline homelessness services to work with and share information with the Home Office in all cases of non-UK national rough sleeping. When a non-UK national sleeping rough is identified, services should be legally required to refer their case to the Home Office to obtain a clarification of immigration status.

Obtaining a clarification of immigration status will enable service providers to provide individuals with the most appropriate options for support. For those with permission to remain, this should include housing options, but also support with looking for work, accessing benefits, referrals to services for alcohol, substance misuse or mental health issues, the National Referral Mechanism for potential victims of modern slavery, as well as access to reconnection services.

3.2.4 Principle two: enforce immigration law

To restore control over non-UK national rough sleeping, the government must be able to enforce immigration law, so that those with no permission to remain in the UK, including people sleeping rough, are swiftly removed. A fundamental principle of a well-functioning immigration and asylum system is that when an individual is residing illegally, they will be removed. The Home Secretary has recognised this point in *Restoring Order and Control*: "Once a failed asylum seeker has had their claim rejected, the public reasonably expect they will be removed from the country".[87] Very rarely does this happen quickly in the UK – under half of refused asylum seekers who first applied in 2022 had been removed by 2025.[88]

In a better-functioning system, a non-UK national sleeping rough who has had their asylum claim rejected, who has overstayed their visa, or who is residing in the UK unlawfully would be returned, whether voluntarily or through enforced removal, to their country of origin or a third country. This approach is not only fair to taxpayers and essential to maintaining trust in the immigration and asylum system, but also vital to sustaining public support for efforts to end rough sleeping and homelessness.

85 Home Office, User agreement: Homelessness Escalations Service, December 2024. Accessed: gov.uk/government/publications/homelessness-escalations-service-hes/user-agreement-homelessness-escalations-service-accessible.

86 MHCLG, Systems-wide evaluation of homelessness and rough sleeping: preliminary findings, February 2025.

87 Home Office, Restoring Order and Control, November 2025, p. 18.

88 The Migration Observatory, Deportation and returns of unauthorised migrants from the UK, March 2026. Accessed: migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/returns-of-unauthorised-migrants-from-the-uk.

As shown above, and as recognised by the government, current practice falls far short of this ambition. Enforcing immigration law to restore control over non-UK national rough sleeping is therefore dependent on the success of the government's broader reforms to the immigration and asylum system.

While these reforms should make it easier for the government to return people in the UK illegally, they should also remove the perverse incentives which can cause people to sleep rough in the first place. One of these is the 20-year long residence rule whereby a non-UK national in the UK is able to regularise their status on the basis of 20 years of continued residence. This includes individuals who have spent the entirety or part of their 20-year period in the UK illegally. This pathway to settlement exists because of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and if removed, would likely face significant legal challenge, without reform of or departure from the ECHR.[89]

Engagement with frontline charities revealed that this rule can create an incentive for an individual to remain in the UK, no matter how destitute, because of the hope of one day reaching this 20-year milestone and obtaining settlement. This can lead to entrenched rough sleeping, the development of complex needs like addiction and mental illness, and a life of extreme poverty as individuals cycle on and off the streets to run down the clock on 20 years' residence.

Removing the 20-year residence rule would take away one of the foremost routes to settlement in the UK for those in the country illegally. This means that appropriate support and returns pathways should be scaled up concurrently. Return hubs within third countries should be in scope for when an individual cannot be returned to their country of origin, as set out in *Restoring Order and Control*.[90]

In addition to removing perverse incentives, the Home Office should strengthen the HES to hold a clear paper trail on individual cases. For example, when the HES finds that an individual has no permission to remain in the UK, the Home Office should issue that person, alongside any support services working with them, a clear resolution plan for their case (for example, appeals routes and options for voluntary return). This approach supports the government's ambition to accelerate removals, while also ensuring that those who have a lawful right to be in the UK can regularise their status and access support.

Issuing clear resolution plans for non-UK nationals sleeping rough will require stronger relationships between local authorities, frontline homelessness services, and the Voluntary Returns Service. In addition to a new statutory duty on local authorities and frontline homelessness services to work with and share information with the Home Office, the government should expect that by the end of the Parliament, every local authority and frontline homelessness organisation has a working relationship and dedicated point of contact within the Voluntary Returns Service.

Where an individual with no permission to remain refuses a voluntary return, they should be subject to an enforced return or deportation. This is dependent on the Home Secretary's reforms to the UK immigration and asylum system, particularly legal reform. This latter point is critical, as the UK's legal framework places substantial barriers in the way of the government enforcing immigration law.

For example, court decisions have in the past prevented the government taking enforcement action against non-UK nationals sleeping rough who have violated the conditions of their stay in the UK. Prior to the UK's withdrawal from the EU, the government was found to have acted unlawfully in removing EU nationals on the basis of rough sleeping, on the grounds that this breached EU freedom of movement rules. This was reported by the BBC, who noted that the Home Office stated it had ceased all enforcement action against EEA nationals for rough sleeping.[91]

89 Home Office, Private Life: Version 7.0, October 2026.

90 Home Office, Restoring Order and Control, November 2025, p. 20.

91 BBC News, EU rough sleepers win damages for illegal deportations, May 2018. Accessed: bbc.co.uk/news/uk-44093868.

Post-Brexit, the government's new immigration system contained grounds whereby a non-UK national rough sleeper could be removed from the country. Paragraphs SUI 27.1 and SUI 27.2 of *Part Suitability of the Immigration Rules* set out a basis for refusing permission to stay on the grounds of rough sleeping. In 2021, these rules were significantly narrowed as a result of legal uncertainty, and guidance issued by the Home Office in November 2025 states that a non-UK national can be removed only after they have both repeatedly refused support and engaged in persistent anti-social behaviour.[92]

It is unclear how often this mechanism has been used. In February 2026, Bob Blackman MP asked the government how many non-UK nationals had been removed via the route above. The government refused to answer, stating that the information could only be collected and verified at disproportionate cost.[93] This raises serious questions about the monitoring of such returns within the Home Office, or whether returns are even happening at all.

3.2.5 Principle three: set a preferential option for voluntary return

In extending support to non-UK nationals sleeping rough and enforcing immigration law, the government should set a preferential option for voluntary return, both in how it responds to non-UK nationals sleeping rough who have permission to remain in the UK, and those who do not. This would mean that a central goal of the government's policy regarding non-UK national rough sleeping would be to support individuals to make a voluntary return to their home country.

To operationalise this, the interaction between the Voluntary Returns Service and frontline homelessness support services should be strengthened. While not mandated for those with permission to remain in the UK, we recommend that every non-UK national sleeping rough is given the option of a voluntary return to their country of origin, working in partnership with the third sector and support services in the UK and abroad.

Increasing the number of voluntary returns would save the taxpayer money and relieve pressure on the homelessness system. It is also right that, in principle, a person's own country takes primary responsibility for alleviating their homelessness and addressing their needs, rather than the British state.

There are two reasons for this. The first is one of principle, as a state should take responsibility for its own people. The second is one of cost, as the government's data estimates that the annual cost per rough sleeper to public services equates to £14,204.[94] This does not include the cost of subsidised housing, or support provided after a person is housed. By this metric, a voluntary return where an individual is supported with up to £3,000 to rehabilitate in their home country offers significant value for money in comparison to them remaining in the UK.

Despite the individual and fiscal benefits of voluntary return, this pathway is only open to those without leave to remain. While this includes many non-UK nationals sleeping rough (946 people seen sleeping rough in London over 2025/26 had no valid leave or were undocumented),[95] it is not comprehensive and excludes a substantial number of non-UK nationals who have permission to remain in the UK but are homeless.

92 Home Office, Suitability: Grounds for refusal/cancellation – Rough sleeping in the UK (version 3.0), November 2025, p. 4.

93 House of Commons, Written Question 110752, answered in February 2026. Accessed: questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2026-02-04/110752#.

94 MHCLG, Rough sleeping questionnaire 2025: Headline findings, May 2026.

95 GLA, CHAIN Annual Report: Greater London April 2025 – March 2026, June 2026, p. 40.

To enable a preference for voluntary return, we recommend that the government extends access to the Voluntary Returns Service to any non-UK national who has slept rough (or is about to) in the 12 months preceding an application. Access to financial support should be regardless of immigration status and contingent on verification by an official outreach team.

Extending the opportunity of making a voluntary return is often in the best interests of an individual sleeping rough. Several charities and frontline homelessness organisations in the UK work in this area to help facilitate a return to a person's country of origin. One of these is the charity Barka.

Case study: Barka

Barka UK's Voluntary Reconnections project offers assisted return for Central and Eastern European (CEE) migrants who are sleeping rough. The aim is not simply to 'send people back', but to provide a humane reconnection and reintegration route for those who cannot or do not want to remain in the UK, so they are supported into stable accommodation, treatment, or work on return rather than cycling back into homelessness. Since 2007, Barka UK reports that it has helped more than 5,000 CEE migrants to return voluntarily to their countries of origin, while also working with UK public services and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to secure any support or benefits to which people are entitled before they leave.[96]

A distinctive feature of Barka's model is who delivers it. Outreach teams are made up of people who speak migrants' languages, understand their cultures and, crucially, often have first-hand experience of life on the streets and of their own reconnection journeys. Barka attributes much of its success to employing ex-service users and to its close links with a network of homelessness and rehabilitation services across European countries. This means that, when someone agrees to return, they are not simply put on a plane, but they can be met at the other end and supported into rehabilitation and stable housing, with the explicit aim of preventing a return to rough sleeping or to the UK.

Local authorities have commissioned Barka to run specialist support for migrant rough sleepers in parts of the UK, including Westminster.[97] However, there is no nationally funded network. In Westminster, Barka workers engaged people in their own language to understand their histories, helped them navigate legal systems in both the UK and their home countries, and, where appropriate, supported return.

The CSJ also visited Hope for Southall Street Homeless (HSSH), a small charity based in Southall, west London, which works predominantly with men from the Punjab region of India. In the 10 years to June 2026, HSSH has supported 88 non-UK nationals to make a dignified return to their home country.

96 Barka UK, Barka UK Reconnections Project, n.d. Accessed: barkauk.org/our-services/reconnections-project.

97 MHCLG, Systems change learning: A practical guide from the Changing Futures programme, December 2025, p. 83.

Case study: Hope for Southall Street Homeless

HSSH is a small independent charity providing day centre services to rough sleepers in Southall, west London. With a team of just four, HSSH supports on average 70 people a week, of whom approximately 90 per cent are actively sleeping rough at any one time.

95 per cent of HSSH's clients are men from the Punjab region of India, with smaller numbers from countries like Sri Lanka and the UK. Many came to the UK to work and send money home; when those ambitions fell short, they became street homeless. A large proportion have no recourse to public funds, and so are ineligible for homelessness assistance or benefits. The more time individuals spend on the streets, the more likely they are to be targets for drug dealers and criminal gangs.

John Murphy, the General Secretary of HSSH, told us that for many of these men the best route out of homelessness is a supported return home. Because one of its staff speaks those clients' languages, it means that they can speak directly to relatives in India and gauge whether a return would be welcomed. The ability of a staff member to speak a person's language and relate to them culturally is essential to making a successful reconnection, a finding which echoes that of the London Social Impact Bond (SIB).

Reconnection can take a long time. Shame, cultural expectations, and bureaucratic difficulties make returning difficult for many of HSSH's clients. Family relationships are often strained, and individuals often feel a sense of failure if they haven't made a successful life in the UK.

HSSH says that quick and adequate support provided by the Voluntary Returns Service is crucial to making reconnections work. The £3,000 financial support payment provides a meaningful incentive, but often uncertain entitlements and delays make the prospect of return too much of a risk for clients. HSSH told us that in the past reconnections worked "like clockwork" and included accommodation, a guarantee of the £3,000 financial support payment, and travel details. This enabled them to support many to return to their country of origin.

However, HSSH says the system has slowed and reconnecting has become more difficult. This is not only a Home Office problem, with foreign embassies being slow and uncooperative in issuing emergency travel documents or identification.

When a reconnection comes together it can transform the life of an individual. Malik left India at the age of 17 and spent most of 16 years sleeping rough in west London. During this time, he had become dependent on alcohol and throughout the Covid lockdown his withdrawal symptoms became unmanageable.

HSSH supported Malik to access detox services, and he was accompanied by his support worker to appointments. In the meantime, the charity helped him to secure travel documents and financial support from the Voluntary Returns Service. Malik made a return to India in January 2021 and made a successful reconnection with his family.

The Netherlands is also a case study of how a comparable country is tackling high levels of migrant rough sleeping. The Dutch government funded a pilot in six municipalities with the aim of supporting rough sleepers from other EU countries who had limited or no access to Dutch support services. The pilot has been successful at helping EU nationals back into work and to return to their home country.

Case study: Reconnection pilot in the Netherlands

The Dutch government has funded a dedicated programme of short-term accommodation and support for homeless EU citizens who are ineligible for regular social services and support. Funding was provided to six municipalities – Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, Utrecht, Eindhoven, and Venlo – which were given freedom to design services specifically for this target group, working in partnership with specialist charities such as Barka to help people either move back into work and housing in the Netherlands, or return to their home country.[98]

Across the pilots, municipalities used this funding to create tailored shelters and outreach services for EU migrants, with some cities setting up separate shelters for migrants and others using hotel places or dedicated beds within existing services. In the first six months, 875 people were accommodated, with 62 per cent achieving a positive move-on, either securing employment with accommodation in the Netherlands, or returning to their country of origin.[99] Four of the municipalities ran separate shelters exclusively for EU migrants and highlighted the importance of providing support in people's native languages to build trust and engagement.[100]

Respondents to the Dutch evaluation stressed the need to give homeless EU citizens a clear and honest explanation of their realistic options in the Netherlands, with three main outcomes identified: (1) a route back into work and housing in the Netherlands; (2) voluntary return to their country of origin; or (3) forced return for those with no lawful basis to remain.[101]

The evaluation concluded that establishing a clear assessment point or centre for homeless EU nationals would be beneficial, so that people receive upfront guidance on their prospects and rights and are not passed between multiple services without a plan.[102]

Reporting in 2025 indicated that Amsterdam had supported 386 homeless migrant workers to return to their home countries in a single year, while across six participating cities around 700 people had accepted offers of help to go home, with Barka playing a central role in preparation and follow-up.[103]

In the UK, previous governments' policies have incentivised voluntary return as a preferential option, providing a basis for the current government to make this a cornerstone of its response to non-UK national rough sleeping.

The London Homelessness Social Impact Bond (SIB), a four-year payment-by-results programme launched in 2012, had explicit targets concerning the reconnection of non-UK nationals rough sleeping with their country of origin. 25 per cent of the allocated funding was reserved for reconnection, providing a tangible financial incentive for providers.[104]

83 individuals achieved sustained reconnection in their home countries, and the impact evaluation identified that the London SIB had a significant positive impact on non-UK national reconnections when

98 Significant Public, Evaluatie Kortdurende Opvang Dakloze EU-Burgers: Eindmeting, June 2024, p. 3.

99 Ibid, p. 3.

100 Ibid, p. 29.

101 Ibid, p. 30.

102 Ibid, p. 33.

103 Trouw, Hundreds of homeless migrant workers have been returned to Eastern Europe. "They're not happy about it, but it's their salvation", February 2025. Accessed: trouw.nl/binnenland/honderden-dakloze-arbeidsmigranten-zijn-teruggebracht-naar-oost-europa-ze-worden-er-niet-blij-van-maar-het-is-hun-redding~b17d348e.

104 Department for Communities and Local Government, Qualitative Evaluation of the London Homelessness Social Impact Bond (SIB), November 2017, p. 16.

compared with a comparison group.[105] This demonstrates how payment by results targets can have a positive impact on service delivery and outcomes achieved, providing a potential commissioning blueprint for local authorities.

The London SIB contains the basis for how the government might set a preferential option for voluntary return within its response to non-UK national rough sleeping. The SIB is an example of how to prioritise certain outcomes, and the government should build upon this, and the learnings from partner charities, St Mungo's and Thames Reach, to operationalise a preference for voluntary return.

Setting a preference for voluntary return within the government's response to rough sleeping could be achieved by amending the Outcomes Framework set for local government. The Outcomes Framework sets out the national priority outcomes for local government across a range of different policy areas, including homelessness. At present the homelessness priority outcome is: "To prevent and reduce homelessness and rough sleeping", with the following priority outcome metrics:[106]

- Households with children in temporary accommodation.
- Families in bed and breakfast (B&B) over six weeks.
- Success at preventing and relieving homelessness.
- People sleeping rough on a single night.
- People sleeping rough over the month who are long-term.

Local authorities are expected to set action plans with local targets which improve performance against each of the Outcomes Framework metrics above. To incentivise local authorities to prioritise voluntary returns of non-UK nationals rough sleeping, we propose that a new priority metric is added: "Success at reconnecting non-UK nationals sleeping rough to their home countries", measured by the number of people with a confirmed reconnection outside of the UK, as modelled in the London SIB.[107]

Voluntary returns and reconnections should be accompanied by advice and guidance on how to successfully commission and deliver services, building on the best practice of third sector organisations like Barka and HSSH. The government should set an explicit presumption that reconnection services operate based on the learnings of existing services and the London Homelessness SIB. This should be supported by the new MRSU. The London Homelessness SIB recommended that reconnection services include:[108]

- Personalised support: the importance of developing long-term trusting relationships with the migrant cohort, including support staff that can speak native languages, and adapting support on a case-by-case basis.
- Partnerships and support in home countries: this includes partnerships with the Home Office and UK services, as well as those in home countries. For example, when delivering the London Homelessness SIB, St Mungo's travelled to Poland to make links with services there. Providers reinforced the importance of ensuring support services were in place when a client returned, which was considered important in sustaining a reconnection, and preventing a return to the UK.

To further strengthen support during a voluntary return, the government could consider measuring success not just by the sustained reconnection of a person after six months, but also by their safety, stability, and connection with support in their home country.

105 Department for Communities and Local Government, The impact evaluation of the London Homelessness Social Impact Bond, November 2017, p. 33.
106 MHCLG, A National Plan to End Homelessness, December 2025, pp. 80-81.
107 Department for Communities and Local Government, Qualitative Evaluation of the London Homelessness Social Impact Bond (SIB), November 2017, p. 16.
108 Ibid, pp. 60-61.

RECOMMENDATION

MHCLG and the Home Office should create a cross-departmental MRSU to coordinate the implementation of a new approach to tackling non-UK national rough sleeping. We recommend that the following principles underpin this new approach:

Principle one: extend support to non-UK nationals sleeping rough

1. The Home Office and MHCLG should ensure that every non-UK national sleeping rough is able to resolve their immigration status to determine their right to remain in the UK and corresponding support options. Emergency support is critical for this to be a success, and a new MRSU should support local authorities to develop accommodation pathways modelled on the four-area Home Office/MHCLG pilots, A Bed Every Night, and the Dutch scheme. Within accommodation settings there should be a stronger voluntary return offer and access to the Voluntary Returns Service, regardless of immigration status.
2. The Home Office and MHCLG should reform the HES so that it becomes a central government case management tool for all non-UK nationals who have slept rough. Every homelessness service should be required to contact the HES as soon as a non-UK national has been identified as sleeping rough. The HES should hold a clear Home Office paper trail on individual cases and issue a resolution plan for each one. For example, the right to remain if eligible, voluntary return and/or reconnection services, or enforced return if the individual is not engaging and is in the UK unlawfully.
3. The Home Office and MHCLG should introduce a new statutory duty which requires all local authorities and homelessness services to work with the Home Office and Immigration Enforcement Teams in all cases involving non-UK nationals. This would create a new legal requirement on frontline services to report all cases of non-UK national rough sleeping to the Home Office.

Principle two: enforce immigration law

1. The Home Office should remove the 20-year residence rule whereby a non-UK national is able to regularise their status on the basis of 20 years of continued residence, despite having spent the entirety or part of that time in the UK illegally. This rule creates a perverse incentive to sleep rough rather than return home. Implementing this within reforms to the immigration and asylum system would likely require reform to Article 8 (right to private life) of the ECHR.
2. The Home Office should ensure that the Voluntary Returns Service has a dedicated point of contact for frontline homelessness services.
3. The Home Office should ensure that when an individual is found to have no permission to remain, the HES issues a clear resolution plan for their case. This plan should be shared with the individual, any support workers and/or relevant agencies involved, and set out appeals routes, options for voluntary return, and the consequences of refusing to engage.

Principle three: set a preference for voluntary return

1. MHCLG should set a preference for voluntary return in its policy on non-UK national rough sleeping. It should operationalise this by introducing a new priority metric within the Outcomes Framework for local government, measured by the number of people with a confirmed reconnection outside the UK. As with existing metrics, local authorities would be required to create action plans with local targets to improve performance against this measure, ensuring that reconnection becomes a core outcome rather than an optional extra.

2. MHCLG should issue detailed guidance on how to commission and deliver high-quality reconnection services, drawing on best practice from the Netherlands, Barka, and HSSH.
3. The Home Office should expand access to the Voluntary Returns Service to any non-UK national who has slept rough (or is about to) in the 12 months preceding an application. Access to up to £3,000 of financial support should be regardless of permission to stay in the UK and contingent on verification by an official outreach or frontline homelessness service. A re-entry ban should be imposed following a return regardless of existing permission to stay in the UK, in line with Home Office rules.

3.3 Prevent long-term rough sleeping

The homelessness strategy placed prevention at the centre of the government's plan to end rough sleeping.[109] It commits to universal prevention, which addresses the root causes of rough sleeping, and to targeted prevention, which supports those at risk. It also commits to preventing crisis and helping people to stay in their homes in the first place. While the Rough Sleeping Programme has strengthened the government's ability to respond to immediate crisis, it is explicit that it does not replace the broader strategy's focus on prevention.[110]

Universal prevention includes tackling the root causes of poverty which increase the risk of rough sleeping. These include family breakdown, educational failure, worklessness, addiction, and problem debt, all of which the strategy recognises as risk factors for rough sleeping. In previous editions of this *Rough Sleeping Tracker*, we have outlined how the government can strengthen its commitment to 'universal' prevention by more effectively addressing the root causes of poverty.[111]

In this report we explore how the government can better prevent long-term rough sleeping. We focus on long-term rough sleeping as this group is now the largest single set of people sleeping rough. Preventing new people sleeping rough from becoming long-term rough sleepers is critically important to the success of the government's Rough Sleeping Programme.

To understand how frontline charities are developing interventions to prevent long-term rough sleeping, the CSJ visited the Whitechapel Centre in Liverpool which has developed an innovative response to prevention through its Night Assessment Hub. The Whitechapel Centre is the leading homelessness and housing charity for the Liverpool region and is funded by the Steve Morgan Foundation.

109 MHCLG, A National Plan to End Homelessness, December 2025.
110 MHCLG, Rough Sleeping Programme Guidance, September 2026.
111 CSJ, Rough Sleeping Tracker: A plan to restore control, order, and hope to London's streets, June 2026, pp. 33-35.

Case study: the Whitechapel Centre, Liverpool City Region

During 2025/26, the Whitechapel Centre worked with 1,379 individuals who were seen bedded down on the streets in the Liverpool City Region. This was an increase of 10 per cent on 2024/25.

The Whitechapel Centre says that this rise reflects the combined impact of poverty, rising evictions (particularly in the private rented sector), a shortage of affordable housing and move-on options, and wider systemic barriers to accessing accommodation. The increase is most evident in three key cohorts:

- People newly granted leave to remain status
- People being released from prison
- Young people

The Whitechapel Centre developed its Night Assessment Hub as one intervention to better target support at these cohorts. The 30-person Hub provides a safe, overnight space where people sleeping rough can participate in assessments of need and stay safe until longer-term accommodation is secured. Between December 2025 and March 2026, a total of 191 people were supported through the service. By 31 March 2026, 170 individuals had been supported to move-on, with 149 successfully securing suitable accommodation. This equates to an 88 per cent positive move-on rate. Over the entire period of operation in 2025/26, a total of 418 people were successfully supported via the Night Assessment Hub to secure appropriate long-term move-on accommodation solutions.

In September 2026, the Whitechapel Centre reported a fall in rough sleeping across Liverpool, with 128 individuals seen bedded down, the lowest number in the last 12 months. Charity leaders say this reflects the increase in prevention interventions relating to prison leavers, evictions from Home Office accommodation, swift placements into the Night Assessment Hub, along with improved joined up working with prevention services such as the Prevention and Resettlement Service (PARS) and the Recovery Support Service (RSS).

A focus on better preventing rough sleeping from occurring in the first place has been reflected in a fall in the number of new people sleeping rough. Insights shared with the CSJ attribute this to improvements in local homelessness systems, outreach services and more suitable offers of support. To build on this progress, efforts must now focus on ensuring that people new to rough sleeping do not become part of the long-term group.

While a fall in new rough sleeping is welcome, the government must now narrow the pipeline from a first night on the street to entrenched, long-term rough sleeping. Our research and engagement with frontline charities identified three drivers of long-term rough sleeping that the government must tackle to meet its commitment to end this form of homelessness. The first is a growing addiction crisis, which draws more people with substance dependencies onto the street and makes it harder for them to sustain long-term housing. The second is institution leavers, in particular prison leavers released from custody without settled accommodation as part of successive early release schemes. The third is the large cohort of non-UK nationals with restricted or NRPF status, whom we examined in detail in the previous section.

3.3.1 A deepening addiction crisis on the streets

People sleeping rough often suffer from an addiction problem. The Rough Sleeping Questionnaire 2025 found that 54 per cent of respondents reported a substance (drugs or alcohol) misuse need within the past year. Of this group, only 52 per cent received treatment in the past year, and nearly one in three (32 per cent) had been refused or declined treatment.[112]

A lack of engagement with treatment makes accessing and sustaining settled accommodation more difficult for people with a substance misuse need. For example, around 37 per cent of homeless hostels do not allow the consumption of drugs or alcohol on site, so when an individual continues to engage in substance misuse, the risk of returning to the street increases. The same piece of research highlighted that 28 per cent of hostels say 20 per cent or more of their clients experience a negative outcome such as eviction – although this does not distinguish between clients who have an addiction and those who do not.[113]

In addition to accommodation barriers, accessing day support services is also more challenging for individuals with substance misuse needs. Analysis by Homeless Link in 2023 found that over half (54 per cent) of day centres who had refused access to certain individuals named drug or alcohol intoxication as a reason why.[114]

Substance misuse is also linked to other support needs, further complicating the lives of these individuals and making it harder to perform successful outreach. 36 per cent of respondents to the 2025 Rough Sleeping Questionnaire reported a mental health, substance misuse, and adverse school experience in their life, while the vast majority (83 per cent) reported a mental health vulnerability.[115]

Barriers to accommodation and support mean many rough sleepers with an addiction need remain homeless long-term. Not only does substance misuse place barriers in the way of accessing permanent housing, but it can also cause a return to the streets. Frontline charities told us that addiction is a reason for people returning to rough sleeping after a gap in time.

The scaling-up of Housing First, as outlined in the previous section of this report, is critical for tackling the link between addiction and rough sleeping. As Housing First places no additional barriers between a rough sleeper and housing, it can act as a stabiliser, on which trusted relationships can be built and access to addiction services opened up.

While the national Housing First pilots found little sign of improvement in relation to substance misuse after 12 months, qualitative evidence found that Housing First was the medium by which individuals with historic addiction problems were able to engage with services, often for the first time in a meaningful way.[116] Embedding addiction services within Housing First programmes should be considered an area for further investigation. It is our view that harm reduction (minimising the immediate negative impacts of addiction) should act as a means to an end, helping individuals to overcome their substance misuse needs for good. This means that Housing First programmes which embed an addiction to abstinence pathway should be within scope of funding for Housing First-informed approaches in the Rough Sleeping Programme.

Beyond Housing First, tackling addiction among the rough sleeping population, and in society at large, is essential for preventing long-term rough sleeping. However, the evidence shows that addiction

112 MHCLG, Rough sleeping questionnaire 2025: Headline findings, May 2026.

113 Centre for Homelessness Impact, What is a Hostel in 21st Century Britain, February 2025, p. 2.

114 Homeless Link, Annual Review 2023: Support for single homeless people in England, November 2024, p. 37.

115 MHCLG, Rough sleeping questionnaire 2025: Headline findings, May 2026.

116 MHCLG, Housing First Pilots: Final synthesis report, October 2024, pp. 33-35.

treatment and housing support are failing to reach many of the people who need both. For example, according to CSJ analysis of Care Quality Commission data in 2024, while the North West hosts 30 facilities specialising in residential substance misuse treatment, the North East has only three.[117]

Over 2027, the CSJ will be undertaking an inquiry into the changing face of addiction in the UK, culminating in a report with new recommendations on how the government can tackle this issue.

RECOMMENDATION

The government should treat access to treatment as a core part of its rough sleeping strategy and address the postcode lottery in residential treatment as recognised by the CSJ in *Still Ambitious for Recovery*. In particular:

1. HM Treasury and the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) should commit at the Spending Review 2027 to extend the ring-fenced element of the Public Health Grant for drug and alcohol treatment beyond 2028/29. This should include a three-to-five-year funding plan to allow for better service planning, staff recruitment, training, and expansion of treatment options for those in a community setting.
2. DHSC should support people to move from maintaining addictions to long-term recovery. It should do this by ensuring individuals receiving opioid substitution therapy are provided with integrated psychological support to ensure that mental health issues are addressed concurrently. This approach ensures that mental health issues, which often underpin substance use disorders, are properly addressed and can reduce the risk of relapse.
3. To improve access to mental health services for those suffering from substance misuse, DHSC should publish by the end of 2027 a review of how the Co-occurring Mental Health and Substance Use Delivery Framework has been implemented. The review should cover to what extent integrated care boards, local authority commissioners, mental health, and drug and alcohol services have improved collaboration and joint working in response to the new guidance.

For more information on our recommendations, please read our report *Still Ambitious for Recovery*.

3.3.2 Prison leavers and rough sleeping

Despite the number of prison leavers sleeping rough falling by 11 per cent from September 2025 to 2026,[118] qualitative evidence suggests that the new early release scheme, which took effect in October 2026, is increasing pressure on frontline services. These changes mean that some prisoners receiving a standard determinate sentence can now be released after serving one third of their sentence, rather than 40 per cent.[119]

The new early release scheme came into force in October 2026, meaning its effects are not seen in the data that this report analyses. Data from October to December 2026 is expected to be published in late February 2027. However, qualitative evidence reveals that homelessness services have already noticed a visible increase in the number of people sleeping rough after leaving prison and have explicitly blamed the reforms instigated as part of the *Sentencing Act 2026*.

117 CSJ, Still Ambitious for Recovery: How to address illegal drug addiction and strengthen law enforcement's role, December 2024, p. 8.
118 MHCLG, Rough sleeping data framework, July to September 2026 – release, November 2026.
119 House of Commons Library, Changes to automatic prisoner release dates in England and Wales, September 2026.

> *"We've just had a second rollout of releasees. In the last week we've had 13 people released with no fixed abode who are now sleeping rough. All our staff looked at the early release scheme and thought that is not going to work."*
>
> **Charity leader, Light for Life, Liverpool City Region**

One leading charity in the Liverpool City Region responding innovatively to this crisis is Light for Life, which is developing a model of support for prisoners on release called Release and Rebuild. Its premise is that the transition from custody to licence in the community is the point of greatest risk, and that a single, consistent charity relationship can help to bridge this. Under the model, support begins before release, with a keyworker helping the individual to register with a GP and with drug and alcohol services, as well as to navigate local housing services. Light for Life describes this role as that of a "middleman", so that the individual does not have to manage every process alone. The charity can act as an advocate for its client, supporting and mediating for them as they transition from custody to the community.

In the long term, the government must address the root causes of rough sleeping following a prison release. These include systemic failures within the criminal justice system, including the *Sentencing Act 2026*, overcrowding in the prison estate, and capacity pressures in the probation service.

In the short term, the government should continue investing in Community Accommodation Service models as referenced in the homelessness strategy,[120] and ensure it embeds guidance for how to best develop local partnerships to prevent rough sleeping. This guidance should explore and evaluate programmes which are designed to bridge the pre-release to post-release period like Light for Life's Release and Rebuild model.

New guidance should be designed to end the practice of releasing prisoners with very little preparation and/or accommodation offers. The Independent Monitoring Boards, the statutory bodies that monitor each prison, found that at HMP Hewell, approximately one in three prisoners were released without accommodation on their first night in 2024/25.[121] Such figures demonstrate the urgent need for better collaboration between the prison service, local authorities, and the third sector.

RECOMMENDATION

The Ministry of Justice should evaluate leading third sector models of prisoner support that effectively prevent rough sleeping. Findings from this evaluation should be used to produce guidance for HM Prison and Probation Service's commissioning arrangements and broader partnership work with the third sector.

120 MHCLG, A National Plan to End Homelessness, December 2025, p. 40.

121 Independent Monitoring Boards, National Annual Audit 2025, June 2026, p. 23.



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