

HOMELESSNESS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE: A HIDDEN CRISIS

Executive Summary March 2023

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Executive Summary

This report was commissioned, funded and co-designed by a coalition of housing and homelessness organisations concerned by the growing yet unacknowledged problem of rural homelessness.

The research found that:

- Rural homelessness is a real and growing problem that requires specific, locally informed and properly funded policy interventions. Without active interventions and good preventive services rural homelessness will keep increasing.
- People with intersecting disadvantages are particularly at risk of homelessness in rural areas. Support services are very dispersed and often unavailable.
- The voices of those experiencing, or who have experienced homelessness in rural areas are rarely heard. They told us about the high costs of food and transport and unavailable support services.
- The shame and stigma associated with homelessness in prosperous areas is a significant barrier to getting support. This intensifies the invisibility of rural homelessness which in turn leads to reduced support services, exacerbating need.
- Frontline workers have valuable insights into rural homelessness. 91% of professional respondents to our survey in rural areas told us that they think homelessness has increased in the last five years. This is corroborated by our analysis of the latest statistics from DLUHC which indicates that there is a 24% increase in rural rough sleeping in the past year.
- Rural poverty exacerbated by high housing costs are fundamental drivers of rural homelessness. Severe restrictions in local authority funding since 2009 intensifies risk. Rural areas receive 65% less funding per capita than urban for homelessness prevention who themselves are severely underfunded. Funding for genuinely affordable housing and state support for housing costs are also highly inadequate and have limited impact in rural areas.
- The aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic and the current cost of living crisis leave people in rural areas at much greater risk of homelessness than before. We have a particular concern that 83% of respondents who work in rural areas think that addressing homelessness has become harder in the past five years.



We recommend:

- Improved information about the scale and distribution of rural homelessness and more developed understandings about what is distinct about rural homelessness.
- Recognition of and strategies to respond to the problem of rural poverty. This is particularly urgent in the context of the aftermath of Covid-19 and the cost of living crisis.
- A renewed political commitment to ending all homelessness including rural homelessness and other hidden forms of homelessness.
- In the light of market failure, a reconsideration of what it means for housing to be affordable and how genuinely affordable rural housing should be provided.
- A radical rethink of Local Housing Allowances and how they operate to exclude many from accessing housing in rural areas.
- Flexible, multi-disciplinary prevention services must be provided in rural areas with mental health services a priority. Those services must be proactive and seek out those in need. There needs to be innovation and joined up thinking in responding to the dispersed nature of rural homelessness.
- The provision of sustainable, reliable and affordable public transport links between rural and urban areas and market towns.
- Listening to those who are experiencing, have experienced or are at risk of experiencing homelessness in rural areas. Those experiences provide vital underpinnings to effective policy making.

