
FINDINGS

2022

Dying Homeless Project



Museum of Homelessness Trustee
and Core Group member Katie
Langford at the Vigil; March 2022
Photocredit: Anthony Luvera



Overview

The Dying Homeless Project, which was set up by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism in October 2017 and taken on by Museum of Homelessness in April 2019, aims to document and remember every person who dies whilst homeless in the United Kingdom.

We remember people on an online memorial page and we hold local and national events to commemorate people who have died. We have previously published findings in August 2019, March 2020, February 2021 and in March 2022.

Since the project began in October 2017, we have documented the deaths of 5232 people on our memorial. These findings and analysis are correct as at 4th April 2023. The project is not static and the data is constantly evolving as new findings come in via the Coroner's system, late FOIs or other research routes.

THE TIMES | Tuesday February 23 2021

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Leading articles

Rough Justice

New figures on homeless deaths should shame ministers into action

rough sleeping within five years, and last year the government pledged an extra £235 million towards that ambitious but eminently achievable goal.

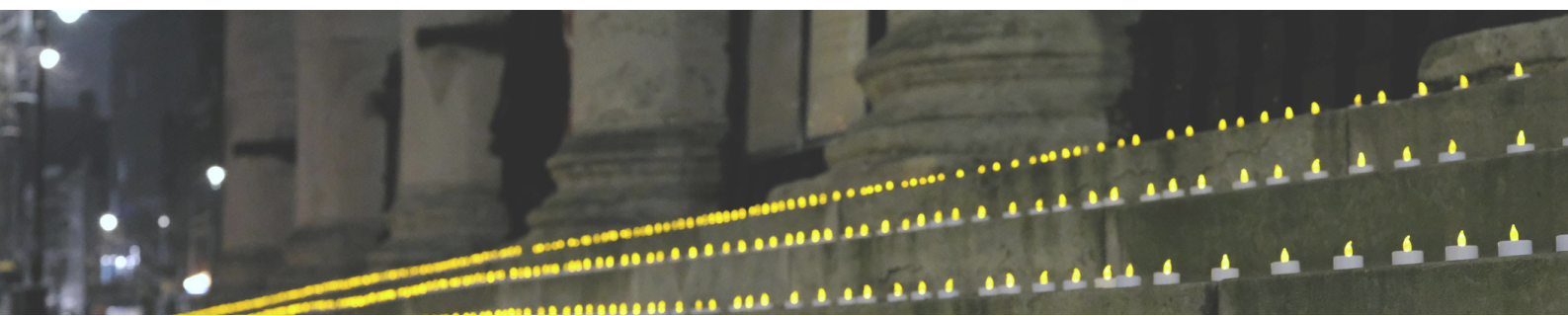
Indeed, as the first wave of coronavirus infections swept the country last March, the state moved quickly to accommodate tens of thousands of

any government determined to solve the problem.

That achievement makes the 975 deaths verified last year by the Museum of Homelessness, a campaign group, all the more lamentable. Only 3 per cent of those deaths were due to coronavirus, indeed the figure is higher than that recorded

Methodology

The Dying Homeless Project collects information year-round; this can come from interested members of the public, grassroots groups, homelessness sector workers, and via public reporting. A significant proportion of the data comes from official sources via Freedom of Information (FOI) requests. The definition of homelessness is people who are sleeping rough, living in emergency or temporary accommodation such as hostels or B&Bs, living in supported housing for people who are homeless, sofa surfing or squatting. We include all people who do not have a settled home, regardless of immigration status. Prior to 2020, both the Bureau of Investigative Journalism and MoH had experienced difficulty in securing, under FOI, data relating to how local councils record and account for people who have died whilst homeless. However, this is the third year when we have amended our FOI requests and had additional resources to support this data collection. The result is a more comprehensive set of data than before.

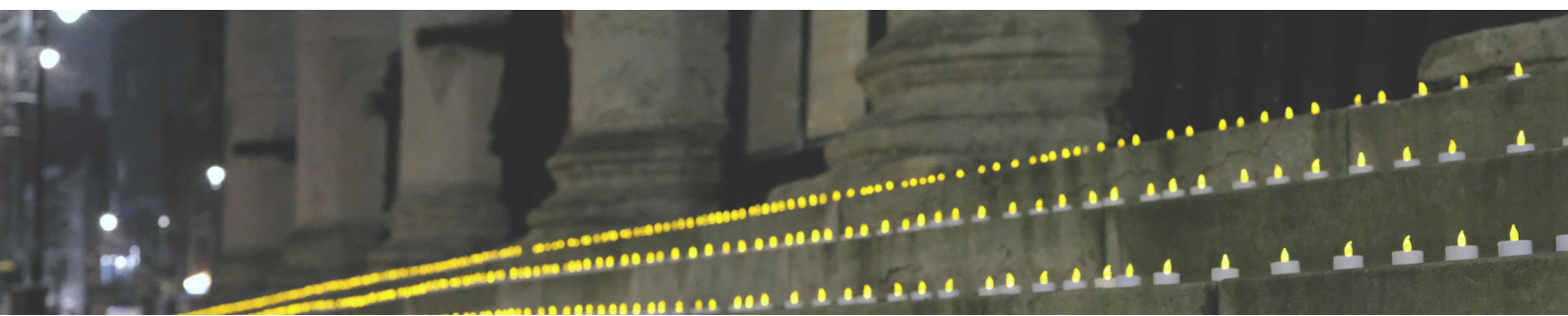


Methodology

This year, we made an amendment to our FOI requests, and we asked about deaths that took place when people were living in exempt accommodation. This is defined as a type of supported, usually shared, housing that is exempt from usual Housing Benefit limits because of the added support that is provided.

Exempt accommodation is used to house people experiencing homelessness, but is not currently regulated. There have been growing concerns about the quality of support that is provided to people living in these types of accommodation. In 2021, Crisis reported that 150,000 households were living in exempt accommodation. They stated 'due to a lack of meaningful oversight and regulation, many exempt providers are abusing the system for financial gain: providing little or no support, whilst leaving tenants in poorly managed, often dangerous accommodation.'⁽¹⁾

We have added exempt accommodation as an inquiry focus for our investigation this year. For consistency, to enable us to make comparisons with previous years of our investigations, the deaths of people living in exempt accommodation are not counted within our headline figures and are reported on separately at the end.



Methodology

Main sources of data

We gather information from news reports, local networks, and also cross-reference names that are remembered at homelessness memorial services with FOI data. We use these methods to try to capture people who might not be recorded under official sources. Information on people's deaths is sourced from news reporting and information from grassroots groups, the sector, and the public. In addition, we have developed the Dying Homeless Project coalition – a group of people who meet regularly to plan the direction of the project.

Coalition members include people from around the UK, including people affected by homelessness and people who work in services. They feed into the project, providing vital advice, direction, and information in relation to finding out about the deaths of homeless people.

We have strict and rigorous verification processes and if we are in any doubt, we will remove a record from the data.

Of the 1313 people identified this year, 1187 of those people were shared with us under Freedom of Information requests.



Methodology

Legal and ethical framework

Developed with Farrer & Co LLP

1. Rights under GDPR and UK data protection law apply only to living persons. Therefore, on a legal basis, MoH does not need to consider the deceased individual's data protection rights nor do we have obligations under GDPR towards that person.
2. However, a duty of confidentiality may be owed to the deceased individual (and their relatives) in respect to information where there was a reasonable expectation of confidentiality.
3. Our blanket approach is therefore only to share information that would be available via public record. For example, details from a death certificate or a coroner's inquest.
4. However, our main consideration in publicly sharing findings relating to someone who has died homeless is that publications by MoH do not wherever possible cause distress or harm to friends, family, and people who knew the person.



Methodology

Legal and ethical framework

5. MoH will not process sensitive information related to individuals, such as medical records or case notes. We note that representatives of deceased people have the right to request a legal duty of confidentiality around such information.

6. In respect of homelessness services and agencies, we will not name individuals or organisations that report in to us and will make every effort to respect the professional integrity of organisations working in the field wherever possible.

7. We operate the 'power of veto' where if a relative of a deceased person contacts us and requests information to be removed from the site, we will do so.

Where a death is reported via the website or other less formal means, we have a strict verification process working with local authorities or local services. We also try and ensure that family have been informed prior to publication.

It is our policy not to share on social media or elsewhere reports of any particular death until we have completed our verification process

Summary findings

This year we have collected information on 1313 deaths in 2022 of people experiencing homelessness. Last year we reported 1286 deaths, and the year before 976 deaths. We remember everyone who lost their lives in 2022 with love and respect. This report represents our findings, and our ongoing attempts to galvanise action to prevent future losses of life.

We are appalled to have to publish similar recommendations again this year, but we will reiterate the change we feel is needed for as long as we have to. It is simply unacceptable that so many people are dying whilst experiencing homelessness when there are clear ways to prevent unnecessary deaths that are not being acted on.

The total number of deaths reported is likely to be higher than our figures suggest, as several local authorities did not respond to our FOI requests. For example, Birmingham, the UK's second-largest city has told us they do not collect information on how and when people are dying in homelessness settings. Additionally, not all councils provided all the types of information requested. For example, some just gave us several deaths but no further details. Therefore, the detailed information related to specific themes (e.g., age, causes) is based on a proportion which we detail where appropriate.

This year, we have documented a 2% increase from the deaths we reported in 2022. We have seen an increase in the number of people dying while homeless in England and Wales, with decreases in Scotland and Northern Ireland compared to the year before. Overall, this is an 85% increase over the number we published in 2019 when we took this project on.



Commentary on the data

Our data is published ahead of the official ONS figures on the deaths of people who are homeless. It is important to note that our methodologies are different.

The ONS uses experimental statistics to estimate the numbers of deaths in England and Wales, based on death registrations in accommodation they know to be provided for people experiencing homelessness.

Our investigation covers the whole of the UK. We nurture relationships with bereaved families, friends and the grassroots community so that we can remember people who died in a wide variety of insecure situations that may not always be captured by official statistics. In addition we use FOIs to councils rather than drawing on death certificates. Our project is live and updated throughout the year

Despite these differences in methodology, we note that the ONS statistics have also increased over time; they note that their most recent estimate for 2021 is significantly higher than their estimates for 2013-2017.



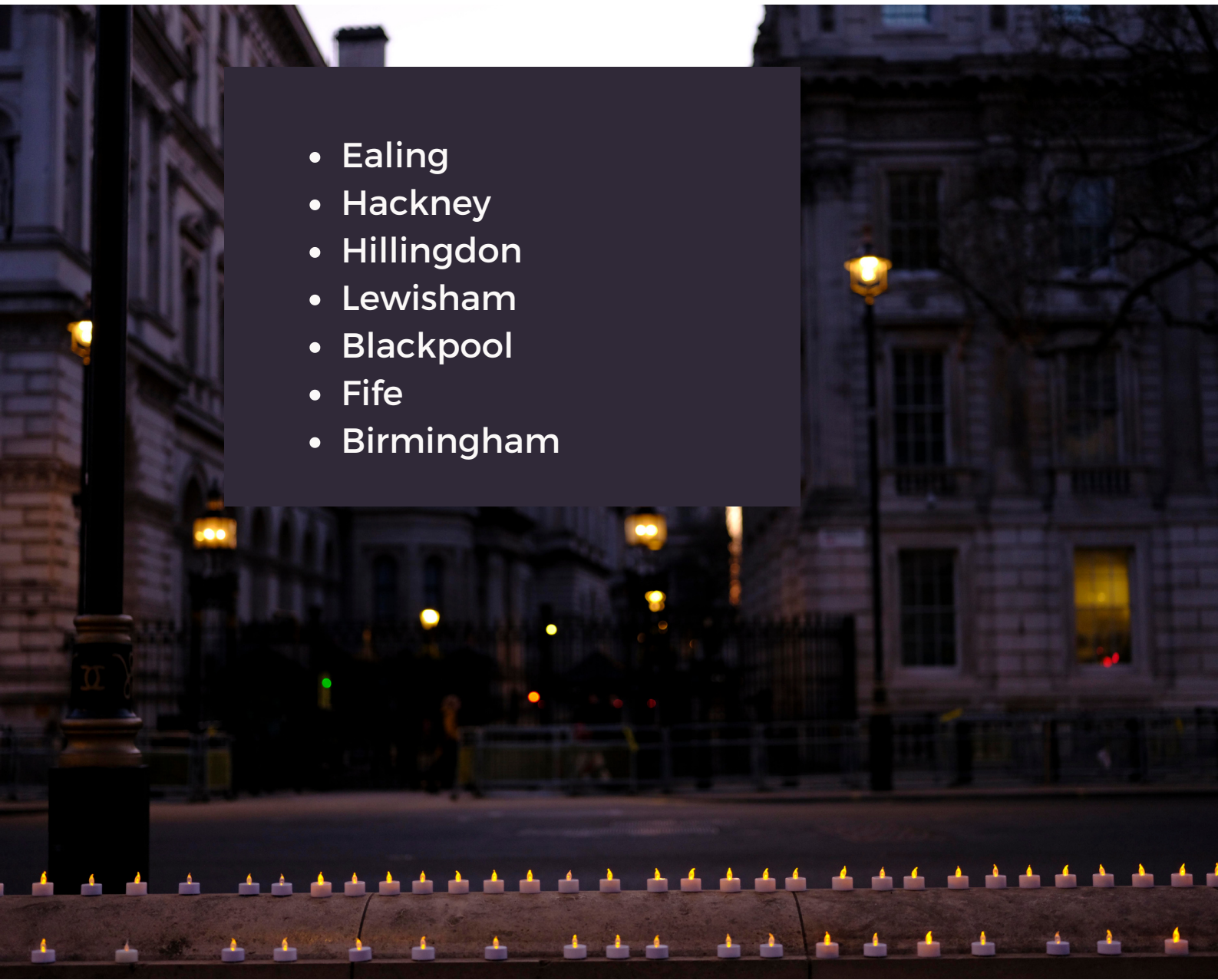
National Vigil 2022 Photo: Anthony Luvera

Local Authorities that don't respond

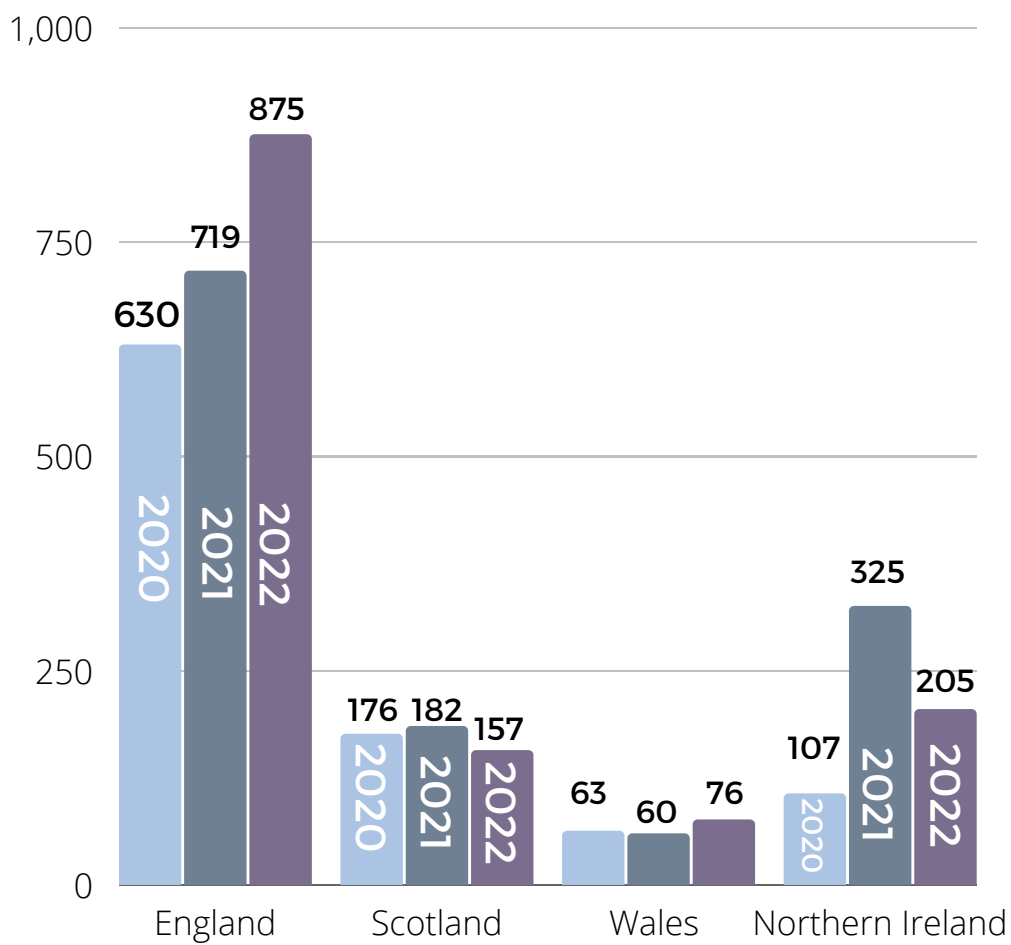
A large proportion of our data comes from FOI requests. We note that there are certain authorities that we would expect to collect information who have not responded to our requests for the last two years, or who state that they do not hold this data. They include:

National Vigil 2022 Photo: Anthony Luvera

- Ealing
- Hackney
- Hillingdon
- Lewisham
- Blackpool
- Fife
- Birmingham



Picture across the UK

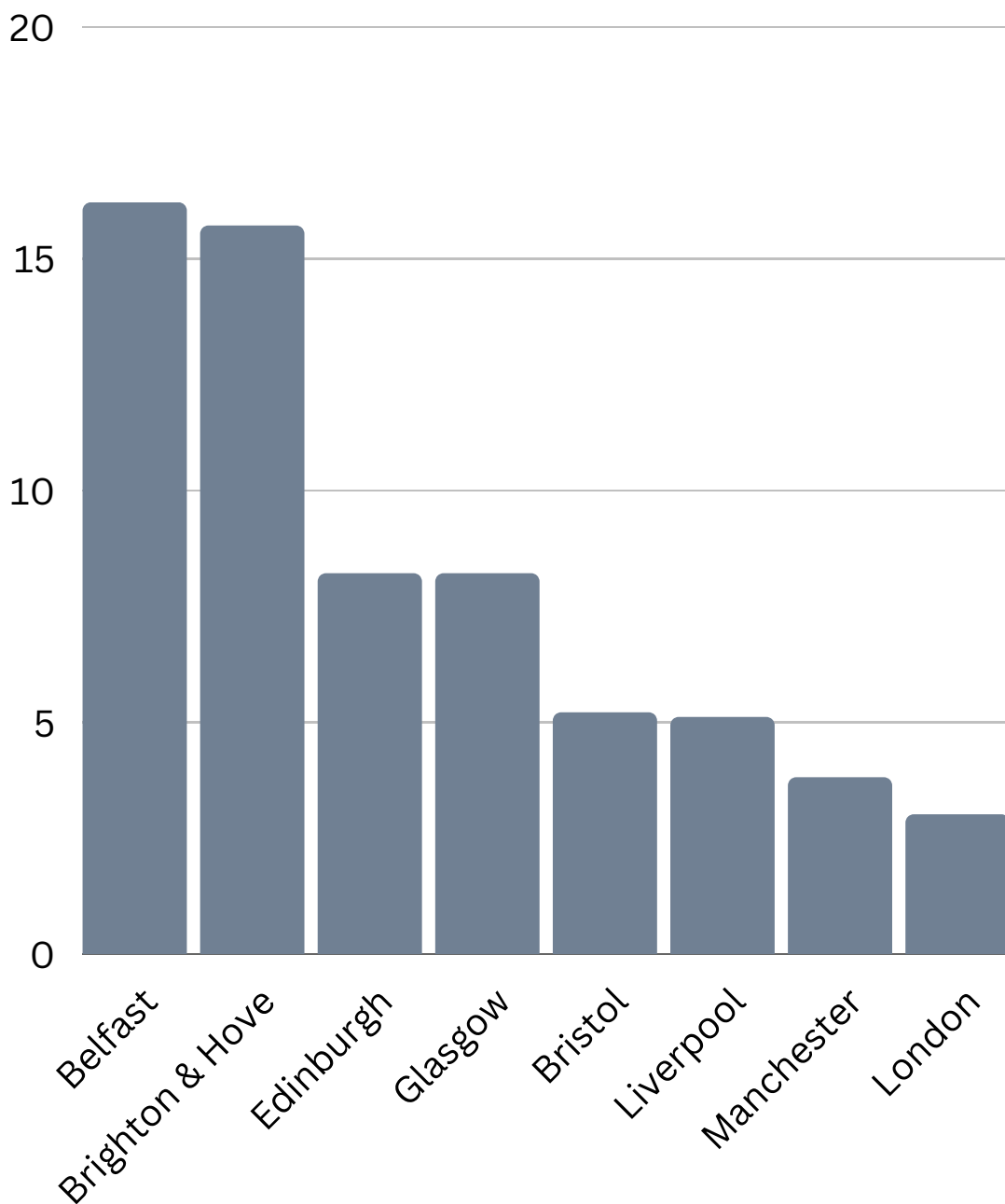


Picture across the UK

Death rates per 100,000 people

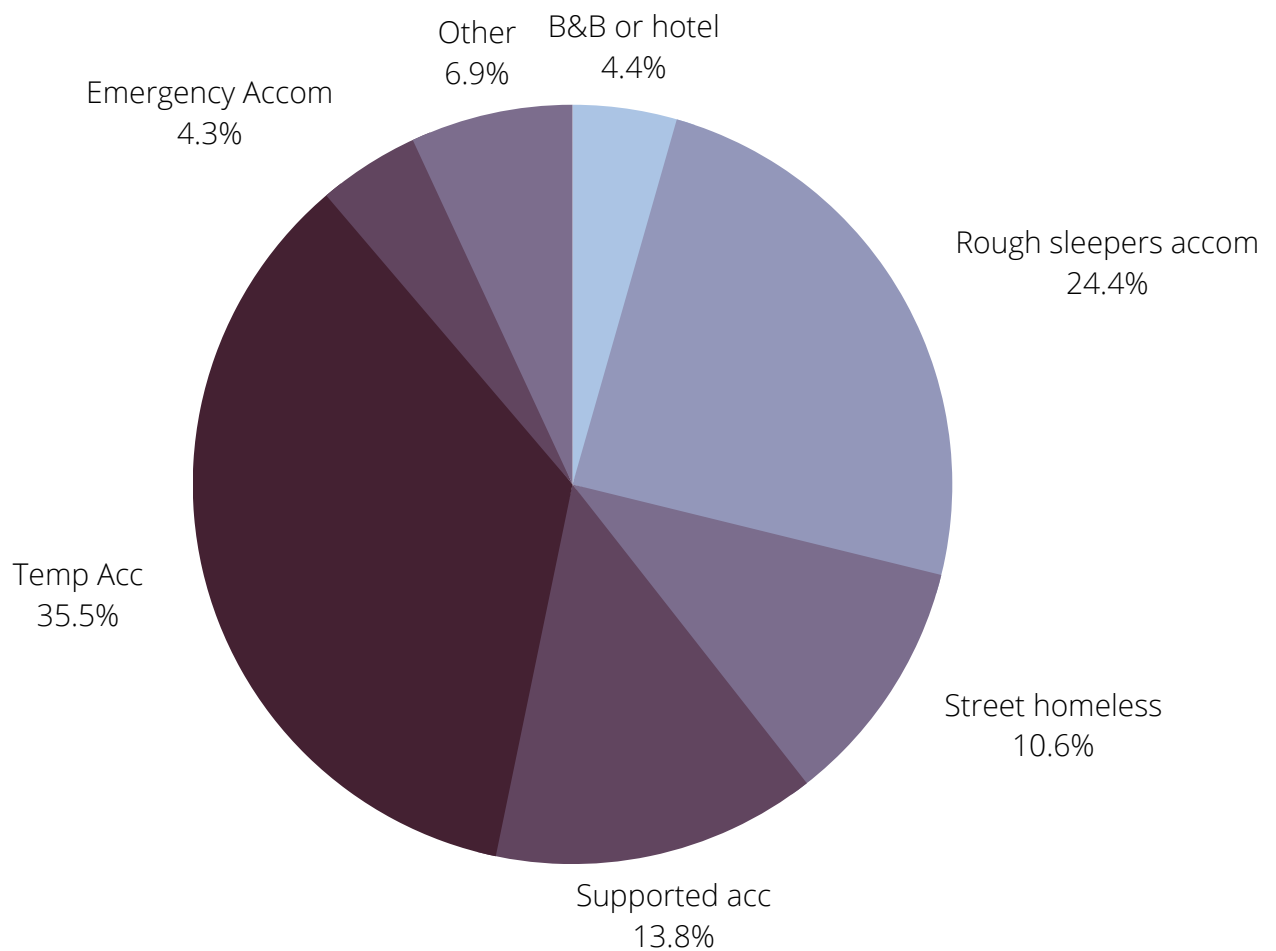
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2022



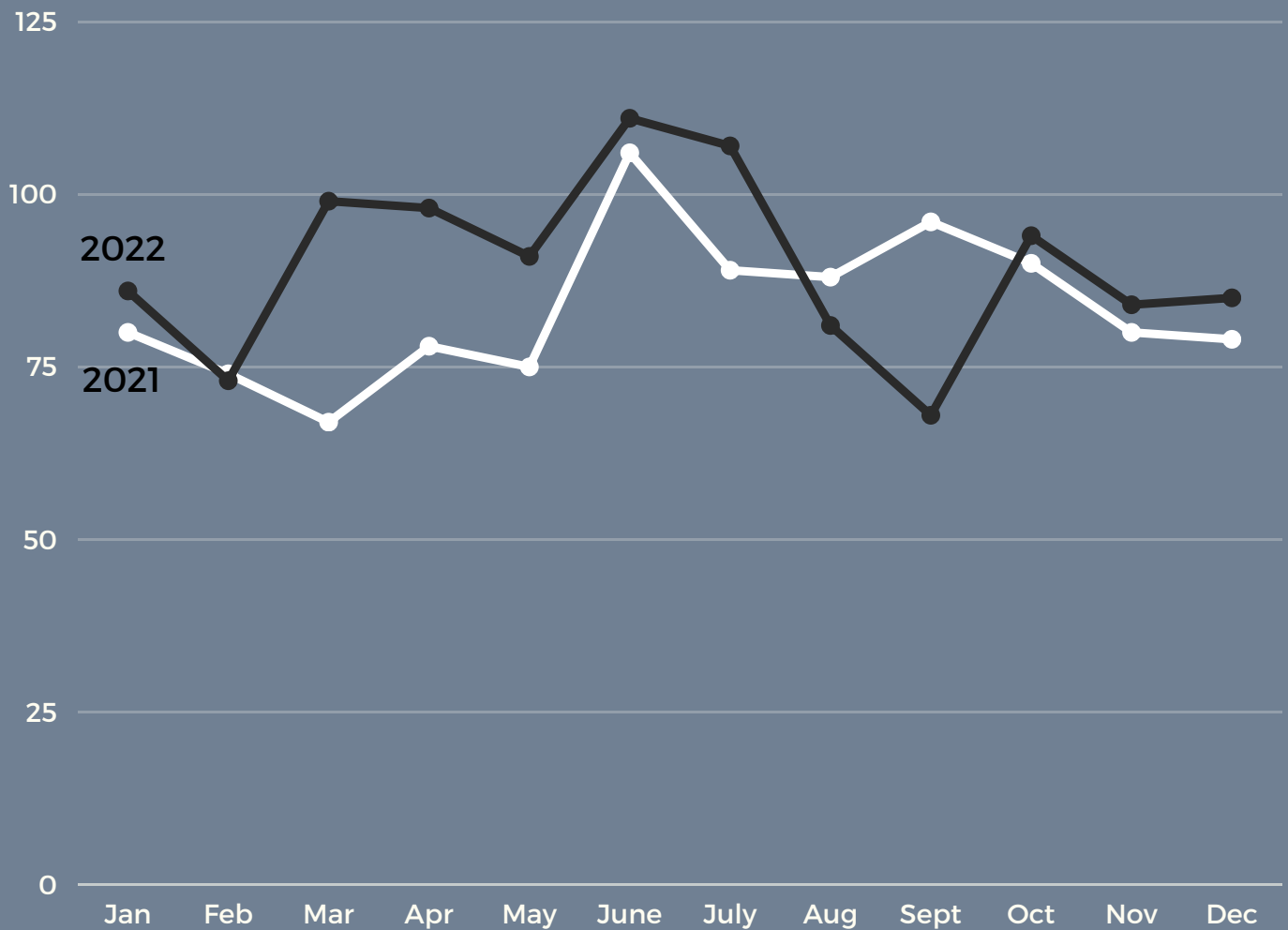
Population data drawn from <https://populationdata.org.uk/>

Accommodation type



Rough sleeping is only one form of homelessness, and we know that there are numerous risks associated with living in insecure forms of accommodation such as hostels, hotels and temporary accommodation. We urge policy makers and funders to invest in permanent and stable homes to prevent future deaths.



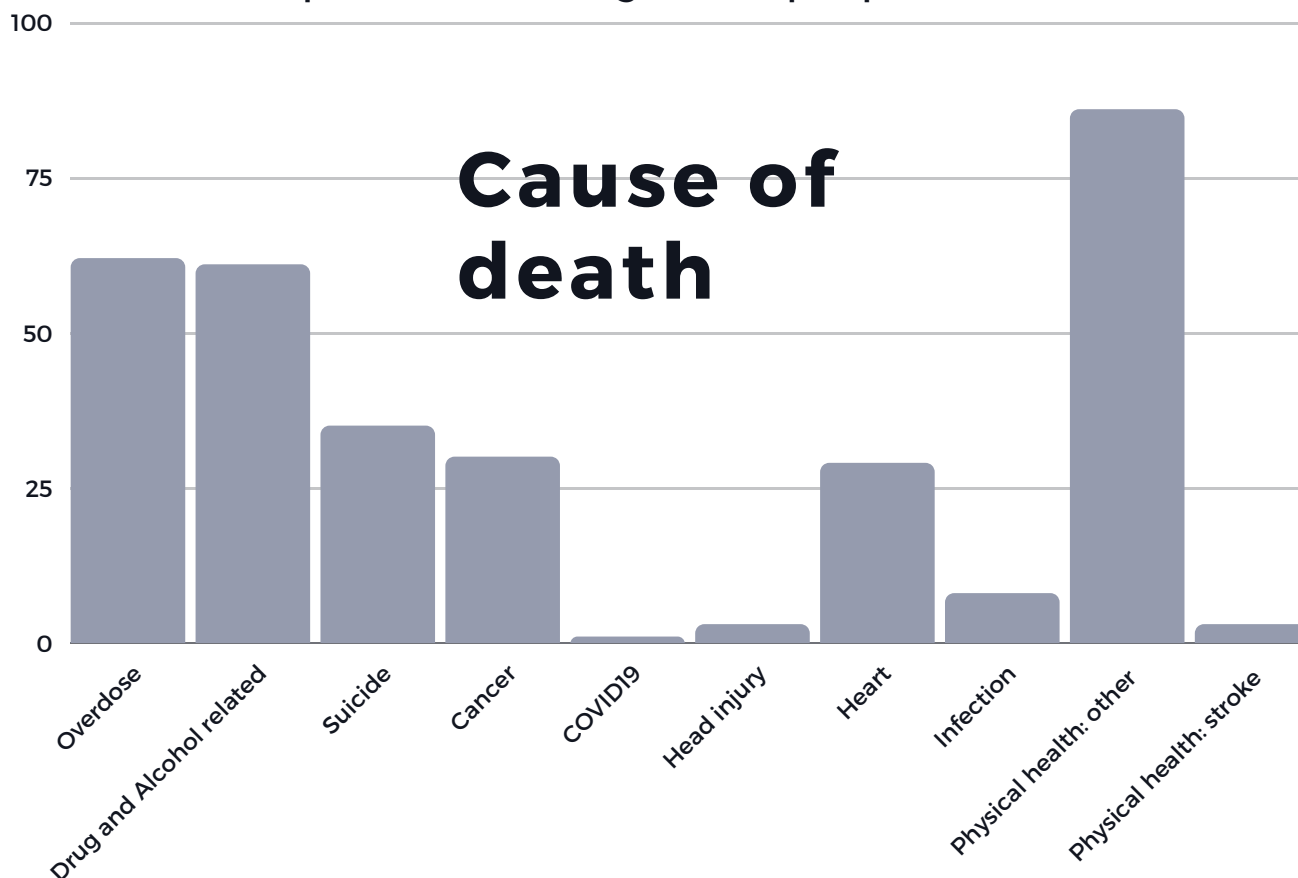


Date of death

This graph shows the numbers of people who died in each month. We can see here the pattern of deaths actually shows higher numbers of deaths in the summer, contrary to common beliefs that many people die in the winter months. We have highlighted the risk to life in our recent investigation into homelessness and climate change - Severe Weather Emergency (2)

People who are living in emergency and insecure forms of housing are at risk all year around.

Selected causation information. Causation data is only a snapshot, consisting of 340 people out of 1313



Deaths related to drug and alcohol use and overdoses are the highest category, after physical health conditions. In particular, 24 drug related and overdose deaths were of people living on the streets and who had no fixed abode.

We have previously called for the piloting of harm reduction spaces to reduce and prevent unnecessary drug related deaths. The efficacy of these is well-evidenced for example, in *The Lancet* calling for overdose prevention centres in 2022 (3) and our findings support the urgent need for supportive, safe spaces for people using drugs.

Additionally, the new charity *The People's Recovery Project* which has been founded by Dying Homeless Project coalition members is seeking to provide alternative and faster routes into recovery for people experiencing homelessness and we urge policy makers and funders to support this mission.

Spotlight on The People's Recovery Project

Founded by Dying Homeless Project Coalition members Ed Addison and Nathan Rosier



The People's Recovery project launched in 2023 and is piloting an alternative route into detox and rehab, without conditions or delays for people experiencing street homelessness and addiction, by raising the money to be able to fund this independently. The project is currently in development and will be operational in 2023

“We cannot sit by and do nothing about this continuing sad and dangerous situation. As drug related deaths continue to rise year upon year in the UK The People's Recovery Project is a direct response to the current paradigm. We will work tirelessly to ensure we achieve changes in the system that mean people using substances problematically can access life saving treatment when they need it and when they want it. Abstinence is not the only way and residential treatment is not a panacea, but this pathway needs to exist and not just for people who have the personal means to pay for it. Through this innovative new approach we are building a community of individuals in recovery who have experienced street homelessness who have the knowledge and capability to lead our work and direct our campaigns.



Suicide

Last year we reported on 31 people completing suicide; this has increased to 35 this year. Five of these deaths were of people who were street homeless and had no fixed abode.

Whether people have nowhere to stay or are housed temporarily in some form of impermanent housing, access to high-quality, trauma informed mental health support is vital and we are saddened that our findings again highlight the gap in this vital provision for people experiencing homelessness. Being 'trauma informed' is talked about more than ever within the homelessness sector, yet we are concerned that this does not always translate to a true understanding of the impacts of trauma and the provision of support within housing projects that is based on a genuinely caring and healing environment.

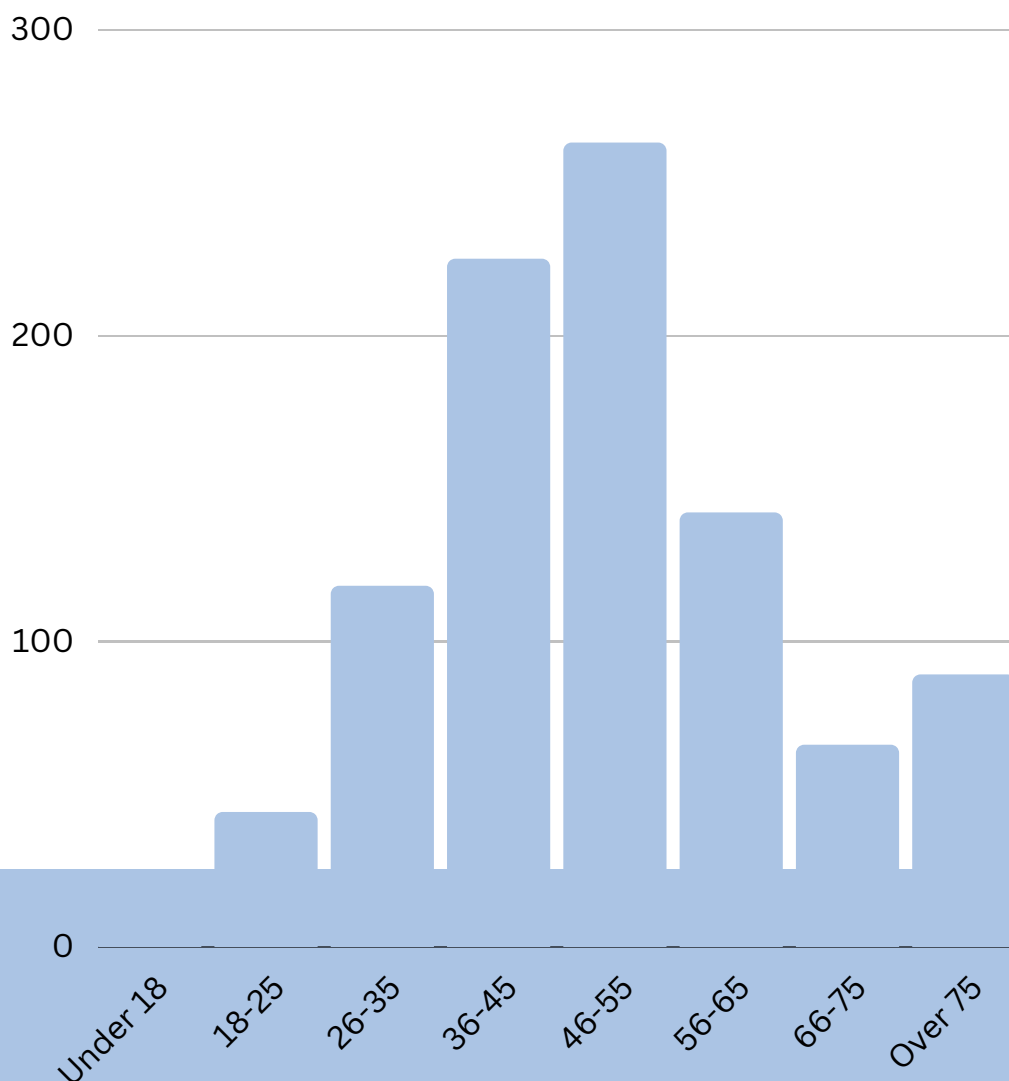


National Vigil 2022 Photo: Anthony Luvera

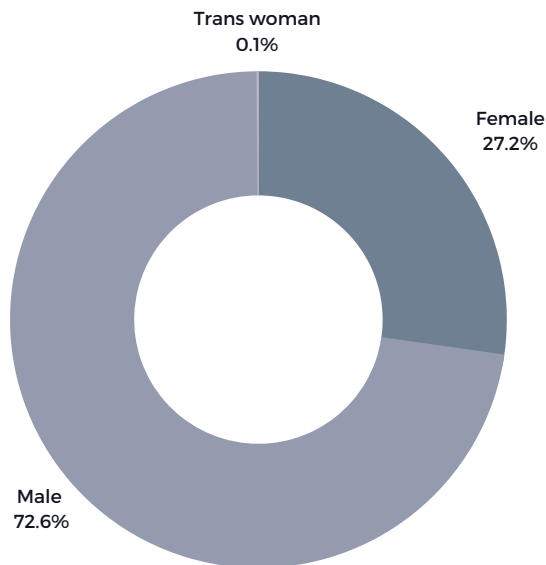
If you are reading this and finding life difficult, Samaritans are here - day or night, 365 days a year. You can call them for free on 116 123, email them at jo@samaritans.org, or visit www.samaritans.org to find your nearest branch.

Age

We know the age of 951 people out of the total. This shows that people experiencing homelessness are dying at very young ages, with the highest proportions from our data dying between the ages of 36-55. This is shocking in a country where on average, the majority of people die well into their 80s (according to the ONS latest statistics on life expectancy.) Recent investigations have highlighted the huge numbers of children growing up homeless and in temporary accommodation, while at the other end of the spectrum, we have documented 12 deaths of people aged over 90 experiencing homelessness, all of which were in Northern Ireland. Safe, stable accommodation should be a right for everyone, whether at the beginning or nearer the end of their lives.



Gender



We know the gender of 789 of 1313 people who died. The breakdown is shown here.

215 women died across the United Kingdom, 89 of whom were homeless in Northern Ireland.

Our records show that 40 women in Northern Ireland were over 75 when they died whilst homeless. We strongly recommend that this is investigated further.

Our findings this year reiterate what we found last year: gender is still treated as a very binary concept and therefore it is likely that people of marginalised genders are not represented accurately within our data.

Recent research (England, 2022) has highlighted how the centering of cis people presents trans identities themselves as risky, and how transphobic marginalisation in homelessness services is normalised. "Structural and economic inequalities translate to significantly elevated homelessness risks among trans people, yet trans people are often under-represented among homelessness service users." (4)

We urge service providers, commissioners and policy-makers to urgently think critically about the role they play in supporting trans and non-binary people and tackling transphobia within their services and structures, for example, by using this guidance from the Outside Project and Homeless Link (7) :

<https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/supporting-lgbtqi-people/>

Exempt accommodation

This is a new area of focus for 2022. We are keeping the data separate to ensure the integrity of our year on year analysis.

Exempt accommodation is not commissioned formally by local authorities but it is used to house vulnerable people. Part of the issue is therefore a lack of oversight and scrutiny about what happens in exempt accommodation and the quality of both the housing and support. Exempt accommodation can be used to house people who are not just homeless but also experiencing other challenges, or who are not catered for within the mainstream housing market, such as learning disabilities.

Most local authorities responded to our FOI saying that they do not have data on deaths in exempt accommodation, however 12 did provide data.

The total number of deaths we were told about was 151. Of these, 109 were in Manchester. This is an appalling number and given that many other authorities do not record the data, we are concerned that it could be only the tip of the iceberg. The other authorities that responded provided the following information:

Area	Number of deaths
Hull	7
Manchester	109
Mansfield	5
Mid Devon	1
Middlesbrough	6
Rotherham	4
Sandwell	1
Sunderland	1
Sutton	2
West Northamptonshire	4
Durham	1
Kensington and Chelsea	10

Exempt accommodation

We urgently call for reform and scrutiny to the exempt accommodation market.

In Birmingham, there have been numerous concerns about exempt accommodation and an inquiry is to be launched (5) We note Birmingham have consistently refused to share information on how and when people are dying in any of their services or forms of accommodation.

The London Assembly Housing Committee has recently examined exempt accommodation and made a series of recommendations based on its concerns that exempt accommodation can be unsafe and of poor quality. (6)

At the time of writing the regulation bill is making it's way through parliament.

These are positive steps but our findings highlight a deep rooted scandal which must be properly addressed.

Deaths in Manchester

109
Exempt



21

All other accom



Areas for development

The Dying Homeless Project has been developing year on year, and will continue to do so.

Areas that we are actively working to explore further are gender and immigration status, as we know that discrimination based on gender identity, sexuality, nationality and ethnicity is far too common and puts people experiencing homelessness at risk.

We publish our findings with heavy hearts but in the hope that these findings can be used to spark change. We are appalled to publish the same recommendations as 2020, we have not seen much progress at all.

MoH welcomes the opportunity to work collaboratively to save lives; the number of lives at stake is too big for any one organisation to tackle alone. We welcome conversations with stakeholders and authorities who would like to work with us to provide information for our ongoing project, and to discuss our recommendations to explore how we can work together to shape future approaches to preventing unnecessary deaths.



Working with us

We produce this report to highlight change that is needed, and we work collaboratively to create that change.

For local authorities, policy-makers, charities and housing providers:

- We are keen to hear about local efforts being made to better capture data and use learning effectively to prevent future deaths.
- We are happy to discuss your initiatives and act as a critical friend to share our experiences and give input.
- We can run bespoke Death Cafe sessions to support staff, volunteers and people experiencing homelessness with bereavement.

Co-founder Matt Turtle in UK Parliament; 2019



Working with us

For people experiencing homelessness, volunteers and grassroots groups:
Join our Dying Homeless Coalition or Death Cafes (details on next page)

We believe that memorials - such as memorial services, events, arts and tributes - are important for healing. We can provide support with local initiatives. Contact us directly if you'd like to speak to us about a tribute to someone who has died, or if you'd like more support.

National Vigil 2022; Photo: Anthony Luvera



Our other activity

The Dying Homeless Coalition

The Dying Homeless Coalition was established in 2020 as a way to bring together a wide range of people, including those who have experienced homelessness, activists and artists, those working or volunteering with people experiencing homelessness in many different capacities, and others who care about the issue of homeless deaths.

In 2021, the Dying Homeless Coalition called for a National Confidential Enquiry to be held in response to the high numbers of people dying while homeless. We still believe that this is required and we will continue seeking resources to campaign for justice. We are interested to hear from anyone with feedback on any of the issues outlined in this report from our findings, including additional information on deaths in your area, or discussions about steps being taken in your area to address any of these issues. You can also register your interest in joining the Coalition by emailing miranda@museumofhomelessness.org

If you have experienced a bereavement of someone who was homeless, we run regular Death Café sessions as an open space for discussing and processing issues relating to death and bereavement. Check our website for the next date: www.museumofhomelessness.org

Recommendations

Structural change

Mandatory fatality reviews for all local authorities, with mechanisms for accountability around applying lessons learned.

Implement and fund mechanisms to uphold the rights of people experiencing homelessness, especially the right to life. This includes Bills of Rights (for example, as adopted by Brighton and Hove Council in 2021) and the proper funding of legal aid to allow recourse to justice.

Temporary memorial installed at
St Martin-in-the-Fields
February 2020
Photocredit: Anthony Luvera

Recommendations

Housing

Urgent attention to increasing council housing stock. We agree with recommendations for changes in planning, land availability, housing benefit, Right to Buy reform and expenditure made by the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, (published on 27 July 2020) The work has been done, the evidence is available, but action is needed.

Pass the Social Housing Regulation Bill to improve scrutiny and quality control of social housing. It is vital that this includes the proposed amendments to ensure that it includes temporary accommodation, and supported exempt accommodation.

Temporary memorial installed at
St Martin-in-the-Fields
February 2020
Photocredit: Anthony Luvera

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Recommendations

Care

Recognise that a roof is not enough. People need relationships, meaning and purpose. Design solutions with this in mind.

Pilot harm reduction spaces

Fund and support initiatives that promote community healing as an alternative, sustainable model to tackle patterns of inequality. While mental health and substance use services are under funded and hard to access, well-resourced communities are a powerful source of transformation.

Implement a genuine trauma informed approach to supporting people across services.

References

(1) Over 150,000 households in controversial exempt accommodation (Crisis, 2021)

(2) Turtle and Turtle, Severe Weather Emergency (Museum of Homelessness; 2023)

(3) Adam Holland, Magdalena Harris, Matthew Hickman, Dan Lewer, Gillian W Shorter, Jason Horsley 'Overdose prevention centres in the UK' (The Lancet, Vol 3, Issue 3, 2022)

(4) Edith England, 'This is how it works here': the spatial deprioritisation of trans people within homelessness services in Wales (Gender, place & culture, 2022), pp. 836-857

(5) Liam Turner, Birmingham City Council to launch inquiry into exempt accommodation (Housing Digital, 2022)

(6) Unsafe and Unregulated: London's rogue supported housing providers (Greater London Authority, 2023)

(7) Supporting LGBTQI+ People in homelessness services (Homeless Link, 2020)

Temporary memorial installed at
St Martin-in-the-Fields
February 2020
Photocredit: Anthony Luvera

May they all Rest in Peace

A photograph of a person in a black beret and patterned face mask lighting a candle at a memorial. The person is in the foreground, looking down at the candle. In the background, other people are visible, and a long line of lit candles stretches across the scene, creating a warm glow against the dark night. The setting appears to be an outdoor memorial area with stone steps or low walls.

Visit our online memorial at:
Dying Homeless
(museumofhomelessness.org)

Research and report by Miranda Keast, Matt
Turtle and Jess Turtle.

Museum of Homelessness is a registered charity no 1164091
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