

Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee

Oral evidence: Rough sleeping, HC 339

Tuesday 12 November 2024

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Florence Eshalomi (Chair); Lewis Cocking; Chris Curtis; Mr Lee Dillon; Maya Ellis; Mr Will Forster; Naushabah Khan; Mr Gagan Mohindra; Joe Powell.

Questions 1 - 33

Witnesses

[I](#): Alicia Walker, Assistant Director of Activism and Advocacy, Shelter; Balbir Chatrik, Director of Policy and Prevention, Centrepoin; Dr Carin Tunaker, Professor in Law, University of Kent; Lord Bird MBE.

[II](#): Sophie Boobis, Head of Policy and Research, Homeless Link; Paul Dennett, Deputy Mayor and Portfolio Holder for Housing First, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, and Salford City Mayor; Ben Tomlin, Head of Strategic Housing and Partnerships, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council; Councillor Adam Hug, Westminster City Council, and Chair, Local Infrastructure and Net Zero Board, Local Government Association.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Alicia Walker, Balbir Chatrik, Dr Tunaker and Lord Bird.

Chair: Good morning, everyone. I am Florence Eshalomi, Chair of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee. We have a really exciting panel with us this morning to discuss the issue of rough sleeping. First, can I get our guests to introduce themselves?

Alicia Walker: Hello. I am Alicia Walker. I am assistant director of activism and advocacy at Shelter. Thank you for having me.

Dr Tunaker: Hi. I am Carin Tunaker. I am a lecturer in law and researcher in homelessness at Kent Law School.

Balbir Chatrik: Good morning, I am Balbir Kaur Chatrik, director of policy and prevention at Centrepoin.

Lord Bird: I am John Bird, ex-homeless, ex-rough sleeper, ex-prisoner, ex-everything. I am the kind of person you meet on the streets. I was one of them. I am now out of that. I started the *Big Issue* because I wanted to do something different on poverty rather than more of the same.

Chair: Thank you. Can I just ask my parliamentary colleagues to introduce themselves and their constituency?

Mr Mohindra: I am Gagan Mohindra. I am the Conservative Member for South West Hertfordshire.

Lewis Cocking: I am Lewis Cocking, the Conservative Member for Broxbourne.

Mr Dillon: I am Lee Dillon, the Liberal Democrat Member for Newbury.

Mr Forster: I am Will Forster, Liberal Democrat Member for Woking.

Joe Powell: I am Joe Powell, Labour Member for Kensington and Bayswater.

Naushabah Khan: I am Naushabah Khan, Labour Member for Gillingham and Rainham.

Maya Ellis: I am Maya Ellis, Labour Member for Ribble Valley.

Chris Curtis: I am Chris Curtis, Labour Member for Milton Keynes North.

Q1 **Chair:** Thank you, everyone. We have two panels this morning. We have our first one until about 10.45 am. We are going to ask a range of questions. If someone has already covered a topic, colleagues do not need to repeat the question. Sometimes we will indicate if we want a particular guest to answer a particular question.

I am going to kick off the panel. Obviously, this is an issue where demand continues to rise and to be high. Let me ask all our guests, just as an opener: why do you think rough sleeping has been on the rise in recent years?

Lord Bird: The reason it has been on the rise is that no Government has addressed the issue of rough sleeping. They have worshipped at the altar of the accomplished fact, which is when somebody ends up homeless; they have not put their energies and finances into preventing those people from becoming homeless.

I come from a particular section of the British working class, which is called the London-Irish working class. We were poor. We lived in the slums. There was a predictability of failure that John Anthony Joseph Bird, who sits before you, was going to end up homeless, in crime or whatever. That predictability is playing out at the moment. All the eggs in the governmental basket have always been put on emergency responding—responding, responding, responding. They have never put any money into prevention or cure. We are now in a situation where

more and more people—it is vectoring out—who formerly would not have had anything to do with homelessness are falling into homelessness.

My opinion is that the Government—the last Government and this Government—are working, unfortunately, to the same methodology and will continue to produce the preconditions of homelessness. Until we get a Government or a Government Department that says, “Let us prevent. Let us turn the tap off and spend the money,” we are always going to be treading water. That is my humble opinion.

Balbir Chatrik: I would agree. Prevention is really important. We at Centrepont are doing work in schools. We are looking at family support; we know that that makes a difference. We are supporting the family, and that might be through mediation. We put those services in place and provide the support families need so that they can stay together. Centrepont works with young people; if it is safe for them to stay at home, we would encourage them to stay at home. So that family support is critical.

That is the prevention element. Then we have a helpline. Young people call the helpline. The major cause of rough sleeping in young people is the lack of temporary accommodation. That is really one of the big drivers, along with gatekeeping by local authorities.

Q2 **Lewis Cocking:** I am sorry. What do you mean by “gatekeeping”?

Balbir Chatrik: Let me give you one example. We had Jenny, who went to a local authority. She had a history of rough sleeping. She was pregnant. She called her local authority—sometimes it is really hard to get the numbers of local authority departments. She got the number, called them and told them she was pregnant. They said, “We will see you next month.” This was November last year. They said, “We will see you in December”. She was pregnant and it was very cold. We then intervened on her behalf and they said, “She can go to a severe weather emergency centre.” That is not suitable for a pregnant young woman; normally, it is a mattress on the floor of a church hall or maybe another kind of hall. That is what they referred her to.

We know that young people sometimes do not even get to be assessed by the local authority. You have the Homelessness Reduction Act. Our research shows that a third of the young people who approach their local authorities do not get assessed.

Q3 **Naushabah Khan:** I have a question on the comment around prevention, which I completely take. Shelter’s data and other data has shown that, particularly over the last decade but certainly year on year, there has been an increase in both rough sleeping and homelessness. I just wanted to understand from the panel what the specific reasons behind that are in terms of prevention and how we can tackle some of those issues. Where would we start?

Lord Bird: Could I just make one point? I am sorry, but I should not really be sitting here before you, because I do not think you are doing the

right thing: you are looking at the problem when it becomes a problem. The Treasury is no good at preventing the problem. I spent 33 years running the *Big Issue*. Before that, I campaigned in homelessness and homelessness prevention, and before that I was homeless and a rough sleeper. Seventy-eight years of experience tell me that we are getting it wrong.

Balbir is giving you anecdotal evidence of social failure. I do not hear people saying, "How can we prevent this? How can we turn the tap off?" Let me just give you one example. In 1940, Britain was facing defeat in the world war against Hitler. There was no chance we were going to win. Do you know what Churchill and Attlee did? They invented a Committee. They dug William Beveridge out of retirement and made him create what became the model for the welfare state. At a time when everything was emergency, emergency, emergency, he was commissioned to imagine the world beyond the emergency. We are not doing that.

In my opinion, it is the mind-forged manacles of always dealing with the emergency. I spent decades working on the emergency. I went into the House of Lords for one reason alone: to dismantle poverty, because I could find nobody doing anything more than trying to make the poor a bit more comfortable.

Q4 **Chair:** Would you welcome the new task force that the Deputy Prime Minister is going to chair?

Lord Bird: I would welcome it, but I would like the Prime Minister to come and sit with me for maybe four or five hours or four or five days. I am sorry; I have delusions of grandeur—he is not going to beat a path to my door.

Why is every Government that I have had any dealings with always treading the same ground? It is largely because they enter Parliament and they take the same shape, irrespective of the politics, as the previous Government and the previous Government and the previous Government.

I am sorry to go on, but we need a Committee to come along and say, "Let us deal with the emergency. Let us fight the emergency. Let us not allow the young lady that you are talking about to fall between the cracks in society." But at the same time, let us do what Churchill and Attlee did, and create the mechanisms and the methodology for prevention and cure.

Dr Tunaker: I agree with all the panellists. I would like to add that one of the fundamental problems is that, if somebody is rough sleeping, there is nowhere suitable for them to go. We do not have the mechanisms in place to help people with different types of social disadvantage to safely go somewhere.

This is the result of what I would call a multi-system organ failure. We have a combination of issues hitting from different angles. There is not enough cross-sector working happening. There is chronic underfunding of social care. There is not enough affordable housing. There is

discrimination in the private rented sector. Local housing allowance rates are not sufficient to cover rents. On top of that, people are grappling with new things, such as the cost of living crisis or the effects of Brexit.

What is happening in the end is that people, particularly people with intersecting social disadvantage, are not getting the support they need. We have law, policy and practical solutions that are not really equipped to recognise the compounding effects of multiple forms of social disadvantage. They are not considering the compounding nature of being LGBTQ+, being from an ethnic minority background, having a disability, being neurodiverse and so on. Much more needs to go into that.

Alicia Walker: I agree wholeheartedly with everything that has been said by my fellow panellists, but I also would like to press home that word “emergency”. We are in an emergency; we are in a housing emergency. We cannot normalise what that means and the depth of deprivation that goes with an emergency.

To explain that, I would set it in terms of both supply and demand. In terms of demand, we have all felt the escalating cost of living, of existing in this country. If you put that into context, it means that rent is escalating. It means home ownership is out of reach for many people. Local housing allowance also has not kept up. That has meant that a lot of people cannot afford to live; very simply, the cost of living means people cannot afford to live.

On the other side, supply is a real issue. We just do not have enough affordable social rent homes in this country. Building has not kept up with the level of demand that I have just set out. Therefore, until we start building and really replacing the stock that needs to be there, there is always going to be this crisis.

To pose a rhetorical question backwards, we say, “Why has rough sleeping escalated?” but where are these people supposed to go? If the homes do not exist and the demand is going up, where will these people go?

Lord Bird: I am sorry, but could I make a really draconian point? If you build more social housing, you will take more people off the streets and into places. I agree wholeheartedly with social housing. I moved from the racist slums of Notting Hill. Because I was Irish, I was treated as black people were later treated when they arrived. We got into social housing. When I moved into social housing, there were police officers who lived in our block. There were retired people; there were infirm people. The social mix was incredible. There were trainee teachers. It was sociable housing.

Unfortunately, some really bad Government decisions made by Harold Wilson led to enormous pressure on social housing. He created something called the Rent Act 1965. It removed 40% of private landlords. In 1964, 60% of all people were living in private rented accommodation—the big supplier was not local authorities at the time, and there was no such

thing as a housing association. Private landlords were made aware of the fact that the tenant was more important than them.

All of that led, after 1965, to the removal of an enormous amount of housing that was lived in by working-class people. When that was removed, enormous pressure was put on social housing. The local authorities had to keep raising their game, up and up and up. People like my brothers, who had been on the housing list and were at numbers 98 and 102, were removed. There were people in need, such as single mothers. You got this enormous pressure on social housing—social housing—and all of the other people disappeared.

To me, that is one of the major problems. But, we also have to address the really unfortunate thing that only 2% or 3% of children of people who live in social housing ever get school leaving certificates, get a job that would earn them enough money or get to university. You get this weird situation: if you want to condemn somebody to two or three generations of poverty, give them social housing. This Government needs to address the fact that social housing is not a precursor to social mobility and social opportunity. Everybody in this room is socially mobile.

Chair: We will explore that as we go on.

Lord Bird: In my opinion, we need to give the poorest amongst us the social mobility that you have.

Q5

Mr Mohindra: My question is aimed at Balbir and Alicia. We had the recent Budget. I am a Conservative, and I do not want to get political, but there were increases in things like national insurance and the minimum wage. How has that affected your organisation's ability to do their jobs?

Balbir Chatrik: It is early days. We have been calculating how much the cost is going to be to us and what the implications will be. If you think about the young people we serve, we are really pleased that the minimum wage has gone up for them. We are really pleased that, slowly, they will be brought up to the adult level as well.

Lord Bird: Can I tell you about the knock-on effect on the *Big Issue*?

Mr Mohindra: Do you mind if I ask Alicia to respond?

Lord Bird: I am sorry—forgive my trespass.

Alicia Walker: It is a really important question, and the answer is somewhat twofold. I would agree with Balbir because it is important, as employers, that we make the correct calculations before we make a proper response to that question. As employers, it is important that we are able to operate as best as we possibly can to serve the people we are here today to talk about, who are so important. That is an ongoing conversation. It is really important for the charity sector that we are able to support people as best we can and to support the Government in pushing forward that endeavour as well.

On the flip side, I entirely agree with Balbir. It is so great to see the minimum wage going up and to see young people better able to afford to live. Fundamentally, this goes back to what I said before about the level of demand: people need more money. But that fundamental point about people needing more money also goes back to the point around national insurance.

So there is a twofold answer to the question, but it is quite early to answer in terms of what this will mean for our delivery as charities.

Q6 Naushabah Khan: We are often told that there are very complex reasons why people specifically end up rough sleeping. It would just be helpful to understand why you think certain groups are particularly impacted or more likely to be rough sleeping than others.

Dr Tunaker: That is a great question. On official statistics, when you look at who rough sleepers are, you will find mostly white British men. From the research that I have been doing with the Albert Kennedy Trust and English Rural, we are missing a huge part of the rough sleeping population. We do not have appropriate data; what we do know about rough sleeping is probably the tip of the iceberg.

We need to focus more on the intersecting protected characteristics of people that make them more susceptible to homelessness and rough sleeping. A lot of these people are hidden. They can be hidden because they live in rural areas. Recently, we learned from CPRE that rural rough sleeping has increased by 40% in the last five years. We know from the women's rough sleeping census that there are more women rough sleeping than show up in the official statistics. A young person's rough sleeping census was recently done as well. We know that there are more young people rough sleeping.

I will give an example from our recent research. One of the young people we spoke to was placed in temporary accommodation that was not suitable; it was not safe. They were a trans young person, and they were subject to really overt discrimination and could not stay there. Instead, they spent seven months sleeping on buses—that is seven months on a bus. That is not a person who will show up in our statistics.

We need to focus more on the hidden populations among rough sleepers and not get single-tracked by what we can see in the data.

Alicia Walker: First of all, I would quite like to put on the record that the average age of death of a person who is homeless in the UK is in their 40s. It is important to have that context when we have this conversation.

A lot of those people remain unnamed. Just last week, we had the annual service of commemoration for people who have died while homeless. A number of the people in that service were unnamed. One of the reasons that those people remain unnamed is exactly what we have just heard: we cannot count a lot of these people. They are hidden homeless.

Sadly, a lot of these people are women. They are people with protected characteristics. We know that a lot of women have to hide their homelessness because, ultimately, sleeping on the streets is not safe, to say the completely obvious. A lot of women will sleep on buses or in hospital waiting rooms and places like that to find ways to informally sleep and get through the night.

When we have this conversation, it is important to have in mind that context of how people are living, why they are living that way and how long they are expected to live.

Lord Bird: I am sorry; could I add something? It is brilliant that colleagues are drilling down into the granular issues, but one of the overriding problems we have is that 90% of the people I have dealt with for decade after decade after decade have come from the same socioeconomic group. They have been largely white and largely inheritors of poverty. My wife's family inherited poverty. They come from India. They did not capitulate; they saved everything. They knew how to cook; they knew how to make a pound last. They got out of it, and my father-in-law, who was a bus driver, ended up putting all his children through university, owning a house in Punjab and all sorts of things, because he knew how to do it.

My family, who were Irish, were destroyed by poverty and imperialism—1,000 years of imperialism. That is why I ended up homeless. As I say, 90% of the people I meet are people who have inherited poverty. They never get over that, although some of them do. A lot of immigrants are much better at it. My mate Danny, who is a Chinese-Jamaican, has many houses. He has learned skills and abilities. Unfortunately, a lot of indigenous white people do not have those skills.

When I go and work in Africa, I see people who turn poverty into its opposite. Until we address that issue of inherited poverty, especially amongst the white working class, we are going to get people who are rioting or going to Middlesbrough to attack a mosque. By the way, we worked with that mosque; it mosque provided 2,000 meals a month to the neediest in Middlesbrough.

Q7 **Lewis Cocking:** When someone ends up homeless, how easy is it for them to access support? How long does it take them to get the support they need? I think it is fair to say that there is support out there, though probably not enough. What are the main barriers for the individual to access that?

Balbir Chatrik: Let me talk about young people. A lot of young people do not know where to go for support; that is one thing. We need to tell young people that they can go to the local authority and that there are charities they can go to. I have already talked about gatekeeping; they do not even get to talk to somebody at the local authority. You would be surprised—local authorities do not advertise the numbers for their housing options. It is impossible to get through to them. Those are massive barriers.

At Centrepoint, we work with the young people local authorities refer to us. You cannot walk off the streets and come to a Centrepoint hostel. Again, there is no self-referral, which is a barrier as well. Those are the barriers that are systematically put in front of young people before they can get a service.

One of the solutions for us is Housing First, which I know you will be talking about this morning. It means that young people have a safe place to stay and all the support services around them. We run Housing First; we know it works for young people, particularly care leavers.

Q8 **Lewis Cocking:** Just to follow up on that, how long on average would someone spend sleeping homeless before they get access to any help? I get that you might not know this.

Balbir Chatrik: I cannot give you an average figure. I would just reiterate that sometimes young people do not even get there because they are not picked up. As Alicia was saying, young people are really vulnerable. They are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation on the streets. They do not sleep in the places where others sleep, where they will be verified and picked up. We have examples of young people sleeping in graveyards, on night buses, in cars, in garages or in all-night cafés. They are not going to get picked up by anybody and they are not going to get the support.

Lord Bird: I am sorry; could I make a point? We spend a lot of time in the west end and in other cities. We go around and pick up anecdotal evidence. There are many young people; I was one of them—I was a trailblazer, 50 years ago, sleeping rough in graveyards and various other places. I was a runaway from home, a runaway from the police.

I can honestly tell you that it is appalling. Today, we have all these organisations, but you cannot get through to them, because everybody in the homeless sector is suffering an inability, because of funds and support, to do things. I am sorry, but until we put money into organisations—the *Big Issue*, Centrepoint and all these other organisations that are the street providers—we are screwed.

Dr Tunaker: One of the really big problems is that we cannot really say what the average waiting times are, because it is different for everyone. You make an application through the part VII of Housing Act. It is determined whether you are priority need, whether you are intentionally homeless and so on. Who do we choose? Who is priority need? That is the issue. How do we decide who needs help more than someone else? Only about 30%—I can look at the exact figure—get statutory help from the local authorities. A huge amount of people who apply as homeless do not get that support and will be referred back into the private rented sector, where discrimination is rife. Young people have very little chance of ever finding something for a suitable price.

Waiting is one of the most prominent things that happens once you become homeless. You are waiting for appointments with the jobcentre.

You are waiting for appointments for health. For mental health, you may never get an appointment. For housing, you will perhaps get an appointment to see somebody who tells you, "You need to go and find your own flat. Let me give you some suggestions."

Local authorities are working really hard to try to place people, but they do not have anywhere to place them, let alone any money to spend on the temporary accommodation that is needed. If you look at the UK in the sense of temporary accommodation use, we are skyrocketing compared to other countries.

The fundamental problem is that there is a build-up of people needing help, support and somewhere to live. They do not have anywhere to go. We also do not have suitable accommodation for different types of needs. If you are a person with a disability who goes to the council, will there be a suitable flat for you to live in with that disability? Probably not. We really need to look at what we can do to provide better options to prevent those barriers from being there.

Q9 **Joe Powell:** I have a quick question. How do you engage homeless people to understand better how these services could be organised? It is quite tricky, but it is really important that they have a voice.

Balbir Chatrik: Can I just clarify what you mean?

Joe Powell: How do you engage them to design the services and to access the services better?

Balbir Chatrik: How do we engage them to design the services?

Joe Powell: Yes. How do they have a voice? Obviously, policy across Government tends to be set with the users of a service. I am just curious because you are talking about all these offers that are quite difficult to access. I am trying to understand how, from their perspective, they can get that support.

Chair: Is that where the work that you all do comes in, for example?

Balbir Chatrik: We work with the young people we support because participation and real involvement are really important. When they come to us, we ask them how they got to us. We will talk to them about some of the barriers, what worked and what did not work. We will then feed that back to some of the local authorities that we work with. You are right: the homeless young people who come to us are at the frontline, and we need them to help design and deliver the services that are on offer to them from local authorities or charities.

Q10 **Chris Curtis:** You are doing surveys, effectively, then. Do you make that data accessible? Is there a way of us seeing it?

Balbir Chatrik: We do not. We would normally talk to the local authorities, to be honest, rather than tell everybody about it, because it is quite specific to each local authority.

Lord Bird: I am sorry; could I say something?

Chair: Yes, very quickly, Lord Bird.

Lord Bird: I am sorry. I am a real pain in the arse because I believe so much in prevention. If only somebody could have prevented the scumbag that I became—a racist scumbag, an underclass person who millions of pounds was spent on. If only there had been some allocation of funding. My brother, who is costing millions of pounds, is ex-homeless and ex-everything. He is now in a place where it costs £14,000 a month to support him. If only we could get you lot to get rid of your mind-forged manacles. You are always worshipping at the altar of the accomplished fact. We are responding to the emergency. Why is it that none of you say, “How the f-ing hell can we prevent this from happening?” You are not politicians—

Chair: Those are some of the things that we are looking at as a Committee. We will be making very clear recommendations to the Government.

Lord Bird: Eighty per cent of all Government money spent on social intervention is spent on emergency and coping. Very little is spent on prevention and cure.

Chair: We have got the message loud and clear, Lord Bird.

Lord Bird: We are providers to emergency, but we need to be made unemployed. It is your job to do it. Please move the argument.

Chair: We will be pressing on that when we meet the Secretary of State; do not worry.

Q11 **Mr Dillon:** You touched on LAs not publishing numbers for temporary accommodation and on feeding back to LAs. What are the limitations of the approach that local authorities take on tackling rough sleeping?

Balbir Chatrik: The primary reason is a lack of resources. Most of them want to help the young people who come to them. They want to assess everybody who comes to them, but they do not have the resources to do it. That is one thing.

The second thing, which is connected, is that there is not enough youth-specific emergency accommodation.

Lord Bird: I am going to go. I am sorry. Thank you—I have really appreciated the chance to come here.

Chair: You are off, Lord Bird?

Lord Bird: I do not want to hear this. I have heard this for the last 30 years. I have heard it from every Government, irrespective of their political complexion. I do not want to be a part of a farce. Until we start turning the tap off, we are screwed.

Chair: Thank you, Lord Bird.

Mr Dillon: He will not get to hear my second question, which was all about that, but never mind.

Balbir Chatrik: So there are not enough resources, and that means there is not enough youth-specific temporary accommodation. We need that, because young people do not want to be in temporary accommodation with adults; they do not feel safe there. We need youth-specific emergency accommodation.

Can I just say one other thing? It is really important for local authorities to fund family support. We do not want young people or anybody going through the trauma of homelessness. We need to get in there early.

Q12 **Chris Curtis:** You are saying we need prevention.

Balbir Chatrik: Exactly. Yes, definitely.

Q13 **Mr Dillon:** I have a follow-up. What is the impact on other public services, such as health and the police? Does homelessness put pressure on them? Does that cost the state more in the long term than putting people in a Housing First property, for example?

Balbir Chatrik: Yes, absolutely. We did some research last year. Youth homelessness costs £8.5 billion. That includes services, whether it is the NHS or the criminal justice system, and a loss of productivity. All that potential is going to waste.

Q14 **Naushabah Khan:** I have a very quick follow-up. I appreciate everything you have said about the challenges local authorities are facing. As a Committee, that is something that we have talked a lot about already. Are there any examples of best practice or good practice that we could perhaps look at and learn from, where local authorities are going above and beyond or getting it right in a way that others are not able to?

Balbir Chatrik: We have been working really closely with Lambeth. They have been working in partnership with charities in the area. The Prince of Wales's Homewards initiative has really galvanised people in the local area and charities. There now seems to be a pathway of services for people, which did not really exist before. They are really majoring on prevention and Housing First.

Dr Tunaker: I am in agreement around Housing First. Yes, that is absolutely a way to go forward. I just wanted to respond a little on what the local authorities are doing and on tackling the barriers there. There are instances of very good practice. There are fantastic people in local authorities working very hard. I agree that they do not have the money to do what they need to do.

I would also like to emphasise that now is a really good time to think about SWEP—the severe weather emergency protocol. Are we doing the best thing for all types of rough sleepers? Churches are often the places that take up SWEP provision. Is that the right place for everyone? Perhaps not. Churches do a fantastic job, but they are not the most

suitable place for everybody, particularly people from other faith-based communities or from LGBTQ+ communities. We need to think about that.

We also need to think about what happens to people who do not feel it is possible to go into SWEP provision. We want to be preventing deaths. There is cold weather coming up. Some people cannot go into a big hall with lots of other people because they suffer from anxiety or have a disability, for example. Are we thinking about the funding for local authorities to help those people rather than leave them out in the cold?

We need more training on looking at different types of need in local authorities. In our most recent research, we found that 47% of local authorities did not have enough knowledge. They stated that they did not have enough knowledge on supporting LGBTQ+ people, for example, who are twice as likely to experience hidden homelessness. There is a lot to be done in terms of what and how we can support local authorities to do the job that is so necessary, especially coming up to the cold months.

Alicia Walker: I will make two really quick points in addition, because I entirely agree with what has already been said. First, it is really important to note that one in four people sleeping rough in the UK are non-UK nationals. That means they have no recourse to public funds and do not really have any options in terms of where to go. Our advisers regularly have to inform people that they cannot help them. In this conversation around rights, we need to really think about who has rights and how we support all the people currently sleeping rough who have nowhere to go.

In this conversation around rights, we also have to understand that trust is a real issue. You had a brilliant question earlier around how to involve people with lived experience. Trust is a big issue. If you have ended up on the street, the likelihood is that many systems have failed you, not just one system. Whether it is the care system, the education system or the prison system, some sort of system has failed you. We also have not acknowledged sufficiently as a society that safety nets are not there for absolutely everybody. If those safety nets are not there, the trust also is not there to go to your local authority and get proper support. As has been really eloquently said, you are then met with gatekeeping, and the trust is further eroded.

We have two issues. First, we need to understand who has rights in the first place. Secondly, when those rights are exercised, do people even trust that that is going to make a difference at all?

Q15 **Mr Forster:** I have a two-parter to conclude. We have talked about how local authorities can help solve this. If you look at the numbers, around half of rough sleepers in the country are based in London and the south-east, which is very disproportionate. Does that mean you need national intervention rather than relying on local intervention? I would welcome your comment.

Also, if we had the Secretary of State with us now, what would be the one bit of advice that you had for them to end rough sleeping for good?

Alicia Walker: I am going to start with your second question because it answers the first one. I am sure you will not be surprised to hear me say this, as someone from Shelter: we need to build more affordable social rent homes. The issue we are talking about is that there is nowhere for enough people to go in this country. We do not have enough homes to house the number of people who are here. There is not enough trust in the system, because there are not enough homes. The No. 1 thing that we need to do is to start building more social rented homes. We recommend 90,000 social homes per year. That is the No. 1 way to solve the housing emergency. We will not end rough sleeping until we have solved the housing emergency.

We do need to look at the national picture, because we need to understand that this is a national problem. In doing so, we need to look at the local as well. Ultimately, the responses to the housing emergency are different depending on where you are, but ultimately we do need to build more social homes.

Dr Tunaker: I wanted to respond first to the numbers question. The issue with the rough sleeping numbers is that it is much easier to count rough sleeping in big urban areas. We need to take a place-based approach to looking at our numbers.

We now know that the rough sleeping figures from the snapshot data are not a reliable source to base all our decisions on. We need to look at more place-based solutions and at the different needs in different types of area. That is absolutely key.

I also believe that the task of the Government needs to be to drastically improve support and protection for groups with intersecting social disadvantages, who are more likely to experience homelessness and rough sleeping, and who are at more risk of harm when they do. I have already mentioned LGBTQ+ people, but young people, people from ethnic minority backgrounds, people with physical disabilities, people with neurodiversity and people with mental health issues all need more protection. This is urgent.

Balbir Chatrik: I am not going to repeat anything that you have said. If she were sitting right here in front of us now, I would say, "Please focus on prevention," and, "We need a youth-specific element of the strategy." Homelessness is different for young people. The solutions are different.

Chair: Thank you very much. Thank you to our guests. If Lord Bird was here, we did get to the prevention bit in the end. We will continue speaking about this. Thank you to our guests.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Sophie Boobis, Paul Dennett, Ben Tomlin and Councillor Adam Hug.

Chair: Good morning, everyone. Can I ask our guests to introduce

themselves, please?

Ben Tomlin: Good morning. I am Ben Tomlin. I am the head of housing and partnerships at Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole council.

Sophie Boobis: Good morning. I am Sophie Boobis. I am head of policy and research at Homeless Link.

Adam Hug: I am Councillor Adam Hug. I am the LGA's housing spokesman and the leader of Westminster council.

Paul Dennett: I am Paul Dennett. I am the Mayor of Salford and the Deputy Mayor for Greater Manchester.

Q16 **Chair:** Good morning. Thank you for joining us this morning for our second panel. You heard some of the comments from the first Q&A session. One of the things I wanted to start with is rough sleeping. It has been said that it was not mentioned in the Labour manifesto or in any of the Bills introduced by the new Government, but we do have a Minister for rough sleeping and homelessness, Rushanara Ali. You will also be aware that the Deputy Prime Minister has launched a new taskforce specifically looking at this that is inter-departmental—it is not just sitting within MHCLG. What are the most effective ways for us to tackle rough sleeping?

Ben Tomlin: Predictably, I will start with prevention. We need to understand the local demand drivers around how best to use prevention to create positive and long-lasting solutions. It is really important that we better use data and evidence to understand how local delivery can be effective. We have improved that over the last 12 months, but it is not systemic within all local authorities. It is really important that we do that.

Alongside that, co-designing services in partnership with our local system is really critical. Using public services, the community and the voluntary sector and charities to understand how best to deliver solutions in a local context is really critical, alongside that data and evidence.

Adam Hug: We need to recognise that rough sleeping is part of the broader homelessness problem, but it also has its own discrete challenges. That is particularly true for metropolitan boroughs like mine. Only 5% of my rough sleepers on the streets of Westminster have a local connection. Where systems fail across the country, whether that is in terms of housing, mental health or substance abuse, it pushes people into homelessness and makes them less willing to automatically accept the homelessness provision that may be available where they live. Ultimately, that means they end up on the streets, that there is a higher barrier to coming back into statutory services and that we have to spend more to deal with people in crisis on our streets.

Going back to the broader point about prevention, greater investment in homelessness prevention is very helpful, but we need to look at those wider services that need to be in communities across the country, which sit alongside what you are doing when people immediately hit the streets.

Some people who arrive will be able to be signposted, get support and come off the streets; other people will be entrenched for a long time. That involves incredibly difficult and cross-departmental work, with the health sector and everything else, to encourage people into housing. It costs an awful lot more by the time it gets there. Some of the solutions are going to need to be things like specialist and supported housing, rather than just the main pathways for building more homes.

Sophie Boobis: It is also about acknowledging that rough sleeping is a symptom of much more systematic and wider support needs. It requires cross-Government working, both at a national and a local systems level.

We need to consider the drivers behind rough sleeping as part of the prevention aspect and the solutions and the support system that need to be built in to help people off the streets. That is about looking at mental health; it is about looking at physical health. We know that rough sleeping makes people physically unwell, as much as it drives trauma and mental ill health. It is about social care, addiction services and all the things that drive trauma, both as a cause of homelessness and rough sleeping and as a consequence of it. It is about factoring that into prevention, understanding the importance of the wider system playing its role in preventing homelessness—it does not exist in a vacuum—and building support services that factor that in.

The housing and accommodation element is only one part of the solution here. We need a system that is much more comprehensive, which has access to appropriate supported housing and Housing First models, but we also need to understand the work that needs to be invested before people reach that stage. That involves really effective assertive outreach, which is what does the hard work of building relationships with people on the streets and building trust and engagement. The day centres and the night shelters are all part of that system. It needs to be joined up, it needs to be responding to different local support needs and demographics, and it needs to be linked into the bigger system. It does not exist in isolation.

Paul Dennett: In terms of Greater Manchester's learning on tackling homelessness and rough sleeping, I agree with the comments that have already been made about rough sleeping only being part of the homelessness landscape. Ultimately, we do not have the luxury of only thinking about prevention. We also have to respond to the humanitarian crisis that is rough sleeping and homelessness, which is engulfing this country currently.

For me, some of the cross-departmental and cross-ministerial work that is being talked about is absolutely where the solutions to this issue are to be found. It is not just within MHCLG. It is what the Home Office is doing and what the DWP has been doing in terms of welfare reform over the last 14 years. Thinking systemically about this, as one Government, we can find some meaningful solutions.

I would also say that part of the solution is subsidiarity or devolution. The English devolution Bill will provide some of the answers to how to respond to the crisis. Local government and the people working at a community-neighbourhood level are best placed, in my opinion, to advise on how best to respond to what is a national crisis.

Q17 **Mr Dillon:** I agree that it is a national crisis, but, going back to Adam's point, only 5% of rough sleepers in your council area have a local connection. Does the focus on the local connection need to be changed? Otherwise, Adam's council is not necessarily going to have the resource to deal with the other 95%.

Paul Dennett: This is really interesting. If you were to look at homelessness and rough sleeping across the country, you would probably find that urban areas around cities are where we have the biggest challenge. Interestingly, if you look at the placement of people seeking asylum and at refugees, you will also find that urban areas are the parts of the country where they are most concentrated, inevitably. Any local urban area only has a finite connection capacity in terms of how we can support and tackle this issue.

When you look at the antecedents to this, we have a chronic undersupply of council housing. You could look at right to buy and the fact that 40% of homes purchased under right to buy find their way into the private rented sector. Many of them have never been replaced and have certainly not been replaced at social rents or rents capped at the local housing allowance. Look at some of the stuff around the national planning policy framework and the inability to capture land value currently, which is creating huge viability constraints up and down the country. Developers are not building truly affordable housing.

If you then throw into the mix 14 years of austerity, which has totally ripped out the capacity of local government to respond to this national crisis, and welfare reform, you have a very toxic environment. Arguably, it is the environment and the system that is driving homelessness and rough sleeping. It is not a lifestyle choice.

Q18 **Mr Dillon:** That is still the issue for Adam, isn't it?

Adam Hug: I do not disagree with anything Paul has said. We have to sort out the wider homelessness crisis. That means building more homes, tackling issues around the gap in terms of LHA rates and stabilising the private rented sector to enable councils to make provision in general terms.

There is also a point to be made about the more specialist needs of the people who are coming on to the streets. These are not just people who are looking for a home and who can be turned around quite quickly. This is the more entrenched stuff, which is what you see on the streets of Westminster and other urban areas, where other systems have failed across the country.

It is key to look at those drivers in terms of mental health and substance abuse, as well as the issues around the Home Office kick-out. One of the big flows that we are seeing at the moment—it is not just us; it is other councils as well—is where people are being placed poorly when they come out of Home Office accommodation and are then coming on to the streets.

Q19 **Lewis Cocking:** I am a councillor on an upper-tier authority, Hertfordshire county council. We do not have responsibility for homelessness. Adam, you just said that you want to build more homes. What do you think about the Secretary of State's view that the housing target in London is going to be reduced by 20%? We are going to build less in London. You just said we should build more homes. Is that fair?

Adam Hug: We have to build more homes of all tenures and types. The previous Government's urban uplift formula was, bluntly, a very crude tool, which meant that certain other parts of the country were not paying their fair share. I would note that under the current formula the housing target that has been given to us has quadrupled—I do not think you want us building on Hyde Park.

There are practical challenges about making sure that you are unlocking building in urban areas. Normally the issues there are around the fact that there are already buildings on those sites. Certainly in inner London, there are not many empty brownfield sites available. That changes the further out you go.

What are the tools to unlock truly affordable house building and overall house building in urban areas, so that you maximise those? Every councillor I know wants to build, but it is incredibly challenging in inner urban sites. What can you do on the urban periphery? How can you manage that approach? The Government are looking at the reform of the green belt. How can you meet the different challenges in rural areas when you are also looking at issues around protecting agriculture and at our climate and energy commitments? There are lots of different land use things.

Ultimately, we need more homes of all tenures and types in all places, but we have to be pragmatic about what we can deliver. As I said, I desperately want to build more homes. If our target goes up to 4,000 homes a year, which is what we will do under the current formula, I need to have a conversation with people about not building offices. At the moment the private sector just wants to build offices. We are building like gangbusters as a council on our land, but if people do not stop building offices and start building residential, we are not going to get those numbers.

It is about looking at each local area and how you unlock the maximum housing that you can deliver. No part of the country can be left out. The previous Government just said, "Right. The cities will do it."

Q20 **Lewis Cocking:** Do you think London should build less?

Adam Hug: No. London should build more wherever it can. It is about how you work with local authorities to unlock those opportunities. I do not know a London council that is trying to avoid building. They are all desperate to build. It is about the money, the planning powers and how you get land assembly in a place like London. Particularly in inner London, there are lots of buildings. If you find me the space, I will build on it or get someone to build on it. I am sure that where you are there is space, but it is about how it is effectively managed.

Q21 **Maya Ellis:** If we just bring it back a bit to tackling the immediate crisis, could you talk me through some examples of what has worked well in previous Governments' approaches and local government approaches to tackling the challenge? I am interested in building on what you talked about, Paul. Who are the key organisations in local areas that can really support that? How have you worked well with them?

Paul Dennett: Speaking from a Greater Manchester point of view, since 2017 we have seen a 45% decrease in rough sleeping. Some of this comes down to political leadership. Mayor Burnham has made tackling homelessness and rough sleeping his No. 1 policy priority and continues to do that.

It is not just about political leadership. It is about how we have used devolution to have conversations with Government and get them to play ball with us in tackling the wider determinants of homelessness and rough sleeping and the immediate crisis that we face.

Over the last five years, we have invested £33 million in Mayor Burnham's A Bed Every Night initiative. That is an immediate response to people who find themselves in the awful situation of sleeping rough on our streets for a number of reasons—some to do with the Homelessness Reduction Act in England, which is different to Scotland. Bizarrely, we owe a duty to some people, but we do not seemingly owe a duty to others. The legislation is forcing us to decide between those who are seemingly deserving and undeserving of temporary accommodation in England.

In addition, we have also piloted Housing First in Greater Manchester, which has been a great success. MHCLG recently published an evaluation of Housing First, and it certainly agrees with our approach. There are seven principles to Housing First, including the right to a home, flexible support, and the separation of housing and the support that needs to sit around the individual—that is a really important aspect. Individuals are given choice and control. The principles also include active engagement, a service based on people's strengths, goals and aspirations—it is very much person-centric—and a harm reduction approach that is trauma-informed.

According to our evaluation in October 2021, 442 people had been referred since the first referral. Some 358, or 81%, were still on the programme in June 2021, and 257 had been housed under the pilot, with 221 in their own property. This is a cohort of rough sleepers who are

entrenched, who are repeat and who have all those complex needs in terms of drug and alcohol addiction, mental health issues and physical needs. Some have experienced domestic abuse and violence, and some have come out of the criminal justice system. We are talking about a really difficult cohort of people from a service point of view, and Housing First has delivered fantastic outcomes for that cohort.

Again, it all comes down to political leadership. We have collaboration and partnership across the 10 local authorities that are working together under the umbrella and rubric of the combined authority. We also place co-production and lived experience at the heart of our model, both in terms of the strategy and the delivery. We have people who have experienced homelessness literally informing us about what decisions we should take, day in and day out, holding us to account as politicians through the programme board, and shaping the prevention strategy within Greater Manchester.

This whole notion of co-production and thinking beyond the public sector is ultimately where some of the solutions to this problem are found, as well as the Government speaking with one voice, but also speaking with local, city and regional government, and harnessing devolution to genuinely tackle this issue. There is something in this that we can literally operationalise across the country.

Q22 **Maya Ellis:** Do the others feel, from the experiences you have had or from past successful experiences, that devolution and those kinds of powers are a prerequisite for some of that success, or are there other examples where you have managed to have success without that devolved power?

Ben Tomlin: We have received a range of different Government grants to tackle this issue, specifically targeting different cohorts and groups. They each provide successes, but they are not joined up. We receive grants to assist care leavers and provide accommodation for ex-offenders. The rough sleeping initiative has been significantly life-changing for a number of people because it provides accommodation and support for a targeted group. They programmes are all successful, but they are not joined up. We would be receiving far better value if we were able to tackle that.

We have had similar successes with respect to Housing First and fidelity to the principles mentioned, but on a much smaller scale. We can spend the resource that we provide to Housing First two, three and four times over, because that is the level of demand we are experiencing. We understand some of those solutions, but we need some greater collaboration on how those grants are administered.

Sophie Boobis: There is definitely an element of local-led drive that is really important, because rough sleeping and people who are presenting as rough sleeping are different in different local areas, whether urban or rural, but there are examples of effective schemes that were at a national level.

If we look at the not-too-distant past, there was the Everyone In scheme during the pandemic. If we go a bit further back, there was the Supporting People programme. These were effective interventions. They have very similar principles to Housing First. The funding and the drive separated the support from the conditionality of accommodation, which is one of the core principles of Housing First. In the Everyone In scheme during the pandemic, people were given a house or accommodation, whether it was a hotel or another form of accommodation, and the support came to them. They were not going to lose the accommodation, because that was a public health drive. It was nothing to do with tackling their rough sleeping; it was, “We need to bring people in for health reasons, but while we have you in, let’s bring the support to you.”

It was the same model when we had the Supporting People funding. At the moment, much of that supported accommodation is funded through housing benefit, which means it is very conditional on the actual provision of the house and the home, whereas Supporting People was focused on the support provided.

There are principles of national-led strategies that have been effective. They are most effective when they are able to flex to local-driven demand. The top-down and bottom-up approach has really driven that effectiveness.

Adam Hug: The key thing is financial certainty. We are coming to the end of our current RSI period and we are looking to see whether that will be extended past May 2025. The key thing, if we are planning services over a number of years, is that we need to have certainty so that we can procure and get those things right.

In London, there is a well-established GLA-led process, because ultimately the rough sleepers on my streets will wander over into Camden; they will not necessarily stop at the border—that is not how it works. There is a lot that you can do. The No Second Night Out hubs that were developed in London over time showed that there is great advantage in collaboration. A lot of those services are still delivered at a local level and in partnership with our local voluntary sector.

Going back to something I heard in the previous session, we need to support voluntary sector partners who are all struggling as well. Our ecosystem involves partnership working, and our service has been hit by the financial difficulties that some of our providers are facing. That means we have to then find more money in an emergency to deal with the fact that we have had to sell off assets.

Chair: You are effectively picking that up as well. Moving on swiftly, you have touched on Housing First, but Naushabah has a few more questions.

Q23 **Naushabah Khan:** I was going to ask for a bit more detail about that, Paul, but you have talked very passionately about Housing First and how it works, as has the rest of the panel. I have seen examples of Housing First, and there are areas where it works very well, as we have heard.

There are some areas where it perhaps has not had quite the impact that we had hoped it would. What support do you think local authorities need to successfully implement a Housing First scheme, and how do we ensure that it has the impact and outcomes we intend it to across the piece and that there is consistency in delivery?

Sophie Boobis: As you say, we have seen Housing First be very effective, but there are definitely barriers to its delivery. One of the biggest barriers comes back again to funding and long-term certainty. The principle of Housing First is open-ended support. It is about long-term security of that accommodation and that support. If you are funding your Housing First services through short-term grant funding, as many are, particularly outside the pilot, that certainty can never be there. That can undermine the whole concept. It takes away the ability to invest.

There is also a challenge with access to appropriate housing. You need a lot of one-bedroom properties for Housing First. If there is not sufficient, appropriate, available and affordable tenure, that will also be a challenge. In terms of the resource and the support available to maintain high-fidelity Housing First interventions, they are very cost-effective but have high upstart costs in terms of delivering. Local authorities need to be sufficiently funded to provide those services, but when they do work, they work incredibly effectively.

The other side is the role of other parts of the system. Housing First works when mental health services and social care play their roles, as well as other services. If they are not equally around the table and building partnerships, people cannot access the support they need to sustain their tenancy and develop the positive environment they need to move on from rough sleeping and homelessness.

Adam Hug: We are currently developing that, and we have some positive work on survivors of domestic violence and on targeted Housing First options. There are particular challenges in London, particularly in terms of getting the scale and the broader housing crisis that we have, as well as the cohorts that we have coming through, as I mentioned earlier.

We still need to build more of this and, going back to my point, we need stuff around supported accommodation. You can get someone in and do that intensive work with people with multiple substance issues, mental health abuse or other issues that need to be addressed. You have to work with people so that they are actually ready to go into more normal types of accommodation. That is absolutely critical.

Ben Tomlin: Because of the multifaceted approach to Housing First, housing-related support and council budgets pay for nurses, social workers and the other elements of Housing First in order to make it work; otherwise, it would not work. We really need some thinking about how we can resource that in a sustainable way in the long term.

Q24 **Chris Curtis:** You do find that you struggle to get by funding-wise in terms of the healthcare service and those other—

Ben Tomlin: It is a challenge provide that fidelity to the model, which we know is evidence-based and works. We have Housing First to work with young people. We have Housing First young people's projects, women-only projects and the entrenched, more traditional rough sleeper group, but it is a challenge in terms of resourcing.

Q25 **Chair:** We are going to move on to resource. Maybe you can come in there, Paul.

Paul Dennett: I was just going to agree with my colleague, because you are absolutely right that getting money out of the health system is not easy, and the loops you have to jump through in terms of cost-benefit analysis and proving your case are quite significant. There is something in this that is much broader and much more systemic that we do need to think about.

At the moment, we are going through the latest round of NHS reforms that were brought about in the middle of a global pandemic. They have yet to bed in. On integrated care systems, the jury is out on their efficacy in terms of whether they are improving outcomes. The overall budget of the Department for Health and Social Care for 2025-26 is over £200 billion. If you juxtapose that with local government, which is around £15 billion, you question whether we are ever going to get into the wider determinants of health and wellbeing here. If we are, and if we are serious about prevention, we need to start shifting money into those wider determinants of health and wellbeing

We have heard a lot about the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sector. I am very worried about that sector of the economy because of the impact of the last 14 years, the covid pandemic, the cost of living crisis and the use of their reserves. We have heavily relied on that sector of the economy as a state, and it will be really teetering on falling over if we are not careful. That will have huge consequences for the homelessness and rough sleeping agenda.

Q26 **Chris Curtis:** I want to start with an open-ended question: is the current level of funding local authorities receive to tackle rough sleeping adequate? I suspect I know the answer to this one.

Adam Hug: Unfortunately, it is not. The two recent interventions are helpful. Obviously, we have the additional £233 million going into prevention, which is helping with homelessness writ large, but as we have discussed, it is about helping people before they end up coming on to the streets.

The emergency £10 million in funding that is currently being distributed is helpful, but the key thing is having long-term consistency in rough sleeping support so that we can plan our services. It is then about coming back to the wider issues around local government funding, and particularly the TA crisis that we are dealing with.

Ultimately, we need to stabilise the PRS. We need to reform housing benefit levels so they actually catch up with where we are today. We

need them to be upgraded to 90% of the 2024 local housing allowance rates to give that stability in the market.

On the council side, in terms of being able to procure accommodation ourselves, it is about making sure that councils can get the same amount of whatever housing benefit is available as private landlords. At the moment, the rates that local authorities get are frozen at 2011 rates rather than the current ones. Looking at some of the structural challenges there would help tackle homelessness writ large.

Greater investment in prevention is helpful, but in terms of tackling rough sleeping specifically, it is about longer-term funding, regional collaboration and getting the health service more in the game to tackle some of those really deep-rooted issues around mental health. Ultimately, the mental health hospital that used to provide support to my rough sleeping community in and around Victoria and the west end was closed during the pandemic and has never reopened. That is a fundamental challenge. Previously, our outreach teams were able to physically walk people in mental health crisis to the hospital. That is now no longer there. It is about the knock-on effect of a range of different changes.

Q27 **Chris Curtis:** Could I go to Ben now? You have about £200,000 from the rough sleeping winter pressures funding for this year. Can you give us an idea about what a lump sum like that is going to pay for and what material difference it is going to make in your area?

Ben Tomlin: First, the funding is welcome. It is challenging to spend that kind of grant funding in what is effectively four months. It will go towards providing more emergency accommodation, so that will help. It is challenging to resource the staff and support workers that are required within that timescale for the impact to be long-lasting. It will protect and save lives this winter.

The preference would be to have that commitment over a longer term, so that we can better spend money on things that are more preventive, rather than on more expensive crisis intervention activities—for example, floating support for single people where we know there are characteristics in their lives that mean they are more likely to become rough sleepers. We should focus that resource on targeting areas more upstream.

Q28 **Lewis Cocking:** Adam and Paul, you have both mentioned the health service and trying to get them on board more. You represent big metropolitan areas, both with elected mayors. If they cannot get into the health service, how does the rest of local government do it? They are quite powerful and have lots of levers at their disposal. How do they need to get in better with the NHS? If they cannot, it is going to be even more of a challenge for the rest of local government.

Adam Hug: It may be different between the two areas, because the GLA does not have a role in healthcare at all. There may well be a case for further devolution from central Government to a regional level around certain health powers. That is under discussion nationally, but at the

moment the relationships with the health sector are held by local authorities.

In London, the ICB changes have proven challenging. The areas we are dealing with are so big. That makes it difficult for local authority representatives on them to provide accountability there. It is important to think again about some of the governance structure around ICBs to improve the influence of locally elected officials, whether that is at a local council level or a regional level. In London, they do not currently have that. There is certainly a case for it.

Lewis Cocking: You must have some convening power. We have a strong individual who is elected—

Q29 **Chair:** Just to clarify, for London, having sat on the Assembly, there is no role for the mayor in that. These are some of the things we would want to discuss in terms of devolution. The jury is still out on ICBs in terms of accountability and transparency. That is from a personal perspective. Can we try to stick within scope? I am just mindful of the time. Maybe we can come back to that issue at the end.

Paul Dennett: There is a difference with Manchester, because we had health devolution previously, and then along came these latest reforms that brought about integrated care systems. That literally disconnected, in a sense, that integration agenda that we had been on for many years prior to the arrival of those integrated care systems.

Now the combined authority is literally disconnected from all of the activity around the ICB, which is accountable to the Secretary of State through NHSE. We have seen a retrenchment of devolution as a consequence of the advent of integrated care systems in this country.

Q30 **Chris Curtis:** I do not want to go off scope now, but I have an important question on this. I assume your ICB, Paul, roughly crosses over with your local authority area, in which case how can you make those two things work closer together? Devolution and more powers are part of that. Do you have a vision for how that works better?

Paul Dennett: We had a vision, we were integrated and we were getting on with the whole agenda around Marmot city regions; the wider determinants of health and wellbeing; and the integration of local government with CCGs, our hospital trusts and our voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sector. All of that was in place, and then along came the integrated care systems and it was literally like we were back to the start, having to come up with another new strategy, having to reset the governance and having to bring in the consultants to advise on what should and should not happen.

I would argue that we have been taken backwards in Greater Manchester. If you have read the *Lancet* review of devolution and the integration of health with local, regional and city government, you will see that there are improvements to life expectancy in Greater Manchester as a consequence of that integration. Integrated care systems have come

along and literally disconnected all that work and undone some of it. It has taken us back to basic principles around strategy and policy that we had already spent years finessing and delivering. We were wanting to move further into that integration operational space but were seemingly not allowed to.

Q31 **Mr Dillon:** To come back on Ben's answer on that £200,000, you said it would undoubtedly save lives, and I agree, but can you put a figure on how many nights' accommodation that £200,000 is going to fund? I am looking for a bit more of a concrete answer.

Ben Tomlin: It is difficult to say, because some of that accommodation will come at different costs, based on some of the needs. In our area, for that period, it would probably assist 30 people for four months.

Chair: You touched on it earlier, Joe, but we are going to come back to looking at data.

Q32 **Joe Powell:** Throughout these two sessions we have heard a lot about the challenges around measuring what is effective, who is affected and so on. Do you any of you have any ideas about how we could improve the data collection around this topic?

Sophie Boobis: Yes. There is a lot of work happening in this space at the moment, and there is a lot of learning coming from that. The new data-led framework was recently introduced by MHCLG. There is the women's census, as has been mentioned. There is also a rural census and a young people's census, and there is the annual rough sleeping count. We also have things like CHAIN in London. All of these take different approaches and give us different insight. There is a need to take a step back and reflect on what the learnings are from all of those different models, and what we could do to roll some of that out nationally without creating a system where all we are doing is gathering data.

There are definitely gaps in our understanding, particularly when we use data to inform what services need to be delivered. We know that we are not capturing everybody who is experiencing street homelessness, and therefore we are not designing services with them in mind. We do really need to look at how we can improve the quality of the data.

There are probably enough examples of good practice out there that we could take and learn from and use to build a more effective national model. In CHAIN, we have a lot of understanding and a lot more detail on who is experiencing homelessness than we do in most other parts of the country, because of the depth and detail that is enabled, but it requires resourcing, funding and investment to deliver the outreach needed for that data collection tool.

The other thing to be mindful of is making sure that data collection does not then drive access to support. We heard earlier about verification, and we know there are examples in London where local authorities will say, "You need to sleep rough and be verified on CHAIN before we will let you access help." It is another form of gatekeeping. We see that happening

across the country—the need for the data capture system becomes a gatekeeping tool to prevent access to services. There is definitely a huge amount of knowledge out there about what could work; it is just about consolidating the learning to develop a more effective single measure that we can roll out nationally.

Q33 Joe Powell: To link to the previous discussion, I have a final question for Adam. You mentioned an example where mental health in-patient beds were closed. Do you have evidence that that has led to increases in rough sleeping? Considering this whole discussion about how the health service is involved, how can we better link up to inform those health decisions, so that they are not inadvertently causing an issue?

Adam Hug: We are clear that it has impacted entrenchment and the length of time people are staying on the streets. It is more the case that where the hospital was located meant that we were able to access it to assist with our street population in and around Victoria and the areas not too far from here. That meant that there was that join-up with our rough sleeping teams. We have had to look at other options and invest in our own mental health assistance through the voluntary sector and everything else. It is not the same as having in-patient beds where you could take people who are in crisis.

It is about making sure that this agenda is picked up by ICBs and other parts of the NHS and mental health teams. We have particularly acute issues in Westminster with rough sleeping, compared with other authorities. When ICBs are dealing with this agenda on an eight-borough basis, they are not always going to be prioritising it, because, understandably, they are dealing with all sorts of other mental health crises elsewhere in the system.

We are very clear that what has happened has had an impact on our services. But, more broadly, the under-investment in mental health services across the country is helping drive people on to the streets and making them inherently more resistant to picking up assistance from our outreach schemes and everyone else.

We need a holistic approach to mental health, linking up with prevention across the country. Where we have acute issues with it on the streets, it is about what more targeted investment can be put in to help people who are in crisis to get off the streets. Those are two related but slightly different things.

Paul Dennett: On data, it is a fascinating question, because some of the solutions are to be found in big data analytics. I mean not just looking at this through the lens of service provision, but looking at things like Home Office data on accelerated asylum and at the Government's affordable homes programme in terms of how many social rented properties and local housing allowance properties we are delivering over time. Where are those being delivered? How does that marry up with the pressures in terms of homelessness numbers and rough sleeping numbers? What is happening on right to buy in terms of the losses? How are we mapping

that data? Also, what is happening with temporary accommodation numbers in all local authorities across the country?

In Greater Manchester, 5,649 households are in temporary accommodation. Some 7,697 children are in temporary accommodation, and 824 are in bed and breakfasts. We have a lot of data. The issue is not data itself; the issue is how we actually marshal and analyse the data to inform decision making and policy. One of the things I do not think Governments ever really grasp is the importance of proportionate universalism. All too often, we have looked at things through a universal lens and we have assumed a level playing field. There is no level playing field.

If we are serious about tackling homelessness and rough sleeping, we have to get serious about resourcing differently in different parts of the country. That does have implications for the work that Minister McMahon is doing on local government financing. Proportionate universalism is definitely the way forward on this agenda.

Chair: Thank you very much to our guests. You have given us a lot of points for suggestions and questions. One thing that is very clear and that Lord Bird was trying to express is the need to focus on prevention rather than cure. It is really important that we look at some of the issues in areas where the Government can work on prevention. The taskforce is a good way forward. Essentially, we should not find ourselves having to do emergency funding every Christmas, because we know that the issues are still there and that rough sleeping is still persisting. There is consensus around really pushing the Government on that.

The other thing is looking at this not just in terms of urban areas; the 40% increase in rural areas should set alarm bells ringing for all of us, because this issue has grown right across the country. We will continue to discuss it and to look at how we can work to make sure we end rough sleeping for good. Thank you very much to our guests for coming this morning.