



Are Councils Prepared for a Rise in Homelessness?

By Mark Lovell, Managing Director at One CIC (Thursday 1st October 2020)

Over the past two days, I have been in Leeds recruiting our first Head of Service who will spearhead One CIC's work in and around Yorkshire. I have met some fantastic candidates – each of them has dedicated years of service, advocating for and supporting homeless people through accommodation-based services and support – they are experts by experience.

Feedback generally was that there seems to be a lack of innovation, speed and drive when working with councils to try and create meaningful, person-led provision which enables homeless people to develop the skills and reliance to live independently.

This insight made me wonder how prepared councils are for a potentially significant increase in homelessness and the urgent need for more high-quality, affordable housing stock.

The UK is currently at the beginning of another recession, brought on by the Covid-19 virus and the three-month lockdown which took hold of the country earlier this year.

Although numbers are always difficult to confirm, the UK currently has around 320,000 homeless people (according to Shelter), which includes people who are sleeping rough, those in

temporary housing such as hostels, hotels, B&Bs and sofa surfers.

If we are heading towards the predicted downturn in the economy and the end of the government's furlough scheme, we will likely see thousands of redundancies. With people unable to pay their rent or mortgage, it is likely we will see a new cohort of homeless people, adding to an already challenging problem.

What's the plan?

Part of the problem with the ongoing homelessness crisis is that it's a tough nut to crack. Historically, councils have been slow to react to the rise in people looking for affordable housing, so we are already far behind where we need to be, even without the impending recession.

The government was proactive in getting rough sleepers into hotels throughout lockdown and has created grants for councils to apply for, but the overall objective of the governments' Homelessness Reduction Act was to reduce homelessness. This hasn't happened.

It is clear that the legislation isn't doing enough to reduce homelessness. People are still losing their homes, and the help available is often failing to

prevent or relieve homelessness.

Shelter argued from the outset that legislation alone could not reduce homelessness. Homelessness will only end when the structural barriers to keeping or finding a home are removed.

Their research shows clearly that councils struggle to prevent or relieve people's homelessness because of the lack of access to homes people can afford. They found that the chronic shortage of social housing and insufficient local housing allowance rates (the housing benefit for private renters) are pushing people into homelessness.

Since the Act was implemented, the number of homeless households living in temporary accommodation has increased by 8%. This continues to grow in part because councils are struggling to prevent and relieve homelessness at an earlier stage.

In an ideal world, there would be extensive government grants and schemes in place to ensure we are building more council-run or affordable property. Still, there isn't enough money in government or councils' budgets to get a hold of the ever-growing homelessness crises.

In place of this, charities and non-for-profit CIC's like One CIC are working as hard we can to provide vital resources including high-quality, affordable housing (at or sub the Local Housing Allowance), alongside brilliant support to enable people to thrive. Over the next 12 months, we will provide our first 500 supported housing schemes and encourage councils to embrace and work in partnership with One CIC to deliver urgently needed accommodation and community services.

What can councils do?

As you can imagine, there are some areas of the UK which are more affected by homelessness than others, and it is often down to individual councils to lead the way in building schemes to relieve the problem.

A good example of the challenges faced is in Manchester. If you've ever walked around the city, the number of people sleeping rough is clear to see. Manchester is also an area of substantial economic growth, fast becoming the second biggest business hub in the country.

The segregation between the rich and the poor is becoming more and more apparent, much like it is in other towns and cities across the UK.

Despite there being a number of targeted charities in the Greater Manchester area, there is still a rising number of people who are becoming homeless and a shortage of affordable social housing.

Greater Manchester's Mayor, Andy Burnham, is very vocal about the issue and was pivotal in helping get homeless people off the streets during lockdown. Whilst this was a practical short-term solution, it is papering over the cracks, and we all need to collaborate and act quickly to ensure we can start to make a real impact.

Whilst Manchester appears to be making some progress, and once the Government-funded housing scheme (brought in to get people off the streets during the pandemic) ends, we estimate that the crisis will be even worse than before.

The team at One CIC are working hard to develop our first supported housing schemes in and around Greater Manchester, and we look forward to a collaborative and meaningful partnership with GMCA and the Mayor.

Alongside developing our work in Manchester, One CIC is proactively developing supported housing schemes, investing in experienced highly skilled staff to support the development of One CIC communities across Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire, Durham, Hartlepool, Peterborough, Corby, and Liverpool.

We understand that councils are under incredible pressure with stretched budgets – our plea is that we all work together to deliver better outcomes for homeless people. Remembering, we are all one and we are also all the same.

What can I do?

If you want to get involved, we'd suggest starting with a conversation with your local MP or councillor. They will be able to advise of the current strategies and plans in place to deal with homelessness in your area and give you localised advice on any ways in which you can help.

You can also speak to us! We are always looking for more people to join One CIC to assist us in the work we do in ensuring that every person in the UK has a place to call home.

