



Community Foundation

Vital Signs North East: Homes



Homes

How philanthropy can help ensure that there are decent, secure homes for everyone who needs them



About this Vital Signs report

Vital Signs is a Community Foundation resource presenting information about a range of issues affecting our area. It draws on statistics, published research, local expertise and knowledge gathered through funding across the region to 'take the pulse' of communities and inform a better philanthropic response to their needs. We see it as the start of a conversation and would love to hear your views about the ambitions of local communities and what more philanthropy and charitable funding could do to meet them.

This is our sixth Vital Signs North East 2024 report. It examines housing and homelessness in our region, and how philanthropy helps ensure that there are decent, secure homes for everyone who needs them.

Vital Signs will explore ten themes during 2024:

Economy – How can philanthropy help build a strong regional economy where everyone benefits from increased prosperity?

Education – What opportunities can charitable funding create for people to learn, develop skills and achieve their potential?

Health – How can charitable funders improve the overall health of our region, and reduce differences in health outcomes between richer and poorer people?

Homes – Can philanthropists help ensure that there are decent, secure homes for everyone who needs them?

Environment – What support can philanthropy provide to help communities look after the environment and ensure the region rises to the challenge of climate change?

Access – How can philanthropists help people overcome the barriers they face in getting access to opportunities and services?

Community – What can charitable giving contribute to the task of ensuring our communities are strong, welcoming and able to cope with the challenges of uncertain times?

Culture – How can philanthropy help foster the North East's unique culture, from iconic theatres, museums and concert halls to diverse community arts, heritage and sports groups?

Justice – How can charitable funding support work to protect people from crime, prevent discrimination and give opportunities for offender rehabilitation?

Living standards – How should philanthropic funds support those faced with a decline in living standards due to economic pressures and rising costs?

In addition to reporting on each of these themes we will produce a brief printed summary of our findings.

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“The ache for home lives in all of us”

Maya Angelou, 1986

“Homelessness is a profound assault on dignity,
social inclusion and the right to life.”

United Nations Special Rapporteur, 2020

A note on terminology

In this report we use the following geographic terms:

“The North East” or “The North East region”: this refers to the North East English region which will soon cover the Tees Valley Combined Authority and new North East Combined Authority

Tees Valley: this refers to the area covered by the Tees Valley Combined Authority comprising Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland and Stockton-on-Tees

The North East sub-region: this refers to the area to be covered by the new North East Combined Authority comprising Northumberland, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, North Tyneside, South Tyneside, Gateshead, Sunderland and County Durham.

Executive summary

This publication is one of a series of Vital Signs reports that the Community Foundation Tyne & Wear and Northumberland is publishing in 2024 looking at the needs and aspirations of communities from Northumberland to Teesside and how philanthropy can help meet them.

Our focus here is housing and homelessness. This is a complex area to do justice to in the space we have. We hope that this report will be read by those working in the field, and that they will assist us to fill any gaps in our analysis. As ever, Vital Signs is the start of what we hope will be an illuminating discussion.

We think that, in general, the housing and homelessness situation in the North East is more in line with the national picture, and we

may even be doing a little better in areas such as housing affordability and numbers of rough sleepers. But there is no doubt that being in line with England is not enough when as a nation we face a situation that is dire enough to be characterised by some campaigning charities as a “housing emergency” or “housing crisis”. And we must recognise too that many people in our region do not yet enjoy their right to a decent and secure home.

Philanthropic funding makes a relatively modest contribution in the field of housing and homelessness. But as you will see from our philanthropy case study, it nevertheless plays an essential role in supporting the vital contribution of civil society organisations. We hope this report will provide a starting point for identifying ways that charitable funds can be used to even greater effect.



Want to know more?

You can download all our Vital Signs reports as they are produced via our website at www.communityfoundation.org.uk/vitalsigns

The Community Foundation believes charitable funding can have a significant impact in three key areas.

1

Helping to address the root causes of homelessness: we know a lot about the factors that increase individual vulnerability to becoming homeless, and about the broader social issues that fuel the problem. Philanthropic funding has an important role to play in enabling civil society organisations to ameliorate poverty, social exclusion and health inequalities and so help young people in particular to become more resilient to the problems that fuel homelessness.

2

The provision of support to those that are inadequately housed, homeless or at risk of becoming homeless including:

- advice, information and advocacy that adds value to statutory provision;
- the provision of housing;
- services that help prevent, or ameliorate the worst effects of, homelessness;
- provision that fills gaps in existing services.

3

Research and campaigning with a particular focus on influencing housing and homelessness policy and practice so that it better meets the needs of individuals and communities of place, interest and identity in the North East.



Housing and homelessness in the North East, and how philanthropy can help

At a national level there is considerable concern about what has been variously termed a “housing emergency” or “housing crisis”, with concern focused on:

- a lack of affordable social housing;
- the level of housing costs for both home buyers and renters (particularly in the private rented sector);
- the lack of adequate regulation in the private rented sector and its impact on security of tenure;
- housing quality and overcrowding;
- levels of homelessness and rough sleeping.ⁱ

Below we look at housing in the North East and attempt to assess the importance of these issues and the potential role of philanthropy in addressing local housing needs and gaps in provision.

Housing

The 2021 Census provided a wealth of data about housing.ⁱⁱ In England, most households (77.4%) occupied a house or bungalow, with around 22% in flats, apartments or maisonettes. Only 0.4% lived in caravans or mobile/temporary structures. Owner-occupiers made up just over 62% of households in England, with just under 38% in rented accommodation. The proportion of households where properties were owned outright (32.5%) was greater than those with mortgages, loans or shared ownership arrangements (29.8%). In the rented sector, 17% of households were in social housing and 20.6% in private rented (including a small number living rent-free).

In the North East, the picture was somewhat different. Compared to England, more households occupied a house or bungalow (85.5%) and fewer lived in flats, apartments or maisonettes (14.4%) or caravans or mobile/

temporary structures (0.1%). In contrast to the figures for England there were fewer owner-occupiers (60.7%) and more renters (39.3%). Slightly fewer people owned properties outright (32.49%) and fewer had mortgages, loans or shared ownership arrangements (28.2%) whilst more lived in rented social housing (22%) and fewer in private rented accommodation (17.3%). However, the availability of housing association affordable homes varied markedly being highest in Sunderland (around 1 for every 3 households in the city) and lowest in Darlington (around 1 per 15 households). And the long-term trend is for fewer households to live in social rented accommodation and more in private rented.

Around 69% of English accommodation is under-occupied. Overcrowding was more common in specific types of accommodation (e.g. flats, apartments and maisonettes or mobile and temporary structures); in rented properties or in properties occupied by households belonging to specific religious or ethnic communities (e.g. households identifying as Muslim or Black). London had the highest percentage of households in overcrowded accommodation (11%) and the North East the lowest (2%). Most overcrowding here was in rented accommodation, with just over 3% of households in this position. Interestingly, under-occupation is particularly associated with economic inactivity.

Our table of indicators suggests that housing is more affordable in the North East both for homeowners and renters than in England as a whole and the South East in particular. However there are substantial sub-regional variations, with home ownership least affordable in Northumberland and most affordable in County Durham and Hartlepool, whilst rents were highest in Newcastle and lowest in Hartlepool.ⁱⁱⁱ And it is worth noting that our table also shows that even before

the cost-of-living crisis took hold, our region had a significant issue with problem debt – the tip of an iceberg indicating that even with relatively low housing costs, many households are likely to be struggling to make ends meet. And there is upward pressure on housing costs. Mortgage rates are relatively high and rents are increasing – albeit more slowly in the North East than elsewhere but often to above the levels on which housing benefits are based – whilst home insurance premiums have increased partly due to an increase in extreme weather events. We will revisit this issue in more detail within our Living Standards Vital Signs report.

In rural and coastal areas housing affordability is affected by particular issues of demand and supply. There has always been a degree of housing market overheating resulting from retirees competing for rural homes, but more recently the purchasing power of high-earners able to work remotely from home may have become a factor. To this one can add increases in property prices due to increased investment in second homes and holiday-let properties – a development accelerated by the popularity of the pandemic “staycation.” The resulting loss of affordable accommodation in rural and coastal communities has the potential to

undermine the viability of communities, as those who keep services and the foundational economy afloat find it harder to secure suitable homes.^{iv} The Campaign for the Protection of Rural England points to a failure to provide sufficient affordable social housing to address their needs and estimate that in 2022/3 there were 26,625 people on rural social housing waiting lists in our region.^v

The table also shows that the overall quality of housing stock in the North East is relatively good, with only 13% of homes considered to be “non-decent” (i.e. falling below statutory minimum quality standards, in disrepair, lacking modern facilities, services and/or a reasonable degree of thermal comfort) as opposed to 15% for England. The proportion of households in non-decent homes is greatest for those on low incomes (20%) or poverty (20%); single adults under 60 (19%) and the Black (21%) and Asian (18%) communities. In general non-decent homes are more common in the privately rented sector, and amongst owner-occupiers who make up 63% of those over 60 or with long-term illness or disabilities in non-decent housing.^{vi} According to the housing charity Shelter, around 1 in 10 households may have an issue with toxic mould.



The energy efficiency rating of homes can be used as a proxy for assessing the overall quality of housing stock.^{vii} Energy efficiency is measured on a scale from A to G, with Grade C indicative of compliance with the minimum standards required by building regulations. The national median score is a Grade D, and our region matches this. There is, however, a marked variation in the quality of rented accommodation by tenure. Our social housing is all rated at grade C or above whereas private rented accommodation is at the lower end of the D range in some parts of the region. Whilst only North Tyneside has an overall median equivalent to grade C, and there is clearly an issue with private rented accommodation in many parts of the North East, the table contains some reasonably reassuring news regarding the quality and energy efficiency of our housing stock:

- our overall median score is the same as for England as a whole;
- whilst not yet at Grade C our owner-occupied housing is generally at, or above, the England median;
- social housing medians across the region equate to at least grade C.

The median grade is of course partly determined by the balance of housing stock in an area – new houses and flats and maisonettes for example tend to achieve higher grades. The percentage of houses scoring at C or above is therefore worth considering as it adds some detail to the picture. In our table below local authorities are doing better than the national average (41%) are shaded green, those equal to it amber and those worse pink:^{viii}

Local authority district name	% dwellings rated C or above
Redcar and Cleveland	38
Darlington	40
Hartlepool	40
County Durham	41
Middlesbrough	42
Northumberland	42
Gateshead	42
Sunderland	44
South Tyneside	44
Stockton-on-Tees	45
Newcastle upon Tyne	45
North Tyneside	50

Looking at the various elements of the housing emergency, there are some clear positive aspects to the regional picture: the supply of social housing is generally better, although the level of availability varies markedly and the private rented sector (where housing quality and affordability is generally worse) is growing; housing costs for both buyers and renters are generally more affordable and levels of overcrowding and housing quality are generally better than for England as a whole. This is not to say however that there are not significant problems within the region in each of these areas, or in relation to the problem of discrimination in the housing market. Shelter has identified a particular issue in relation to the problems faced by people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, low-income families, single parents and bisexual, lesbian and gay people in finding safe and secure homes and there is evidence this also applies to transgender individuals: there is no reason to believe that this is not an issue for us in the North East.

For disabled people there are particular challenges with finding affordable and accessible housing locally – in part due to inadequate planning and enforcement of relevant legislation covering housing development. Only 7% of English homes offer minimal accessibility features and it is estimated that, for example, around 400,000 wheelchair users are living in non-adapted properties. The impact of inadequate accommodation can be significant affecting the ability to live independently, socialise, maintain normal family life, work and maintain good physical and mental health. With access to social housing not always an option, many disabled people often face challenges accessing private rented accommodation: the accessibility of properties is often not advertised; “no DSS” policies indirectly discriminate against them (although there is legislation being enacted to address this) and there is often a reluctance to allow adaptations. The cost of rent may also be less affordable given the additional costs associated with living with a disability, and lower employment rates and earning levels

amongst disabled people. And there are wider issues relating to the engagement of disabled people in the planning of housing provision and availability of the advice, support and advocacy that underpin independent living in particular for those with additional needs and people with learning disabilities. The planning issue is particularly concerning as less than a quarter of new homes due to be built by 2030 are planned to be accessible, while only 1% are planned to be suitable for wheelchairs. Research published by Habinteg Housing Association in 2021 suggests that the North East has 1 accessible home planned per 129 residents, ranking us 6th of 9 English regions.^{ix} The supply of accessible housing is likely to lag significantly behind demand.^x

Homelessness

Levels of homelessness are identified as a key aspect of the housing emergency. Our table of indicators suggests that in general we are doing about average for England, but worse than the South East except in the specific areas of youth homelessness or rough sleeping (which is covered elsewhere in this report).

Issues around housing security, particularly in the private rented sector, are a major concern in our region. Looking at the figures for the North East in October-December 2023 we can see that of those receiving initial assistance under the Homelessness Reduction Act^{xi}: 33% were private rented sector; 12% were social rented sector and 3% were in owner occupied accommodation. Of private sector renters with assured shorthold tenancies, 16% were in arrears or breach of tenancy and 61% were losing their tenancy because the landlord wished to sell or re-let. Prior to the announcement of a July 2024 General Election legislation was in train to address a number of the housing security issues affecting private sector tenants mentioned above. It would have made it harder to evict tenants, although there would have remained scope to do this on the basis that a landlord intended to sell or move into a property. What will happen now very much depends on who will form the next government.

It is worth noting that homelessness itself is not a single, fixed state. The homelessness charity Crisis has defined five distinct types of homelessness, with people often moving between them. They are:

1. Sofa surfing, where a person is allowed to share accommodation on a temporary basis with a household with which they have no immediate family connection;
2. Occupying unsuitable temporary accommodation (e.g. B&B);
3. Living in emergency, temporary accommodation (e.g. hostels, refuges or shelters);
4. Unconventional accommodation (e.g. vehicles, garages, offices) and
5. Rough sleeping (e.g. sleeping in a doorway or park).^{xii}

Crisis uses this model to inform its representations to government, since it enables a more detailed analysis of the impact of specific social policy proposals. We will discuss these in a little more detail in the Homelessness section below. The model may prove equally useful in informing decisions about how to use philanthropic spending most effectively, and we hope that there may be more regional analysis using this model in the future.

In the meantime there is a fair amount of information about why people become homeless. The table below provides an overview of the reasons why people presented to local authorities in the North East as homeless or threatened with homelessness in October-December 2023:^{xiii}

Reason	% of all people presenting NE (% England)
Private rented assured shorthold tenants in arrears or breach of tenancy agreement	4% (6%)
Private assured shorthold tenants where landlord wished to sell or re-let their home	33% (46%)
Family or friends no longer willing to accommodate	23% (22%)
Non-violent breakdown of relationship with partner	6% (4%)
Domestic violence (victims)	10% (7%)
Other violence or harassment	3% (1%)
Social rented tenants in arrears or breach of tenancy agreement	3% (4%)
Social rented tenants other reasons	2% (1%)
Supported housing tenant in arrears or breach of tenancy/licence	1% (2%)
Supported housing other reasons	2% (2%)
Leaving custody	4% (2%)
Leaving care	0% (1%)
Leaving hospital (inc psychiatric care)	<1% (<1%)
Leaving accommodation provided by Home Office as asylum support	10% (5%)
Home no longer suitable as a result of disability or ill-health	1% (2%)

Those at substantially more risk either in absolute terms or compared with elsewhere in England during this brief period would therefore appear to be private tenants; “sofa-surfers” (who are often at the greatest risk of sexual exploitation);^{xiv} those experiencing family breakdown; victims of domestic violence; victims of violence or harassment; those leaving custody and refugees.

Looking more generally at the problem, it is well established that the risk of becoming homeless is greater if you are poor, in low-paid or precarious employment, unemployed, on benefits, socially isolated, from a marginalised social group or in some other way vulnerable. Services that support people at risk of becoming homelessness and that can provide them a measure of protection and support if the worse happens are vital. They include those within civil society that:

- address poverty and its effects on individuals and families;
- provide benefit, employment, money and housing advice and advocacy;
- help with employability;
- address physical and mental health needs;
- address social isolation and marginalisation (including the needs of people in isolated rural areas);
- support families and offer mediation when relationships are strained;
- reach out to those at greater risk such as victims of domestic violence; young people including care leavers; those at risk of sexual exploitation; ex-offenders; people with physical or learning disabilities; people who have Autism or are neurodiverse; visible minorities; those without recourse to public funds (e.g. temporary migrants and those without a qualifying immigration status) and people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

It is worth noting that those with multiple vulnerabilities may well be at greater risk e.g. asylum seekers with no recourse to public funds experiencing domestic violence or young people with learning disabilities at risk of sexual exploitation. Philanthropic

funding may have a particular role in ensuring there is adequate provision for people in this position.

But it is not enough to see homelessness simply in terms of individual needs, or to think that services alone can provide the whole answer. Built-in problems with the operation of the housing market – from the precariousness of private tenancies to the lack of affordable social housing and rising housing costs for private tenants and owner-occupiers – do much to drive up homelessness. More realistic levels of benefits, greater security of tenure in the private rented sector and an increase in the supply of affordable housing are essential to solving homelessness alongside greater support to those at most risk. These are largely tasks for government, and it is appropriate that the charitable sector uses its experience at the sharp-end of the problem to work with other civil society organisations and stakeholders in the housing space on solutions and to campaign for action.

A look at youth homelessness illustrates these points. A major driver of the problem is a breakdown in family relationships (representing 46% of youth homelessness cases). Many families will experience some tensions as children enter young adulthood. But in some, relationships will reach breaking point as a result of more serious issues such as financial hardship (exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis); mental health problems; issues with drugs and alcohol; physical, emotional or sexual abuse (11% of cases); and/or conflict over issues like sexual orientation or gender identity. If compelled to leave home young people – especially those with no ongoing parental support – can then find themselves struggling due to a combination of low paid employment or dependence on benefits, inadequate support with housing costs and a scarcity of affordable accommodation. It is perhaps only by working in depth with young people in this position that one can fully understand both their problems and the potential solutions. It is striking that in looking to inform MPs about what can be done about this particularly concerning problem – which affects around 136,000 16-24 year olds nationally – the House of Commons^{xv}

drew so heavily on the experience of charities like **Centrepoint**, **St Basil's** and **Reform**. A major campaign - **#PlanForThe136k** - remains underway that involves many housing charities in calling for more effective, informed and joined-up action by government on this problem.

Input from civil society organisations working in the field has helped shape developments in homelessness policy under the current Conservative government. **The Homeless Reduction Act 2017** was a major piece of legislation, creating a three-stage process for helping anyone threatened with homelessness for a minimum period of 56 days. The statutory duties on local authorities are to:

1. **prevent** homelessness by providing assistance to keep someone in their existing home and failing that to
2. **relieve** homelessness by helping someone find a new home over and failing that to
3. **rehouse** certain households in priority need that are unintentionally homeless.

In addition, the Act promoted improvements in a range of areas such as assessment, planning and joint working, to ensure that more people at risk (e.g. on leaving prison or hospital) would be caught in the safety net the Act provides. However, in its first few years the Act has clearly not been as effective as many had hoped, not least because of wider issues in the housing market such as the lack of affordable accommodation (e.g. social housing) and a lack of funding within hard-pressed local authorities. Crucially, research by Crisis found that nearly half of those covered by the Act remained homeless at the end of the three-stage process, and the figures were higher for those with complex needs.^{xvi} Centrepoint has concluded that only 38% of young homeless people received a positive outcome, with major failings in many rural areas.^{xvii}

In this connection we should mention the work undertaken by North East-based charity **Changing Lives** to inform social policy in the homelessness field drawing on its experience of working with 15,000 people in over 100 projects nationally. Ahead of the general election it has produced a raft of policy recommendations focused on preventing

homelessness, protecting essential services (including those in the voluntary sector) and improved support services focused on empowering people to help themselves to address problems that contribute to rising homelessness. Changing Lives' specific recommendations to social policy makers include the following:

- A stronger focus on planning and providing for people with multiple needs in partnership with civil society.
- Developing a more strategic and informed approach to tackling homelessness (Changing Lives' approach seems to reflect an appreciation of the five homelessness states identified by Crisis, highlighting for example the danger of focusing too heavily on rough sleeping; the particular risks facing women sofa surfers and the additional difficulties hostel residents face in recovering from trauma, deprivation and discrimination).
- A stronger focus on helping groups at greater risk including those with health issues and addictions; offenders and the victims of violence and exploitation with a particular focus in both instances on the unmet needs of women and Black and minoritised people. This includes both recommendations for systemic change and improved services.
- Reforming the welfare system so as to provide a sufficient safety net to avoid people falling into poverty and destitution.
- Addressing the barriers homeless people face in the labour market with appropriate support and benefit provision that recognises their potential whilst not underestimating the scale of the challenges they need to overcome. A broader point about measures to address in-work poverty is also made.
- Increasing the supply of affordable social housing and increasing housing benefit to a more realistic level.
- Improving arrangements for public funding and commissioning of services from civil society organisations.^{xviii}

Changing Lives also produced a **briefing to North East Mayoral Candidates** requesting that candidates focused on the needs of women who are often “designed-out” (our phrase) of services for homeless people. The report also suggested focussing attention on policy and services that could address problems in the labour and housing markets that work against eradicating homelessness. It will be interesting to see how far these are taken on board by the elected Mayor.

Our analysis of the housing and homelessness situation in the North East suggests the following priorities for philanthropic funding:

1

Advice, information and advocacy that adds value to statutory provision:

this might include support for households (particularly in the private sector) facing eviction or in dispute over housing repairs; debt and benefits advice for those struggling to pay rent or mortgages and legal advice and representation to secure tenants’ rights under housing and homelessness legislation.

2

Services that help prevent or ameliorate the worst effects of homelessness:

this could cover a very broad spectrum of activity including work on the root causes of homelessness (e.g. anti-poverty work, vocational and physical and mental health services); preventative work with those at risk (e.g. youth work and family mediation) and specialist housing and homelessness services such as those featured in our case studies.

A strong focus on the needs of vulnerable people; those not best served by mainstream services (e.g. women, homeless people in rural and coastal communities^{xix}) and those with complex needs should form part of this. A particular priority could be to help head-off the long-term impact of homelessness on children. Shelter has highlighted that it leads to a 25% higher risk of severe ill-health or disability in childhood and early adulthood, as well as lower educational attainment and a greater likelihood of unemployment and poverty.^{xx}

3

Research and campaigning in line with Charity Commission guidelines on regional housing and homelessness issues:

as well as contributing to the development of policy and practice this could also help to address issues like the housing needs of rural and coastal communities; issues of equity, diversity and inclusion in the regional housing market and the unmet housing needs of disabled people.

All aboard?

Who are rough sleepers, and how can philanthropy help them?

Current official figures suggest that in England around 7 people in every 100,000 live on the streets. This is fewer than when we published Vital Signs in 2017 and, thankfully, the North East accounts for just 89 of the 3,898 people recorded as sleeping rough on the chosen survey night in Autumn 2023. But whilst the situation here certainly contrasts markedly with that in London and the South East – which together account for nearly half of the total rough sleepers recorded – our regional picture is based partly on estimates rather than counts. And research suggests that official estimates tend to drastically underestimate the number of vulnerable rough sleepers who are harder to spot (e.g. women or visible minorities who conceal themselves in A&E department waiting areas, buses or trains to avoid harassment). It is quite likely that the real figures are substantially higher than suggested, and there is further cause for concern in that we have seen a substantial increase over the past year (+46%).^{xxi}

Rough sleepers can evoke concern within the wider community, particularly due to a perceived link with anti-social behaviour and criminality. Research by Birmingham City University^{xxii} suggests that their appearance, behaviour, reputation or mere presence can generate strong negative feelings. An obvious contributor to this hostility is the problem of street begging, even though evidence from our region^{xxiii} suggests that as few as 1 in 20 street beggars may actually be homeless. Prejudice and discrimination against rough sleepers often results in inhumane treatment including the widespread use of **“hostile architecture”** to inflict discomfort on those attempting to live and sleep on the street. At worst rough sleepers may find themselves victims of violence and abuse as in the tragic case of Middlesbrough’s **Michael Cash** who was sprayed with paint in an attack

motivated by hostility to street beggars. One third of rough sleepers report having been hit or kicked at some time, whilst half have experienced threats, harassment or abuse.

What do we know about rough sleepers? A government survey of a substantial representative group of 563 rough sleepers conducted in 2019-2020^{xxiv} is a good starting point. A key finding was that although many had long experience of sleeping rough, many had spent some time during the past year in either short-term homeless accommodation (77%) or sofa surfing (48%). This is perhaps unsurprising given the hardships they might have otherwise endured. Another major theme was the wide range of vulnerabilities within the group: 96% had additional needs on top of being homeless. These included: physical and/or mental health issues (83%); being a victim of crime (65%) and issues with alcohol (23%) and/or drugs (49%). Unsurprisingly rough sleeping is associated with greatly reduced life expectancy for both men (47 years) and women (43 years).

The reasons why individuals end up sleeping rough are many and various, but to a great extent their individual problems reflect our failure as a nation to address a wide range of social, welfare and housing issues and in particular to lift people out of poverty. The survey suggests some recurring themes. A third of respondents in the survey had at some point in their lives experienced domestic violence, and half had been in prison – although only 20% had offended in the past year. But perhaps the most significant common experiences were those of childhood difficulties. Half those surveyed began rough sleeping before the age of 25. Over 70% had been in care, been permanently excluded from school or regularly truanted and/or left school early. And for many their lives began to be seriously problematic before the

age of 16, for example as a result of mental health problems (36%) and drug (35%) and alcohol (33%) problems. And yet despite these past difficulties there was little evidence of a passive acceptance of life on the streets. Around 80% of respondents had worked at some point in their lives – 21% in the last year – and many reporting recent contact with statutory homeless services (48%) or past contact with homelessness organisations (80%). A further group worthy of mention in closing are refugees who end up rough sleeping due to a lack of adequate support once their claim is accepted – a further issue that has prompted a number of charities to lobby government for change.

So what is being done to meet the needs of rough sleepers? Tackling the issue has certainly been a priority for the current government. Its **Homelessness Reduction Act 2017** places greater responsibility on local authorities to intervene early to prevent homelessness, and it has also produced a **Rough Sleeping Strategy** (2018) later updated with a strategy for **Ending Rough Sleeping for Good** (2022). The proposed approach here is to combine prevention measures – with a particular focus on at risk groups like care leavers; those leaving hospital or prison; asylum seekers/refugees and ex-service people – with swift delivery of support to meet individual needs and in particular help with finding a new home and employment. These aims are backed with an emphasis on “joined-up working” with civil society organisations and a range of targeted funds. To get a sense of how these aims translate into practice in our region we can look at the two local authorities with the highest number of rough sleepers reported, Newcastle and Middlesbrough. Newcastle’s Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025 seeks to end rough sleeping by 2030 and focuses particularly on a multi-agency partnership involving the **Council’s homelessness services and rough sleeping teams**, homelessness charities such as **Changing Lives** and the Police. Middlesbrough gives more prominence to the **No Second Night Out policy** with its emphasis on the speedy identification of rough sleepers and provision

of emergency accommodation and services, and here again there is a commitment to working with voluntary sector partners and other partners.

The Birmingham research cited above suggested that the shared experience of marginalisation and victimisation can create strong bonds between rough sleepers. There are benefits to this if one is cold, lonely or afraid. But there can also be negative consequences with loyalty to the group making it harder to escape from problems like alcohol or drug addiction, increasing individuals’ vulnerability to exploitation by sex-traffickers and drug dealers and making it harder to access services designed to prevent rough sleeping. Philanthropic support needs to be carefully considered from this standpoint: it may be that interventions intended to help such as the provision of food, tents or sleeping bags can provide a further disincentive to escape life on the streets.

Experiences of marginalisation and victimisation can create a sense of “otherness” and mistrust in society and its institutions: the awareness of social exclusion being amplified by collective experiences of both the law on rough sleeping^{xxv} and negative interactions with the police and other authorities. The latter issue will hopefully be partially addressed by new approaches to policing and multi-agency working. These accept the need to offer communities the same protection from anti-social behaviour or criminality amongst rough sleepers as for any other social group, but place greater emphasis on a flexible, patient and assertive approach that is mindful of the trauma homeless people may experience and seeks to offer housing and support as an alternative.^{xxvi} These accord well with recent government policy approaches, and government’s change of heart on proposals to further criminalise rough sleepers in the Criminal Justice Bill is particularly welcome in this context.^{xxvii}

So how can philanthropy add value to existing provision for rough sleepers? We believe that maximum impact can be achieved in three main areas:

1

addressing the root causes of rough sleeping by providing support to young people at risk and their carers e.g. those in or leaving care, excluded or disengaged with education, with mental health issues or at risk of developing drug or alcohol dependencies.

2

supporting services that help people at risk of becoming rough sleepers. We are thinking here of a wide range of services including: youth work; domestic violence services; services for those in the criminal justice system; youth work and family support services; drug and alcohol services and housing, benefit and money advice provision.

3

funding gaps in services for rough sleepers with a particular focus on supporting engagement with wider homeless service provision and practical assistance to support better health and nutrition. This could also include supporting campaigning within the limits of charity law to secure changes in legislation or practice where there is evidence that it aggravates the problem of rough sleeping.



Philanthropy, housing and homelessness: case studies

How Gap Supported Housing used a Community Foundation grant to support homeless adults

Hexham – often voted as one of the country's most desirable places to live – may seem like the last place a homelessness service is needed. But in reality this is far from the case. Gap Supported Housing is a charity that has been providing temporary accommodation and support to homeless and poorly-housed adults in the town since 2000, and demand for its services is unrelenting. As its Chief Executive Andrew Sanders points out:

“Whilst there is a perception that homelessness and deprivation are not issues that require addressing in West Northumberland, high numbers of referrals to our service suggest this is far from the case. Homelessness in rural areas like ours is often a hidden problem.”

Gap has been working with a growing number of people who are especially vulnerable to homelessness due to factors such as poor mental health; learning disabilities; addictions or gambling problems; a history of offending or experience of physical and emotional abuse. It expanded its accommodation offer from 7 to 13 beds in late-2021 with the opening of Links House, a development comprising two four-bed flats, one three-bed flat and one two-bed flat each with communal living rooms, kitchens and ensuite bathrooms along with staff accommodation and laundry facilities. This also enabled it to offer five places in female-only accommodation for the first time.

“Without the help of charitable funders such as the Community Foundation we just wouldn't be able to offer the additional support that is crucial in enabling individuals to make their first steps away from homelessness and begin a new life.”

Andrew Sanders, Chief Executive Officer, Gap Supported Housing

Shortly after the service opened, Gap secured an award of £5,000 from the P&G Charitable Fund at the Community Foundation Tyne & Wear and Northumberland to meet the costs of 12-months' worth of additional one-day-a-week support services. These are designed to enable homeless people to move from supported accommodation to independent living in social housing or privately-rented accommodation. They include such things as help to secure social housing or appropriate private sector accommodation; support with benefits and job searches; assistance with the development of independent living skills (e.g. cooking and budgetting); liaison with health and social services and support once moved with practical issues like furnishing, decorating and signing up for utilities.

Gap faced challenges in delivering the project: everyone using the service has different needs and the pace of what often proves a difficult transition for vulnerable adults cannot be forced. Yet during the period of the award, with support from the Community Foundation alongside a range of other funders, 28 individuals with complex needs were enabled to move into their own homes.

How the Community Foundation is helping Cleveland Housing Advice Centre to address housing and homelessness issues in Middlesbrough and Tees Valley

Cleveland Housing Advice Centre (Chac) is a medium-sized charitable company providing support to people with housing and homelessness issues in Middlesbrough and Tees Valley. Its services include welfare, housing and debt advice and representation in the County Court. The organisation works in partnership with a wide range of local agencies to support its users.

High levels of low-income employment, benefit dependency and deprivation, together with the cost-of-living crisis, have helped fuel levels of problem debt in Middlesbrough and Tees Valley. The Money and Pensions Service estimates that in 2022 around one in six people in Tees Valley were in need of debt advice. The strain financial hardship can put on family relationships, together with repossessions for rent or mortgage arrears, are increasing the risk of homelessness. More than one in every thousand local households in Middlesbrough had their homes repossessed as a result of action by landlords or mortgage providers in 2022. And Centrepoint reports that 280 young people were recorded as approaching the local authority as homeless or at risk of homelessness in 2023, around half of these as a result of a breakdown in relationships at home.

Chac is dependent on support from Middlesbrough Council and a wide range of charitable funders. The Community Foundation Tyne & Wear and Northumberland is a long-term supporter and since our last Vital Signs report in 2017 – which identified housing and homelessness services as a priority – the organisation has received over £60,000 from our funds. Our grants have been used for a range of purposes at Chac including covering core running and staff costs; contributing to the development of outreach services in other areas of Tees Valley and purchasing specialised training for staff and volunteers in money management advice.

“The support received from the Community Foundation since 2004, has helped Chac to train its staff and volunteers, improve its quality and structure and upgrade its facilities - enabling us to provide our services to 13000 people per year”.

Malcolm Bateman, Chair of Trustees, Chac

Outcomes achieved for service users include a reduction in the stress associated with problem debt; an improvement in financial circumstances and – most importantly – avoiding the threat of homelessness. But there have also been wider gains: the service estimates that since 1992 it has brought an additional £120m into the local economy in unclaimed benefits as well as helping to alleviate the pressure on local statutory housing and homelessness services.

You can watch a short video about the work of Cleveland Housing Advice Centre [here](#).



Philanthropy in action:

How charitable funding helps Moving On Durham tackle youth homelessness in County Durham

Moving on Durham was set up in 1998. It provides support to young people aged 16-25 who are homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless, including temporary supported accommodation in over 150 properties leased from private landlords. The work of the organisation is supported by a wide range of national and regional charitable foundations and trusts, including the County Durham Community Foundation and Community Foundation Tyne & Wear and Northumberland.

Since our last Vital Signs report was published in 2017, Community Foundation Tyne & Wear and Northumberland has awarded Moving On Durham grants totalling £35,750 from our Wellesley Trust, Northumberland Village Homes Trust, 1989 Willan Charitable Trust and Pattisons Estate Agents funds mainly to cover the salary costs of its housing and employability support workers.

We spoke to the organisation's Chief Executive, Peter Richards, about how Moving On Durham helps young homeless people and the role of philanthropic funding in supporting its work.

Can you tell us a little about the work that Moving on Durham does?

In the 1990s young homeless people in County Durham were typically placed in hostels in Newcastle or Middlesbrough. Moving On was set up to help make good a lack of local services in County Durham. We now have the capacity to support 150 vulnerable young people who are referred to us by the Local Authority and a range of other agencies.

We provide temporary accommodation – for anything from 6 months to over two years – and provide support that enables a safe transition to independent living. About ten years ago, with funding from the Northern

Rock Foundation, we moved from just providing services to young people living in the community to managing accommodation in partnership with a range of private landlords and housing developers. Although we aren't ruling out owning property at some point in the future, and are looking into becoming a social housing provider, we like the flexibility our current model offers us.

Our measure of success is that young people leaving our accommodation should never need to access it again – although we're always there for them if they do. About 98% of them succeed in this the first time they work with us, when some young people are not ready for this step they often return to us again for another go, we like to be the home of second chances for our young people.

Why are more young people becoming homeless, and are existing services adequate to meet their needs?

The young people we work with are generally vulnerable and from disadvantaged backgrounds. About half are leaving care. Whilst they will get some statutory support to age 25, it is considerably less than that which has been provided up to age 18 so there is a need to fill the gap with services like ours. Others have left the family home due to factors like relationships with parents and carers breaking down, overcrowding, the loss of child benefit and associated money problems, abuse or tensions around sexuality and gender identity.

I can't help thinking that part of the reason we are seeing increased demand is that a lot of the services that once helped prevent young people from entering care, or that enabled families to cope have gone. Things like Sure Start and youth work services, for example.

Our young people are a very diverse group. For example some are hoping to go to university or find work, whilst others are simply struggling to stay out of the criminal justice system. They can be challenging to work with - many have had quite enough of services by the time they reach us! But we offer them help in three main areas: developing the skills needed to live independently; being able to own and resolve the issues that affect them and finding a place in society.

Unfortunately, the number who are not in employment, training or education is high and rising. I think the cost-of-living crisis has led to the daily struggle to make ends meet taking up all their time and energy – they don't have the head-space to think about future plans. It has also meant that part of our service has become not just to help with household budgeting and things like getting fuel bills paid, but also to provide basics like food. And that now means things that require minimal gas or electricity to prepare – which can rule out cheap staple items like potatoes which we can't now give away.

We are seeing our young people leading more solitary lives. It started during Covid and continued as a result of the cost-of-living crisis. Isolation and financial worries are contributing to an increase in mental health issues, at a time when there are long waiting lists for services. For that reason we've recently employed a specialist mental health worker.

Moving On is a relatively large organisation with an income of nearly £2m, and support from philanthropic trusts and foundations looks like a relatively modest part of your overall funding picture. What does this funding stream contribute to the work of your organisation?

It's important to understand how our finances work. We receive very little statutory funding, and currently we don't provide services under contract. A large part of our income comes through enhanced Housing Benefit, but it's ring-fenced to be passed straight on to our property owner partners as rent or used for housing management costs. We can't use it for our actual support services. Those are funded

mainly by grants from charitable funders, and donations secured through our relationship with Durham University and other sponsors in the local community. So although it may look relatively modest, it is absolutely vital to what we do as an organisation.

Are there any gaps in your funding that charitable grant makers could help to fill?

Now you're asking!

For us as an organisation I think the most important thing charitable funders can do is provide reliable, regular and longer-term support that does not come with unduly heavy monitoring requirements. We have limited capacity as an organisation, and spending less time chasing next year's funding or providing a range of feedback over and above what we already report on as a charity would give us more time to focus on the needs of our young people.

A second request I'd like to make is for a bit more of a discretionary approach to some of the funding restrictions that apply to charitable grant programmes. For example in the past we have not been able to apply for grants because of the level of income we receive which – as I've said – is largely due to rent payments passing through our books. And we've also not been able to get funds for providing advice and guidance to homeless young people on the basis that there is a statutory obligation to provide it, whereas we know many young people just won't go to the Council for support.

A final area where I think charitable funders could step in to help is in relation to helping us address digital exclusion. There are significant capital and revenue costs associated with providing free Broadband connectivity within our properties, but it is really important in terms of enabling the young people living in them to access work, manage benefit claims and access services as well as providing a connection to social networks.

Appendix 1:

Table of Indicators

Key area	North East	England	South East	Date*
Housing tenure				
Home owner (owns outright)	32%	33%	34%	2021
Home owner (mortgage/loan/shared ownership)	28%	30%	33%	
Tenant social housing	22%	17%	14%	
Tenant private rented (inc those living rent free)	17%	21%	19%	
Housing affordability				
The number of times you would need to multiply median gross annual earnings to cover the median house price	x5	x8	x10	2024
% of median income that you would need to be spent to meet the median private rent	24%	26%	29%	2023
Housing quality				
Proportion of non-decent homes	13%	15%	9%	2021
Median energy efficiency score	68	68	68	2023
Household debt				
% of households with problem debt (i.e. debt that creates liquidity or solvency problems)	5%	4.5%	4%	2022
Homelessness				
Number of households per 1000 households with an initial assessment of homeless (threatened with homelessness)	7 (9)	7 (6)	5 (5)	2023
Youth homelessness rate	2%	2%	2%	2023
Percentage of rough sleepers by region	2%	100%	17%	2024

* Links to Source

References

- ⁱ See for example Shelter's **Housing Emergency Campaign** and the Centre for Social Justice (2021) **Exposing the hidden housing crisis**
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- ⁱⁱ See <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/bulletins/housingenglandandwales/census2021>
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- ⁱⁱⁱ See <https://nhf.brandstencil.com/resources/live-create/001-home-truths?region=north-east>
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- ^{iv} There are over 10,000 second homes in the region, notably in Northumberland (3,722), Newcastle (2,089) and County Durham (1,467). In 2022 Northumberland alone has nearly 3,000 holiday lets trading as businesses (i.e. available for 140 days per annum).
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- ^v CPRE (2023) **Unravelling a crisis: the state of rural affordable housing in England**
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- ^{vi} Northern Housing Consortium/Smith Institute (2019) **The hidden costs of poor quality housing in the North**
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- ^{vii} Savills (2022) **Improving Housing Quality and Boosting Delivery in the North**
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- ^{viii} See <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/datasets/energyefficiencyofhousingenglandandwaleslocalauthoritydistricts>
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- ^{ix} See <https://www.habinteg.org.uk> Forecast for Accessible Homes 2020
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- ^x See Equality and Human Rights Commission (2018) **Housing and disabled people: Britain's Hidden Crisis** and the evidence given to the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee on **disabled people in the housing sector** disabled people in the housing sector (February 2024). See also <https://differencenortheast.org.uk/the-disability-housing-crisis/>
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- ^{xi} There are three levels of help available and these are explained in the Homelessness section of this report.
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- ^{xii} Crisis (2022) **The homelessness monitor: England 2022**
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- ^{xiii} See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>
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- ^{xiv} An **Albert Kennedy Trust /YouGov report**, published in 2021 found that 17% of LGBTQ+ young people had used casual sex as a means to secure somewhere to stay whilst homeless.
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- ^{xv} See <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cdp-2024-0083/>
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- ^{xvi} Sutton-Hamilton, C., Allard, M., Stroud, R., and Albanese, F. (2022) **"I hoped there'd be more options:" Experiences of the Homelessness Reduction Act, 2018-2021**
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- ^{xvii} Centrepont (2023) **Unaccounted: the scale of youth homelessness in the UK**
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- ^{xviii} Changing Lives (2023) **Breaking down barriers: Unlocking society's full potential**
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- ^{xix} For more analysis on the needs of homeless people in rural communities see: Universities of Kent and Southampton (2023) **Homelessness in the Countryside: A hidden crisis**
-
- ^{xx} Shelter (2006) **Chance of a Lifetime**
-

xi See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/rough-sleeping-snapshot-in-england-autumn-2023/rough-sleeping-snapshot-in-england-autumn-2023#consultation-with-local-agencies> The methodology of the survey data is questionable, with more robust estimates putting the number of rough sleepers in London alone at over 10,000 compared to the official figure of around 1,000. Newcastle (26) and Middlesbrough (18) account for nearly half of rough sleepers recorded in our region. For a critique of its tendency to under-report women and vulnerable minorities see: <https://www.shp.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=d383bae1-cbf0-4723-b769-a4c9dec76740>

xxii See <https://www.bcu.ac.uk/news-events/news/a-vicious-cycle-of-vulnerability-and-victimisation--new-study-reveals-reality-of-life-on-the-street-for-rough-sleepers#:~:text=The%20authors%20found%20that%20negative,care%20services%20and%20law%20enforcement.>

xxiii <https://www.chroniclive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/more-96-per-cent-beggars-10482765> The data is some years old and relates to Newcastle, but it seems to reflect what we know about the current national picture.

xxiv Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2020) **Understanding the Multiple Vulnerabilities, Support Needs and Experiences of People who Sleep Rough in England: Initial findings from the Rough Sleeping Questionnaire**

xxv See <https://www.crisis.org.uk/get-involved/campaign/the-criminal-justice-bill-and-homelessness/>

xxvi National Police Chief's Council/Crisis (2021) **From enforcement to ending homelessness: How police forces, local authorities and the voluntary sector can best work together.** Crisis

xxvii See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-69005091>

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Let’s talk

We hope that this report will inspire more of you to give to causes that contribute to improving health. You can help inform our work on this and the other Vital Signs themes by completing the Vital Signs North East 2024 questionnaire. Just visit www.communityfoundation.org.uk/vitalsigns or scan the QR code below.

If you would like to discuss this report further, or what you could do to help, please contact us:

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