



Is there a way to tackle the ever-growing homelessness crisis in the UK?

By Mark Lovell, Managing Director at One CIC (Tuesday 25th August, 2020)

On Saturday night, I sat down to watch the first episode of the new BBC documentary series 'Manctopia – Billion Pound Property Boom'.

The series is centred around a property developer who is repurposing and gentrifying an area of central Manchester, where you can find millionaire property buyers searching for the perfect penthouse alongside people on affordable council house waiting lists and homeless people living in a 30-bed shared hostel.

It is a great reminder of the divide and disparity we currently see in our society.

The programme made me think about some of the problems and challenges we face across the social housing sector.

At this moment in time, we do not have enough affordable housing in the UK. For developers like Capital & Centric, who are featured throughout the documentary, the high-end private market is more lucrative, and the incentives to build social housing within developments are not significant enough. Investments can also be devalued if the developer perceives delivering a percentage of social housing problematic.

The demand for affordable housing in places like Manchester and Salford far outweighs the supply, and this is the case across many parts of the UK. There just isn't enough money in the public purse to solve the problem. Partnerships between councils, developers and private investors are going to be critical components in finding new solutions that provide more housing stock.

Whilst the focus of homelessness is often on rough sleepers, we must not forget that the crisis is far more complicated than this. Many individuals and families (like the one's featured in the programme) are living on sofas, sharing beds or living in unsuitable accommodation like hostels or B&Bs.

I have ever growing concerns about the state this homelessness crisis will be in 12 months from now, where many thousands more people will become unemployed and lose their homes. Now is the time for real, urgent action before we reach this point.

The levels of homelessness in the UK is something which successive governments have been trying to tackle for many years. Whilst the aim has always been to reduce the numbers or to end homelessness entirely, there aren't any confirmed figures for how many people it truly affects.

From the figures we do have, it's clear to see that the number of homeless people in the UK is on the rise, and this is going to worsen as the effects of the latest recession take hold.

How do people become homeless?

There are many different reasons why someone may end up homeless, and these can be attributed to two areas: social and personal.

Social causes are things such as a lack of affordable housing, unemployment or a poor education, often more common in more rural areas of the country or where there is less local industry.

Personal causes are things such as the breakup of a relationship, death of family members, domestic violence, losing a job or mental and physical health issues.

How big is the problem?

As mentioned above, the exact official figures are unknown; however, Crisis UK states that there was a 15% rise in the number of people sleeping rough in England on any given night in 2017 from the previous year (4,751).

With hundreds of thousands of people currently at risk of losing their jobs due to the effects of the Coronavirus, there is every expectation that homeless figures in the UK are going to rise at a much higher rate over the next year.

How do we resolve the homeless issue?

This is the big question. Homelessness is not a new problem, and whilst it's definitely getting worse, the solutions are not getting any easier.

Many people believe that the simple answer is to provide free housing to homeless people. It was widely reported that at the beginning of the pandemic, everyone was taken off the streets and given accommodation – so the problem was solved, right?

Not quite.

Whilst temporary measures can be put in place, they are exactly that – temporary. Many homeless people were put into hotels and hostels and were without the resources they needed to properly integrate back into society.

It is also naïve to think that every rough sleeper wants to move off the streets; there are issues around trusting people, missing the sense of comrade on the streets, some people worry about the loneliness and isolation of being on their own in an apartment.

In reality, there is a lack of affordable housing in the UK at the moment, and many of the homes available aren't always suitable for people's needs.

Whilst council houses do exist, there tends to be long waiting lists in popular areas, meaning that people are either placed far away from where they can work, or end up in areas where they don't know anyone.

Renting from a private landlord can be hugely expensive and many don't accept housing benefits, meaning it can be really tough to find a property which is affordable for people who earn less or are not currently working.

Many people who find themselves homeless end up in inappropriate accommodation like large hostels or B&Bs which are inappropriate and actually prove more expensive than more suitable housing options.

How does One CIC help?

At One CIC, we see the process of moving from being homeless into high-quality, affordable housing as a partnership between us and the people we are supporting.

We believe that in order to do this successfully, people need to feel empowered – building yourself up from being homeless isn't a simple process and it's one which requires a lot of support and trust.

Our strategy is based on three core principles:

DEVELOP: We work in partnership with homeless people across the UK, giving them high-quality accommodation, support, training and advice. We develop pathway accommodation (shared and self-contained) with an understanding that everyone has different needs and wants.

BUILD: Our support enables those we help to feel empowered, building their confidence and skillset with the opportunity to work within their local One CIC.



RETURN: A large percentage of people once supported will be employed by One CIC and end up supporting more people.

Using this method, we enable the people we work with to take responsibility for their lives, develop their personal and professional experiences and build something they're proud of.

We firmly believe that this is the key to successfully reintroducing previously homeless people back into society.

Get in Touch

At One CIC, we work closely with councils, charities and other organisations to take referrals for homeless people across the UK. You can find out more about One CIC [here](#).

We must remember that the line between being housed and being homeless is very thin – it affects people from all walks of life and can be incredibly difficult to get out of.

If you or someone you know needs support, please get in touch and we will offer assistance in any way that we can.

If you'd like to find out more about how you can help out at One CIC, please do contact us.

