

# Homelessness

## Myth Busting and Frequently Asked Questions

### Contents

What is Bristol's city approach to homelessness? .....	2
Why are people homeless? .....	2
There seems to be more homeless people in Bristol - why has there been an increase? .....	3
How many homeless people are there and how many are sleeping rough? .....	4
What is the impact of increased homelessness in Bristol? .....	5
Doesn't the Council / Government have responsibility for helping homeless people? .....	6
How can we help prevent people becoming homeless? .....	7
Should I give money / food / clothes to homeless people? .....	7
In what other ways can I help? .....	8
How can the business community help homeless people in Bristol? .....	9
Where can a homeless person go tonight? .....	9
Do homeless people have to pay for accommodation? .....	10
Are all people who ask for money on the street homeless? .....	10
Are most street homeless people drug addicts and alcoholics? .....	10
By giving out free food aren't you supporting people's addiction? .....	11
If we improve our response to homeless people in Bristol, will that encourage more homeless people from outside of Bristol to come here? .....	11
What help is available for homeless refugees, EU migrants and people from outside of Bristol? ..	12
Do some people choose to be homeless? .....	12
Is the life expectancy of a male rough sleeper really 47? .....	12
Are rough sleepers dying on the streets of Bristol in the winter months as a result of the cold and severe weather? .....	12
Do you work with people sleeping in squats/caravans/cars/tents? .....	13
Why shouldn't I give out tents to people who are sleeping rough? At least they will be safe and warm as there is little help to move them off the streets. ....	13
Why can't you just give a derelict building for homeless people to stay in? .....	14
Who do I contact? .....	14
Where is the best place for homeless people to find out about services and facilities? .....	15

## What is Bristol's city approach to homelessness?

We are striving for a One City approach to homelessness and rough sleeping in Bristol. No one should have to sleep on the streets.

Bristol is a strategic thinking city, looking at long term solutions, while at the same time responding to the immediate needs of people faced with homelessness.

There are a number of organisations and partnerships working together in Bristol to support those who are homeless and those at risk of homelessness. These organisations include Bristol City Council, St Mungo's, Golden Key, The Julian Trust, Crisis Centre Ministries and Caring in Bristol.

A Rough Sleeping Partnership (RSP) designed to reduce and prevent homelessness has been set up by Bristol City Council. The partnership is led by St Mungo's and includes Avon and Somerset Police, Julian Trust, Crisis Centre Ministries and the Golden Key Programme. It aims to address the problem of street homelessness in the city.

The RSP works alongside the City Office which has committed to providing both short and long term solutions to the homeless problems in the city.

Homelessness is a complex problem that cannot be solved overnight. That is why all these organisations have come together to work towards long term change, committed to ending the blocks and barriers to finding stable homes for some of the city's most vulnerable people.



## Why are people homeless?

The top 3 reasons for rough sleeping from December 2016 to November 2017 were:

- 25% Eviction
- 20% Relationship Breakdown
- 10% Leaving prison/remand

The remaining 48% are for a wide range of other reasons.

This is the visible side of homelessness that the public sees and is another indicator that more people are losing their homes or are not in stable accommodation. We need to shift things upstream and look at how we can stop the steady flow of people ending up on the streets. Early intervention is key.



## There seems to be more homeless people in Bristol - why has there been an increase?

Nationally there has been a rise in homelessness since 2010. The introduction of austerity cuts and welfare changes, alongside much less stable employment and falling real incomes for some households has led to an increased number of evictions, repossessions and financial stresses on families.

Bristol is the capital of the South West and is an economically successful city which attracts people from outside the area. This puts additional pressure on our already limited housing supply. Higher rents and higher house prices, coupled with the lack of new house building means that many people can no longer afford a roof over their heads. The number of properties advertised for rent at Local Housing Allowance rate has reduced to almost 0. Local housing allowance is a way of working out how much housing benefit you can get to help pay the rent if you have a private landlord. With so many people competing for properties, landlords are able to put their rents up – pricing many people out of the market. This all has a knock on effect on the speed with which people move on through supported housing and makes it difficult for people to find a place to rent for themselves.



## How many homeless people are there and how many are sleeping rough?

The number of people rough sleeping in Bristol has increased. Official figures peaked at 97, following the official annual street count in November 2015. This is an increase from 41 rough sleepers (on any one night) in 2014 and less than 10 in 2012 (on any one night). In 2017 the number of people sleeping rough in Bristol was recorded at 86 during the [annual count](#). Although this represents a drop in the official figure recorded in 2015, the actual figure is believed to be higher, and the council and its partners believe that nobody should be forced to sleep rough and remain committed, to addressing the problem of homeless and reducing rough sleeping – eventually reducing to zero - in the city.

The number of people living on the streets is not static, as there are constantly people moving into accommodation and new people finding themselves rough sleeping. Between 1,200-1,400 people a year experience rough sleeping in Bristol, and 100 people every quarter are new to rough sleeping in the city. No children or families with children sleep rough.

In December 2017 there were 476 households placed in temporary accommodation in Bristol and 276 of these had been there more than 6 months. This compares to 282 households in March 2014. This does not include any stay in emergency accommodation before going into the temporary accommodation.

In addition to those in temporary accommodation about 800 people are in supported accommodation at any one time as a result of homelessness

However, these figures do not take into account the people we cannot count. Rough sleeping and families in temporary accommodation are only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to homelessness. We recognise that many single homeless people are Hidden Homeless, defined by Crisis as ‘non-statutory homeless people living outside mainstream housing provision’.



## What is the impact of increased homelessness in Bristol?

There is a greater demand on services commissioned by the council, including the Outreach team, physical and mental health services, housing (shelters, hostels, supported housing etc.) and support working (Golden Key).

In addition there is also a greater demand on community and charitable services including drop-in centres, night shelters and food provision.

On average people are now sleeping rough for a longer period of time – up from around three weeks to three months.

There are a number of issues for those forced to sleep rough. These include a significant reduction in life expectancy, issues with mental and physical health, a lack of safety and an increased risk of being victim of crime and barriers to getting back into work.

For some street homeless people with more complex needs there are also 'hidden' costs on a number of services including criminal justice, A&E and substance treatment services.



## Doesn't the Council / Government have responsibility for helping homeless people?

Tackling homelessness is the responsibility of the whole city, where every organisation and community can play a part in preventing homelessness and its root causes.

The city council is one of a number of partners in the city working to prevent homelessness by working with vulnerable single people and families who are at risk before they become homeless. In 2016/17 we collectively prevented 4,298 households from becoming homeless, a rise from almost 3,500 in 2012-2013. This shows the rise in households affected by homelessness since 2013 and also the volume of cases that the city council and other agencies are dealing with in order to prevent people becoming homeless.

The city council has a statutory duty to meet only the needs of homeless people who meet the criteria set out in the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002. People facing homelessness or at risk of homelessness are referred to Housing Advice through partner agencies or through customer service points. Their needs are assessed and the city council then deliver a housing solution or advise the household that they do not have a duty to house them. In the latter case the city council will always signpost to other housing options. Many homeless people never seek the council's help, often finding their own (sometimes very unsatisfactory) solutions. Many otherwise homeless people are 'managed' by other agencies (eg hospital discharge, prisons, etc). So the system for helping people is very complex – some are not eligible for help, some fall through the net and many never turn up in council-funded or other services.

There are 1,100 council funded supported housing bed spaces, including homeless hostels in Bristol and there are several initiatives responding to the increase in rough sleepers in recent years.

These include a Rough Sleeping Partnership designed to reduce and prevent homelessness which has been set up by Bristol City Council. Separately the Golden Key programme, funded through the Big Lottery, is developing long-term systemic changes to radically overhaul the way in which people with the most complex needs are assisted to recover.

However, these are only solutions to the symptoms of a deeper issue of insufficient affordable and social housing in an environment of squeezed benefits and rising rents. The longer term solution requires a wider political, economic and social response.



## How can we help prevent people becoming homeless?

Prevention and early intervention is key. There are a whole range of services available to help people worried about losing their home – but it is vital to make people aware that it is important to act before it is too late.

Do you think that you or a friend or family member might be at risk of homelessness? It is vital to seek advice as soon as possible. It is much easier to get the help you need before you find yourself homeless. Visit <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/housing/homeless-or-at-risk-of-being-homeless> for more information.

Taking early action can avoid reaching crisis point. There is good advice and guidance available online: [CAB](#), [MA](#). There are also advice and support services available in Bristol: [ACFA](#), [ACORN](#) and [Relate](#).



## Should I give money / food / clothes to homeless people?

It is an individual's choice what to do with their money. We understand that people want to do something immediate to help, and we hope they will also look for ways to make a difference in the longer term. There are many ways to help homeless people, however many well-meaning efforts can hinder a homeless person from accessing the help that they need and can keep them trapped in the rough sleeping cycle. We believe money is best donated to charities working with homeless people, like <https://www.fundsurfer.com/project/bristol-rough-sleeping-partnership>. See more information below.

There is already enough food offered to homeless people in Bristol – the Bristol Soup Run Trust serves food seven nights a week in two locations, the Wild Goose Drop-in serves meals six nights and four days a week, the Julian Trust serves meals five nights a week, the Methodist Centre serves food four lunchtimes a week. In addition, the Salvation Army offers food, as does Trinity Tabernacle and there are a number of other organisations giving out food weekly in the centre of Bristol. [Food banks](#) also provide food for people who are homeless but who do have a roof over their heads.

If you have food that you want to direct to the homeless it is best to distribute this through existing services that homeless people have come to depend on. Non-perishable food is best given to a Food Bank. Ad-hoc food handouts may be appreciated at the time but unpredictability can be stressful and encourage food waste. Serving food can attract high numbers of people, not all of whom will be homeless (or potentially even vulnerable), and you would need to be prepared to deal with some challenging behaviour. In terms of rules and regulations, you would need to ensure you comply with food hygiene regulations and depending on what you were doing you may need [event permission](#).

Organisations working with homeless people also give clothing and may welcome donations of appropriate clean clothing. Any current needs will be listed on their websites.

If you would like to make contact with some groups, organisations and others already offering food and supporting in other ways the best way is via the Bristol Homeless Forum [www.bristolhf.org.uk](http://www.bristolhf.org.uk) or [bristolhf@gmail.com](mailto:bristolhf@gmail.com) – you may be able to get more detailed answers to some of your questions and learn from existing experience.



## In what other ways can I help?

We are working on a co-ordinated approach to supporting homeless people in Bristol. There are a large number of organisations currently offering help and support. We want to empower people in the city to offer help and co-ordinate these offers to maximise the support available. Partners are currently working on a new website to facilitate this process which, though still under development is available here

<https://bristolhomelessconnect.com/>

In the meantime, to find out more about how you can get involved visit

<http://bristolhf.org.uk/>

### **STREETLINK**

If you are concerned about someone who is rough sleeping ANYONE can make a street referral via [Streetlink.org.uk](http://Streetlink.org.uk) giving the following information:

- the rough sleeper's name (if known)
- physical description
- any distinguishing characteristics (e.g. colour of distinctive clothing/possessions/sleeping bag or distinctive accent)
- specific location where the person is sleeping
- Time they were seen

### **DONATIONS**

**Safer off the Streets (#SOSBristol):** The four charities that provide free of charge night shelters to support rough sleepers have come together to set up a single, online crowdfunding appeal that offers people the chance to donate a specific sum - £17 – to provide one bed for one night to a homeless person.

<https://www.fundsurfer.com/project/bristol-rough-sleeping-partnership>

It is important to note that these bed spaces are provided free of charge to people to stay in as the first step in helping them off the streets and into accommodation and support.

### **VOLUNTEERING**

None of our night shelters can operate without the dedication of volunteers, and in Bristol, helping the homeless by giving up a night a week or a night a month is the best way. You can contact the charities directly:

- **St Mungo's:** telephone 0117 954 2958 | website [www.mungos.org](http://www.mungos.org)
- **Julian Trust:** telephone 0117 924 4604 | website [www.juliantrust.org.uk](http://www.juliantrust.org.uk)
- **Crisis Centre Ministries:** telephone 0117 330 1230 | website [www.crisis-centre.org.uk](http://www.crisis-centre.org.uk)
- **Caring in Bristol** telephone 0117 9244 444 | website [www.caringinbristol.org.uk](http://www.caringinbristol.org.uk)



## How can the business community help homeless people in Bristol?

The City Office is coordinating an approach bringing all agencies, businesses, communities and citizens of Bristol together to play a role in meeting the challenge. Some of the things the City Office group is seeking include;

- Resources – revenue funding for some of the initiatives and helping the co-ordination of the initiative.
- Business and Community Champions – to help lead the Hearts and Minds campaign to change Bristol’s attitude towards homelessness, helping make Bristol a more compassionate city with a better understanding of how people become homeless and the challenges they face.
- In-kind services such as builders to help with works, legal professionals to help with procurement / contracts in Bristol.
- Help with campaign fund-raising and help in researching and evaluating our initiative to ensure we learn from what works best and use valuable resources wisely.
- Business and community sponsors for individual homeless people to develop longer-term understanding and provide meaningful purpose and skills development for both business and homeless person.

Businesses can also sign up to St Mungo’s Be Street Aware initiative. Email [bristolstreetaware@mungos.org](mailto:bristolstreetaware@mungos.org) for more information.



## Where can a homeless person go tonight?

There are four night shelters for homeless people in Bristol with a total of 70 available beds. They cost nothing to access. They are run by charities and are staffed, safe, warm places for people to sleep. There is one where people can queue for a space, one for women only and two that the St. Mungo’s rough sleeper Outreach team nominate people for on a nightly basis. There have consistently been spaces available in the night shelters.

For anyone facing a night on the streets the quickest way to get help from Bristol’s Outreach services is referral to Streetlink – a national service. This can be done by the homeless person themselves or by someone concerned for their welfare.

If you are concerned about someone who is rough sleeping ANYONE can make a street referral via [Streetlink.org.uk](http://Streetlink.org.uk)



## Do homeless people have to pay for accommodation?

In general, no they don't. People who are asking for money sometimes say they need £12-20 to get into a hostel or night shelter, so if you give money it is likely to be spent on other things.

There are four night shelters for homeless people in Bristol (see above). They cost nothing to access.

Bristol City Council currently funds around 1,100 supported housing bed spaces, including homeless hostels. They are free to access if service users do not have income or savings, but service users are expected to contribute a small amount towards heating and hot water costs, typically £10-20 per week, usually payable from benefits. There is a referral and assessment process with a waiting list, but while people are waiting they can stay in a night shelter.

There are cheap backpacker hostels in Bristol that can cost £15 to £20 per night and some homeless people do use these occasionally. But there is free shelter accommodation available across the city especially for those who are engaging with the Outreach services



## Are all people who ask for money on the street homeless?

Rough sleeping and undesirable street activity (begging, street drinking and antisocial behaviour) are separate issues that are not necessarily connected, although there is sometimes some overlap.

Our ambition is to ensure that no one who is willing to accept help should be forced to sleep rough – ensuring we have a bed for everyone who is sleeping rough so that no one should have to beg.



## Are most street homeless people drug addicts and alcoholics?

Not all homeless people have addiction problems and for only a few is addiction the main or only cause of their homelessness.

Nonetheless this is a common perception and addiction is a real problem for many people.

When someone has an addiction problem there are often other underlying issues that the dependence on drugs or alcohol is disguising and these issues may make it harder for the person to engage with services that might help them away from the streets.

Providing good support, and linking to mental health, and other services (including drug and alcohol abuse services) is vital.



## By giving out free food aren't you supporting people's addiction?

Not all homeless people have addiction issues but all rough sleepers, even those in work, struggle to afford decent meals.

Even for those who have addiction problems, providing food is keeping them alive and relatively healthy until they are ready to engage with services that can help them with their issues.

As mentioned above, there are many organisations who already provide this vital service.



## If we improve our response to homeless people in Bristol, will that encourage more homeless people from outside of Bristol to come here?

People without a Bristol connection or a valid reason for needing accommodation in Bristol are not entitled to housing through our homeless services, but are given advice to help them access help and accommodation in the place where they have a local connection.

A significant proportion of rough sleepers do have a local connection with other cities and towns in the UK and parts of Europe. Where this is the case, our priority is to help people access help and accommodation in the place where they have a local connection. This is the quickest route off the streets and the best way to help.

In Autumn 2015, a multi-agency approach to reduce levels of rough sleeping was instigated through the Rough Sleeping Partnership backed up with a clear action plan. One element of this approach has been to clarify the criteria for access to supported housing. Rough sleeping, or sleeping in a night shelter, does not count as normally residing in Bristol when someone is considered for supported housing.

Each person has a plan to leave the streets – this is known as the Single Service Offer. We are sharing that plan with all partner agencies working with rough sleepers in the city so it is clear what the city can offer that person to help them to move off the streets. Where someone does not have a local connection with the city, all agencies will be clear that the offer to that person will be to find them accommodation and support in the area or country where they do have a local connection and to assist them to return to that area.



## What help is available for homeless refugees, EU migrants and people from outside of Bristol?

(Entry waiting validation by Bristol Rough Sleeper Partnership)

All street homeless people in Bristol can have access to the same first line support whether they have a local connection or not. That first line support includes engagement with the Outreach team and offers of shelter accommodation while a long term plan to move them off the streets is worked out with them.

For some people, which may include refugees, EU migrants and people from elsewhere in the UK the best offer to that person will be to find them accommodation and support in the area or country where they do have a local connection and to assist them to return to that area.

For asylum seekers their priority will be to gain a right to remain and there are other services in Bristol which are better suited to helping them with those needs.



## Do some people choose to be homeless?

No one chooses to be homeless. While some people do have some very complex needs, many people become homeless because they are just coping with things when circumstances change and they can no longer manage.

Once people have become homeless it can be very hard for them to seek help or to accept the help that is offered. Some people need encouragement to engage with services that can help them get back into housing, especially when that might mean tackling longstanding personal problems.



## Is the life expectancy of a male rough sleeper really 47?

No. Rough sleeping is a high risk lifestyle and there are deaths related to rough sleeping.

The average age of rough sleepers who die on the streets is 47, but many people who are rough sleeping today will engage with services and become housed where their lifestyle changes and their risks of death from exposure, accident, injury or ill health are dramatically reduced.



## Are rough sleepers dying on the streets of Bristol in the winter months as a result of the cold and severe weather?

We are not aware of any rough sleepers dying on the streets in recent years because of the cold or severe weather conditions. The council and the St Mungo's rough sleeping service monitor the weather on a daily basis. When the weather is forecast by the Met Office to be zero degrees or below for three or more consecutive days, or the weather will increase the risk of harm or death to people sleeping rough, this will trigger the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP). When the SWEP is triggered we will open up to 60 extra bed-spaces (depending on the demand for spaces), alongside fully utilising the 77 night shelter and winter church shelter spaces in the city with additional contingency for extra bed-spaces if they are needed. As well as night shelter provision, the spaces used are temporary utilising communal areas in buildings, staffing is provided by the Outreach team, volunteers

and the occasional use of agency staff. There is neither the budget nor sufficient buildings with suitable spaces available to provide this all year round.



## Do you work with people sleeping in squats/caravans/cars/tents?

Yes, the charities working with homeless people won't distinguish between the different ways that people without secure housing are finding shelter for themselves.

But some forms of shelter such as squats and tents present real difficulties to the Outreach services in gaining access to homeless people and properly engaging with them.



## Why shouldn't I give out tents to people who are sleeping rough? At least they will be safe and warm as there is little help to move them off the streets.

The council funds a rough sleeping service that engages and works with rough sleepers to move them into accommodation and support and off the streets. This service also works with a wide range of supported housing providers, private landlords and night shelters to help people find accommodation that suits their needs.

We understand the need for people to stay warm and dry when they are rough sleeping. However, when people are sleeping in tents the rough sleeping team often find it difficult to engage with them and this can prevent or delay helping people into accommodation. Campers can feel more comfortable than if they were rough sleeping and therefore may not engage with the rough sleeper service.

We do not want to encourage encampments in public parks and areas as it often leads to complaints from the public about mess, littering and anti-social behaviour. Parks and public places are not designed for camping and do not have suitable facilities for campers.

We appreciate the offer of help from people who would like to provide tents and sleeping bags, but we do not want to encourage large encampments in the city centre. Instead, we would encourage people to volunteer with a number of organisations that work to provide shelter or help to assist people off the streets and into accommodation and support.



## Why can't you just give a derelict building for homeless people to stay in?

Just opening up a derelict building is unsafe as it is usually unsupervised and unsecured. This type of property does not provide adequate warmth, hygiene solutions or shelter or offer long term move on options. Many homeless people do not want to stay in that sort of environment, but for those that do, there is a real danger that people can become trapped. There is also the risk of creating hot spots for anti-social behaviour and having a negative impact on the local neighbourhood. Properties of this kind could attract drug dealers.

However, as part of the Rough Sleeping Partnership, Bristol City Council has been working with St Mungo's to bring closed buildings into use as temporary accommodation for people who have been rough sleeping. The properties are council owned former offices or community centres which are currently out of use, and are offered to St Mungo's on a 12 month lease and management agreement. The former rough sleepers act as property guardians and in return are charged an affordable rent.

On 31/1/2018 The number of temporary housing places in empty buildings is 22 – 20 for single people, provided by St Mungo's, all so far using Council buildings; 2 family places provided by Home Turf Lettings. One additional building is in the process of being made habitable by St Mungo's to provide 13 additional places for single people. Two additional buildings are being assessed for viability St Mungo's and may provide a further 28 additional places for single people.



## Who do I contact?

If you or someone you know are at risk of homelessness visit <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/housing/homeless-or-at-risk-of-being-homeless> for more information about the support available.

The Survival Handbook provides practical information to homeless people <http://caringinbristol.co.uk/about/survival-handbook/>

If you would like to help support those who are homeless, you can contact the Bristol Homeless Forum <http://bristolhf.org.uk/> to find out more about the best ways to help.

To get involved with the City Office initiative please contact [city.office@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:city.office@bristol.gov.uk)



## Where is the best place for homeless people to find out about services and facilities?

Bristol has a Survival Handbook for homeless and vulnerable people in Bristol which contains advice and information on many services across the City. It is distributed to most local services and should be available in advice centres, police stations and other places people would go for help. It is also available

online <http://caringinbristol.co.uk/about/survival-handbook/>

And is now available via a new website Bristol Homeless Connect

<https://bristolhomelessconnect.com/>



This document was compiled by the City Office, with input from St Mungo's, the Julian Trust, Bristol City Council and Crisis Centre Ministries.