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# No Way Out:

## A Study of Persistent Rough Sleeping in Nottingham

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# Executive Summary

## The Research

Concerns about rising levels of rough sleeping in Nottingham combined with evidence from elsewhere prompted an investigation into how far this increase might have arisen not just from more people coming on to the streets, but also from people remaining there longer or repeatedly returning because of the precariousness of available solutions. The research sought to uncover the characteristics that distinguish persistent rough sleepers from the wider street homeless population, and any common features in their circumstances that might help to explain persistence. The following definition was adopted:

A persistent rough sleeper is someone who was recorded sleeping rough on at least 10% of nights between 1st April 2016 and 31st March 2017, i.e. 36 nights (the 'sustained'), or who has been seen sleeping rough in at least three out of the six years between 2012 and 2017 (the 'recurrent').

The study was undertaken by staff at Nottingham Trent University and Opportunity Nottingham (ON) with help from the Nottingham Street Outreach Team (SOT). The following data sources were used:

- Quarterly data collected on ON Beneficiaries by their Personal Development Coordinators (PDCs) to track changes in personal characteristics and circumstances, use of services and progress against two indicators: the NDT or 'chaos' index and the Outcome Star score.
- Records compiled monthly by the SOT based on information that people they have seen sleeping rough are willing to provide on their characteristics and personal circumstances.
- Qualitative reflections and commentary recorded in the above data sets by PDCs and SOT members that provide a narrative of the changing lives of Beneficiaries and those seen rough sleeping.
- A focus group with the SOT undertaken during September 2017 to explore the reasons for persistent rough sleeping that members have discovered arising from their daily encounters with rough sleepers.



## Characteristics of Persistent Rough Sleepers

There were **72 persistent rough sleepers** who met the above definition, consisting of 7 who were both sustained and recurrent, 33 who were sustained and 32 who were recurrent. Of these,

- **10 were women (14%) and 62 men.**
- **58 were recorded as of White British ethnicity (81%),** most of the others being White (Other).
- **13 were recorded as having a disability (18%).**

ON Beneficiaries are recruited to the programme because they are assessed as having at least three of the four prescribed complex needs: homelessness, substance misuse, mental ill-health and offending. The SOT also records support needs in addition to homelessness among people seen rough sleeping, though definitions might differ from those of ON. Data reveals that persistent rough sleepers register higher levels of all of these support needs than either ON Beneficiaries or rough sleepers generally.

- **25 out of the 38 persistent rough sleepers who were ON Beneficiaries had all four complex needs (66%), the remainder having three.** The corresponding figures for the overall Beneficiary population whose needs are known are 53% with four needs, 45% with three and 2% with two.
- **67 out of the 72 persistent rough sleepers have problems with substance use (93%).**
- **49 are offenders or at risk of offending (68%).**
- **37 have mental health problems (51%).**

More detailed quantitative analysis has only been possible for the 38 persistent rough sleepers who were ON Beneficiaries. Comparison with the full Beneficiary cohort (302 at 31st March 2017) may shed some light on any distinguishing features of persistent rough sleepers, provided no statistical significance is attached.

- **12 (32%) had spent at least two weeks in prison since engaging with ON,** compared with 51 (17%) of the whole Beneficiary cohort.
- **16 (42%) had experienced at least one eviction from accommodation,** compared with 74 (25%) of Beneficiaries overall.
- **16 (42%) reported being excluded from a service because of unacceptable behaviour during at least one quarter,** compared with 48 (16%) of Beneficiaries overall.
- **6 (16%) reported being refused a service for failure to meet eligibility criteria in at least one quarter,** compared with 18 (6%) of Beneficiaries overall.
- With regard to illicit sources of income (family and friends, begging, sex work, illegal activity, etc.), only begging showed an appreciable difference, with 9 persistent rough sleepers **(24%) securing income in this way,** compared with 35 (12%) of Beneficiaries in general.



## Common themes in persistent rough sleeping

The following were found repeatedly in narrative provided by PDCs and SOT members. They are not listed in any particular order of importance, and accounts of the varied effects of each factor on the sustained and the recurrent can be found in the full report.

- 1) Both rough sleepers themselves and those who work with them are encountering a **diminishing range of options** when seeking to leave the streets, arising from cuts in public funding and adverse changes in the housing market. Hostels have closed, Housing Benefit availability is more restricted, affordable tenancies are more limited in terms of quantity and quality, and the supply of tenancy support has all but dried up.**
- 2) Financial issues** loom large in the lives of many rough sleepers. This is particularly true of migrants with no recourse to public funds, but is also the case with many indigenous rough sleepers who encounter restricted access to welfare benefits. Access may also be impeded by debts incurred in previous accommodation. The structures needed to sustain benefit claims may result in a preference for begging which is unreliable as a source of income and may thereby put accommodation at risk, something particularly relevant to the recurrent group.
- 3) The high proportion of persistent rough sleepers who experience prison sentences means that **prison discharge** frequently precipitates a return to previous chaotic lifestyles, even amongst those who may have had some form of accommodation, or otherwise made progress in recovery, immediately before sentencing.**

4) The operation of homelessness legislation may act as a barrier in many cases. For instance, rough sleepers fleeing from another locality may be seen as having **no local connection** to Nottingham, while others vacating accommodation because of intimidation may be seen as **intentionally homeless** and single rough sleepers in general may struggle to prove **priority need** status.

5) The **level of complex need** encountered in the persistent rough sleeper population generates particular problems in the context of diminishing specialist facilities and tenancy support. The result is unsuitable referral to whatever hostel accommodation is available or premature referral to move-on accommodation, both of which may break down, resulting in eviction.

6) As a result of this and other experiences, rough sleepers may carry a baggage of **past evictions and negative risk assessments** which leave them barred from many facilities and make them hard to accommodate. Moreover, rough sleepers frequently miss out on mental health or other assessments that might give access to specialised support because of the logistics of conducting assessments with rough sleepers.

7) The narratives of many persistent rough sleepers recount an **ambivalent relationship with hostel accommodation**. There are stories of evictions for rent arrears or inappropriate behaviour. There are stories of abandonment for experiences of intimidation or financial exploitation by other residents. As a result, many refuse offers out of fear of who they might encounter, or of being lured into lifestyles from which they seek to escape.

8) **Personal relationships may have a toxic effect** in the lives of persistent rough sleepers. This sometimes affects women more than men, but not always. It is the case that women are more likely to be trapped in exploitative and abusive relationships which impede solutions to their housing problems. Local authorities are precluded from housing a homeless woman with a partner with whom she is at risk of harm. However, other Beneficiaries (men and women) may be impaired by loyalty to a partner with whom they have a positive relationship. Meanwhile, others remain homeless from fear of those with whom they might be located. This might be a hostel or shared accommodation, or the only neighbourhood where they have a local connection.

9) A combination of all the above often results in **an overall disillusionment with what is perceived as a hostile system** that may end up making the streets attractive. The experience of repeated failure, the sense of there being no alternative and the effect of growing numbers in generating a mutually supporting community are generating an inertia in engaging persistent rough sleepers in the pursuit of better options.



# 1. Introduction

Twenty years ago, the first known study of rough sleeping in Nottingham was completed (Bowpitt, et al., 1997). The Government had expressed an interest in extending Phase 3 of the Rough Sleepers Initiative beyond London (DoE, 1995) for which local authorities were required to indicate knowledge of the extent of the problem locally, and plans to address it. A street head count in July 1996 had returned a figure of 14 rough sleepers seen on a single night, but anecdotal evidence suggested many more. Funding was therefore secured from Crisis under its Action Research Programme for a more substantial investigation of rough sleeping in Nottingham.

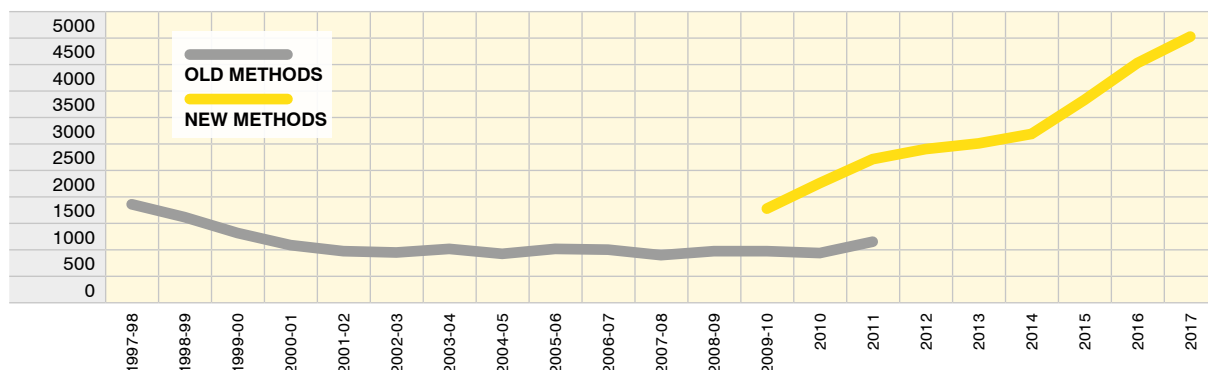
A total of 126 people was found sleeping rough during a 63-day period between January and March 1997. Compared with the characteristics of rough sleepers revealed in data gathered by the Street Outreach Team (SOT) and used for the current research (see below), rough sleepers in 1997 were more likely to be female (21%), younger (average age 28), of white ethnicity (95%), English (86%) and have a local connection to Nottingham (about half). What is of special interest to the current research is the duration of rough sleeping and the reasons that kept people on the streets twenty years ago. About a third of respondents reported having slept rough for at least a month, and about half gave reasons for night shelter accommodation – which was all that was on offer for rough sleepers in 1997 – being inaccessible.

- Partners or friends could not be accommodated together.
- Rough sleepers could not be accommodated with their pets, usually dogs.
- Bad experiences deterred people from night shelters, especially lack privacy and threats posed by other residents.
- Some rough sleepers were barred from night shelters for repeated episodes of drug or alcohol misuse, violence, intimidation or sexual misconduct.
- Financial reasons kept some people from night shelter accommodation due to accumulated debt or reluctance to lodge a Housing Benefit claim.

From 1997, homelessness in the form of rough sleeping assumed a much higher political prominence as a series of Government initiatives came and went. Along with most other major cities, Nottingham has benefited much from these in terms of the more effective funding of street outreach, day centre, tenancy support and supported housing services, and this effectiveness was reflected in a decline in rough sleeping that mirrored national trends from 1998 to 2010. All this came to an end in 2010, as Government austerity measures undercut the funding base for many of these initiatives. Continuous increases in rough sleeping in England since 2010 have been widely reported, with some of the most dramatic increases seen in the past year, as Fig 1 illustrates.

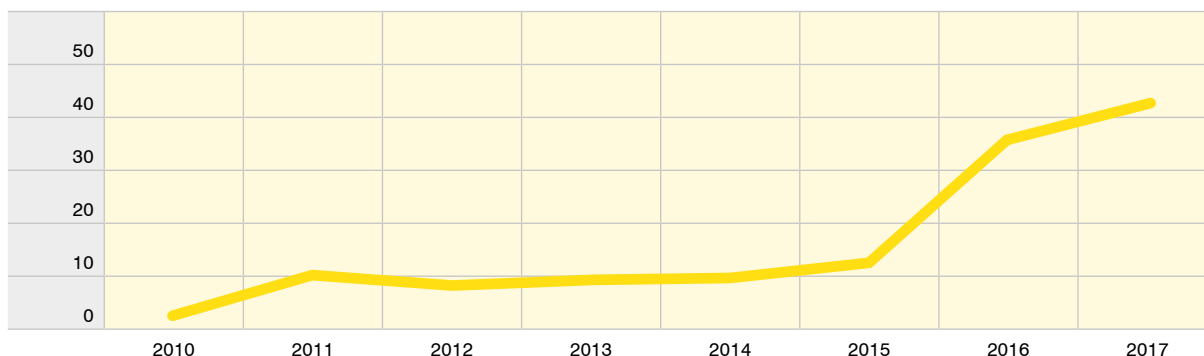
The official national headcount for England counted 4,751 rough sleepers in autumn 2017, a 15% increase on 2016. However, this national figure conceals wide local variations, raising concerns locally when the Nottingham headcount increased from 35 to 43, as FIG 2 shows.

**FIG 1: ONE NIGHT HEAD COUNTS FOR ENGLAND**



<sup>1</sup> CLG, 2018b. The method of counting rough sleepers changed in 2010 to include people residing in places unsuitable for human habitation (CLG, 2010)

**FIG 2: ONE NIGHT HEAD COUNTS FOR ROUGH SLEEPERS IN NOTTINGHAM**



What is less well known is how far these increases have arisen from the arrival of new rough sleepers, the return of previous rough sleepers, or the inability of existing rough sleepers to find accommodation. What follows are the findings from an investigation that concentrated on the latter two categories, particularly focusing on a group of persistent rough sleepers in Nottingham, who appear to be unable or unwilling to access potential exit routes. The national survey on destitution in the UK (Fitzpatrick et al., 2016) is helpful in going beyond the DCLG's single night headcount in showing that nearly a quarter of the estimated 1.2 million people in the UK who met the survey's destitution criteria might have slept rough at some point in the past month, but it tells us little about the duration of rough sleeping. Elsewhere, the Mayor of London's report from the CHAIN (Combined Homelessness and Information Network) database covering the period from April 2016 to March 2017 (Mayor of London, 2017), which is based on records of people seen sleeping rough by street outreach teams in London, showed that, of the 8,108 rough sleepers, 1,978 (the 'stock') had been seen the previous year. That is, while overall numbers had remained more-or-less static after a 7% increase the previous year, the stock had increased by 8%. Moreover, 1,869 were seen in more than one quarter of 2016-17, representing a decline of 8% from 2015-16 after a 25% increase the previous year. The evidence from London clearly points not only to an overall upward trend in rough sleeping, but also a general trend towards an even greater rise in its average duration. The present investigation therefore sought to examine patterns of rough sleeping in Nottingham to understand how far the massive increase in headline rough sleeping conceals a corresponding increase in persistent rough sleeping, and whether any common themes are emerging that may have changed from the explanations that were prevalent in 1997.



## 2. Data Sources and Methods

Researching an elusive population like rough sleepers inevitably poses problems for investigators. We have had the good fortune to have access to two routinely collected sources of data relevant to rough sleepers in Nottingham.

1) The Opportunity Nottingham (ON) database is examined for what it reveals about the number and characteristics of Beneficiaries who have been persistent rough sleepers. ON is part of the Big Lottery's Fulfilling Lives: Supporting people with multiple needs programme, and for the past 3½ years has been working with over three hundred adults who have combined homelessness, mental ill health, substance misuse and criminal involvement in ways that have entrenched them in damaging lifestyles. Not all of them have a history of rough sleeping, but many do, and the present study has focused on a sub-set with a recent background of persistent rough sleeping.

The value of the ON database for present purposes lies in gathering extensive data on a quarterly basis on the characteristics, personal circumstances and patterns of service use of all beneficiaries. It also charts their progress using two tools, the NDT or 'Chaos' Index<sup>1</sup> which is a negative measure of the level of 'chaos' in the lives of Beneficiaries, and the Outcomes Star which is a positive measure of progress towards outcomes<sup>2</sup>. The quantitative part of the analysis derives from four measures that might potentially reveal patterns of rough sleeping or extreme housing vulnerability:

- The proportion of time in each quarter that Beneficiaries spend in different types of accommodation, including rough sleeping;
- The number of times Beneficiaries have been evicted from their accommodation in each quarter, which has been aggregated into a total;
- Beneficiaries' NDT scores for housing insecurity and instability, a maximum score indicating 'rough sleeping or living in high risk exploitative accommodation under coercive arrangements';
- Beneficiaries' Outcome Star scores for 'managing tenancy and accommodation', the lowest score possibly indicating that they are stuck in a highly vulnerable housing situation, such as rough sleeping.

The purpose of the analysis has been to explore patterns of rough sleeping over time, and to compare with other indicators of complex need to illuminate reasons for persistent rough sleeping among the population of ON Beneficiaries. However, it must be recognised that the ON data has been gathered for gauging Beneficiaries' progress in overcoming multiple needs rather than exploring the reasons for persistent rough sleeping, and the indicators used for this analysis have far from perfect validity as measures of the phenomena under investigation. The limitations of the measures used are partly obviated by a valuable qualitative source derived from the comments, reflections and narratives of Personal Development Coordinators to whom Beneficiaries are assigned to navigate their experience of ON and other services. These have provided a further valuable source for the present study.

2) The Nottingham Street Outreach Team (SOT) managed by Framework Housing Association has operated consistently on the streets of Nottingham since the late 1990s, moving beyond the City Centre as funding has allowed. The SOT surveys the streets around the City Centre and beyond every morning of the year to monitor the welfare of all those found sleeping rough and invite them to meetings where they can be directed to sources of help where appropriate. The SOT keeps records on all those encountered that are as detailed as participants will allow. This includes information on personal characteristics and circumstances, as well as qualitative reflections, comments and narrative from SOT members as relationships develop and situations change. A fairly full set of data have been available since 2012 which have enabled returners to be tracked.

<sup>1</sup> NDT index scores Beneficiaries against ten criteria, including self-harm and risk to/from others.

<sup>2</sup> The Outcome Star also scores Beneficiaries against ten criteria, including motivation and self-care.



We are now left with the question of how to combine these disparate data sources to generate a coherent analysis of a phenomenon – persistent rough sleeping – for which there is no agreed definition among researchers and for which each data source might generate its own distinct population. We have taken some guidance from the conceptual distinction in the Mayor of London’s analysis of the CHAIN data between the ‘stock’ seen continuously over a specified period and ‘returners’ who return to the streets, often repeatedly, after a period of absence. We have used the slightly different terms, ‘sustained’ and ‘recurrent’ for these two groups. Thus for our purposes,

A few further comments are needed on the way this definition has been arrived at and interpreted.

A persistent rough sleeper is someone who slept rough on at least 10% of nights between 1st April 2016 and 31st March 2017, i.e. 36 nights, (the ‘sustained’) or who has been seen sleeping rough in at least three out of the six years between 2012 and 2017 (the ‘recurrent’).

- A rough sleeper is anyone seen by the SOT on their morning rounds who meets the CLG (2010) criteria. For the ON dataset, there is some degree of self-definition of rough sleeping as PDCs interpret the evidence provided by Beneficiaries in their quarterly returns. These definitions are far from fully reliable: the SOT can never be comprehensive in its surveys, and PDCs have to interpret the testimonies of Beneficiaries.
- The 10% persistence measure for the sustained group is somewhat arbitrary, selected to generate a large enough population for comparison with the wider population of rough sleepers. For ON Beneficiaries, the proportion of time spent in a range of accommodation types is recorded for each quarter, so a Beneficiary was included if they reported sleeping rough for an average of 10% of the time in each of the four quarters between April 2016 and March 2017. Those who were found sleeping rough by the SOT for at least 36 nights during this period were also included.
- The recurrent group were included to capture a population for whom rough sleeping was a prominent part of their lives over a much longer period than 2016-17.
- Names from the list of persistent rough sleepers from each data source were cross-checked with each other to avoid double counting.
- Data has been amalgamated into a single data set as far as possible, although it needs to be recognised that the ON returns provide a much more detailed source of quantitative data than the SOT data. Any comparative comments therefore relate only to the ON data sets.



### 3. Characteristics of Persistent Rough Sleepers

#### The number of persistent rough sleepers

29 ON Beneficiaries reported sleeping rough for at least 10% of the time between 1st April 2016 and 31st March 2017. This compares with a total of 302 Beneficiaries who had engaged with ON by 31st March 2017. Moreover, of the 669 people seen sleeping rough by the SOT during the survey period, 19 were seen on at least 36 separate occasions. Of these, 8 also appeared in the ON Beneficiary list, giving an aggregated 'sustained' group of 40.

An additional 39 'recurrent' rough sleepers had been seen regularly by the SOT during at least three of the six years between 2012 and 2017, of whom 5 appeared in the list of 29 ON Beneficiaries and a further 7 were 'recurrent' Beneficiaries, but not part of the 'sustained' group, giving 38 ON Beneficiaries in all. Aggregating the sustained and recurrent, and allowing for overlap, gave a total of **72 persistent rough sleepers**, consisting of 7 who were both sustained and recurrent, 33 who were sustained and 32 who were recurrent. FIG 3 will make this clearer.

FIG 3: SUSTAINED AND RECURRENT ROUGH SLEEPERS FROM ON AND SOT DATA

	ON BENEFICIARIES	SOT DATA	ON & SOT	TOTALS
Sustained	17	9	7	33
Recurrent	0	25	7	32
Sustained & Recurrent	0	0	7	7
TOTALS	17	34	21	72

#### Demographic features and support needs of the 72 persistent rough sleepers

- **10 were women (14%) and 62 men.** This is identical to the gender balance found by the SOT among all 669 rough sleepers, but lower than the number of female ON Beneficiaries recorded at 22% at end of March 2017. This reflects the fact that being a rough sleeper is by no means the primary referral route into becoming an ON Beneficiary; many of the other routes are likely to attract a higher proportion of women.
- **58 were recorded as of White British ethnicity (81%),** most of the others being White (Other). This is only slightly higher than the 79% proportion of ON Beneficiaries recorded as White British, but considerably higher than the 64% of rough sleepers seen by the SOT who were recorded as White British.
- **13 were recorded as having a disability (18%).** This is far less than the 37% of ON Beneficiaries for whom information about disability has been recorded. Unfortunately, no comparable figures on disability can be found from SOT data.

#### Complex needs

ON Beneficiaries are recruited to the programme because they are assessed as having at least three of the four prescribed complex needs: homelessness, substance misuse, mental ill-health and offending. The SOT also records the support needs in addition to homelessness among people seen rough sleeping, though definitions might differ from those of ON. Data reveals that persistent rough sleepers register higher levels of all of these support needs than either ON Beneficiaries or rough sleepers generally.

- **25 out of the 38 ON Beneficiaries have all four complex needs (72%), the remainder having three.** The corresponding figures for the overall Beneficiary population whose needs are known are 53% with four needs, 45% with three and 2% with two.
- **67 out of the 72 persistent rough sleepers have problems with substance use (93%).**

- **49 are offenders or at risk of offending (68%).**
- **37 have mental health problems (51%).**

## Other prominent characteristics

More detailed quantitative analysis has only been possible for the 38 persistent rough sleepers who were ON Beneficiaries. Comparison with the full Beneficiary cohort (302 at 31st March 2017) may shed some light on any distinguishing features of persistent rough sleepers, provided no statistical significance is attached.

- **12 (32%) had spent at least two weeks in prison since engaging with ON**, compared with 51 (17%) of the whole Beneficiary cohort.
- **16 (42%) had experienced at least one eviction from accommodation**, compared with 74 (25%) of Beneficiaries overall.
- **16 (42%) reported being excluded from a service because of unacceptable behaviour during at least one quarter**, compared with 48 (16%) of Beneficiaries overall.
- **6 (16%) reported being refused a service for failure to meet eligibility criteria in at least one quarter**, compared with 18 (6%) of Beneficiaries overall.
- With regard to illicit sources of income (family and friends, begging, sex work, illegal activity, etc.), only begging showed an appreciable difference, with **9 persistent rough sleepers (24%) securing income in this way**, compared with 35 (12%) of Beneficiaries in general.

## NDT (New Directions Team) assessment

The NDT index is used to assess Beneficiary need across a total of ten indicators sometimes seen as a measure of 'chaos' in their lives. All but two are scored out of 4, generating a maximum score of 48. A Beneficiary would score 4 for housing if they were rough sleeping or living in high risk, exploitative accommodation.

- The average opening NDT score for ON Beneficiaries in the sustained group was 32.3, significantly higher than the current threshold of 30 for accessing ON.
- For those with at least two NDT measurements, the average score by the end of March 2017 was 28.9, an improvement of 3.4, which is somewhat less than what is typically achieved by Beneficiaries who on average manage an improvement of 4.1 at the second measure and 6.0 by the third. Moreover, this average obscures considerable diversity from -18 to +15, with a quarter showing worsening NDT scores.
- For housing, the average NDT score was 3.2, higher than the typical opening NDT measure of 2.7, with a quarter of sustained rough sleepers scoring a maximum of 4.

## Outcome Star

The Homelessness Outcome Star is a way of measuring Beneficiary progress in ten aspects of their lives, such as self-care and living skills and managing tenancy and accommodation. Each assessment generates a score out of 10 for each aspect.

- **The average opening Outcome Star score for ON Beneficiaries in the sustained group was 25.5**, slightly less than the average opening score of 28.5.
- For those with at least two measurements, **the average Outcome Star score at the end of the survey was 31.9, an improvement of 6.4**, which again is somewhat less than the 36.3 that is achieved by Beneficiaries generally by the second reading, giving an average

improvement of 7.8. Moreover, this average for sustained rough sleepers also obscures considerable diversity from +43 to -20, which bears comparison with the best and worst found among all Beneficiaries.

- **For managing tenancy and accommodation, the average Outcome Star for those with at least two readings was 2.4**, with nearly half recording a score of 2 or less. This contrasts with an average of 3.7 for all Beneficiaries.

In summary, we can say that, compared with rough sleepers generally, persistent rough sleepers are more likely to be White British men without a significant disability. Moreover, compared with a wider population of adults with multiple needs, those who are persistent rough sleepers are more likely to have support needs arising from problematic substance use, mental ill health and offending, to have spent significant time in prison, to have been evicted from accommodation or excluded from or refused services, and to engage in begging as a significant source of income. Furthermore, they are likely to be a generally needier group who make less progress through engagement with a service like Opportunity Nottingham.



## 4. The Experience of Persistent Rough Sleeping

In this section, narrative evidence from PDCs and SOT members in the notes, reflections and commentaries that accompany their ongoing records is used to link the common characteristics of persistent rough sleepers into accounts that will hopefully deepen our understanding of their experience. Case studies of individual rough sleepers have been constructed to illustrate common themes in their stories, with many of the accounts illustrating more than one theme, reflecting the complexity of their lives and the way that factors reinforce one another in sustaining a pattern of rough sleeping. Further explanation of the themes is derived from SOT members' testimony during the focus group discussion. Although the themes are often hard to separate, they have been grouped around the two overarching themes of systemic and personal factors, in order to distinguish those that derive from the welfare service environment that confronts rough sleepers in their efforts to manage their lives from those arising from the circumstantial and motivational attributes that affect the way that they negotiate their world. However, as we will see, systemic and personal factors almost invariably intertwine in the lives of rough sleepers.

### 4.1 Systemic Factors

Both rough sleepers themselves and those who work with them are encountering a diminishing range of options when seeking to leave the streets, arising from cuts in public funding and adverse changes in the housing market. Hostels have closed, Housing Benefit availability is more restricted, affordable tenancies are more limited in terms of quantity and quality, and the supply of tenancy support has all but dried up. The SOT highlighted some of the obstacles encountered when trying to secure private sector tenancies for rough sleepers.

*"We can access the private rented sector. But we have the same problem of lack of availability. Sometimes they have to pay the rent and a deposit, so then they think, 'I've got it, I've got it.' But then .... if they are on benefits, it doesn't always happen even when they've actually got the money. There's always something that can happen. The quality of landlord that is guaranteed to accept people on Housing Benefit and no deposit is pretty low. ... We have landlords that we do not use, we would not use, and we advise people not to go and end up with those landlords. We don't use them for exactly that reason; they are poor quality, they will take anybody. The issues are there are no risk assessments. We don't refer into those rentals. When we refer into a property we have to be sure that it is a suitable environment for that person."*

In July 2016, **Alan**<sup>3</sup>, one of the sustained group, had a tenancy, but he felt harassed by neighbours knocking on his door constantly so he slept rough. He was waiting to be re-accommodated by his landlord. At the end of August, he gave notice on his property as no alternative was found, and by the end of October 2016, the SOT had lost contact with him.

**Financial issues** loom large in the lives of many rough sleepers. We have already noted the problem of securing a deposit for a private tenancy. This is particularly true of migrants with no recourse to public funds, but is also the case with many indigenous rough sleepers who encounter restricted access to welfare benefits. Access may also be impeded by debts incurred in previous accommodation. The structures needed to sustain benefit claims may result in a preference for begging which is unreliable as a source of income and may thereby put accommodation at risk, something particularly relevant to those in the recurrent group. The SOT explained some of the problems they encounter in some detail.

*"It's so easy to get sanctioned now. Some people are in sanction for 6 months."*

<sup>3</sup>All names are fictitious

*It is difficult to open a bank account as well. You don't realise that until you go with someone. Terms of ID, proof of address, that sort of thing. ... You try and explain that to them (DWP staff) and they just sanction them. They've got no way to get to their appointments. They don't even know how to apply for jobs some of them you know. It's unrealistic.*

*"To get benefits you have to give proof of looking for work. ... Being made to do that, they are homeless, ... Therefore, people just stop bothering. So, if they are rough sleeping and they are begging for example, why would you go for 10 job searches to get £40; you can make that in 2 hours. That is a massive barrier. ... You need to be on the phone for half an hour. There are no phones in Job Centres any more, which everybody relied on. So, if you're heading for making money by doing that, you're never going to put money on a phone. You're not going to put £5 on a mobile. You're not even going to waste your time. ... Taking phones away from Job Centres and you don't have a free number. That is a move that is dead transparent. Because if they did care, those things would be in place.*

*"If we have to go and do a benefit claim, that is 4 hours of our time. We have to make sure we have a mobile and a charger and make sure we've got hours to get the very basics. ... For some of them it's too much; they'd rather beg. ... If you are dealing with drug users, there are other things that are important."*

**Ben**, one of the recurrent group, illustrates the preference for begging as a source of income to fund drug needs, and the consequences for finance and accommodation. He was first met by the SOT in 2013 when he slept rough after missing the last bus home due to begging late. He begged to support his drug use which obliged him to stay out. He was living with his partner. In 2014 he had a tenancy, but slept rough when he was partying in the city and begging. Similar stories were recounted in 2015 and 2016. One week in Autumn 2016 he reported sleeping rough as he could not get his script for a week so slept rough to be in a better position to beg and secure drugs. He claimed he had been rough sleeping for eight weeks as his benefits claim had broken down and he needed to support his drug habit. Likewise, in 2017, he slept rough to raise money for drugs. He rarely stayed in his property and had an eviction order for rent arrears.

**Cesar**, one of the sustained group, illustrates the monetary problems regularly encountered by migrants with no recourse to public funds. In spring 2016, he slept rough for around a month, before moving on to sofa surfing. He could claim Job Seekers Allowance, but not Housing Benefit. He was working part time whilst rough sleeping, but was unable to get a new job as his passport had expired and he was trying to save up money for a rent deposit. In the summer, he went back to sofa surfing and rough sleeping, whilst he was working. In the autumn, he got a new part time job, but he was still rough sleeping. In 2017, he was banned from the winter night shelter for trying to punch a staff member. There was also a GP note to say that he should not work due to ill-health, but he was not entitled to benefits.

The high proportion of persistent rough sleepers who experience prison sentences means that **prison discharge** frequently precipitates a return to previous chaotic lifestyles, even amongst those who may have had some form of accommodation, or otherwise made progress in recovery, immediately before sentencing. SOT members picked up the negative implications for housing rights, noting that people from prisons in parts of the country with limited resources, or which for them had negative connotations, come to Nottingham only to find they have no local connection.

*"We were speaking to a Homeless Health Team and the guy was saying the people in prisons or hospital, were being told you just go to London Road<sup>4</sup> and get a bed. And they*

<sup>4</sup>Direct access hostel

*come from a different part of the country and they say, 'I've been told I can come here and get a bed'. They don't. They are here. There is no local connection and they are stuck. What is next? There is nothing to go back to where they come from. And then here we try to get them into private rented.*

*"People are saying, 'I'm not going back to Doncaster, 'cos I've got loads of drug debts; that's why I'm in prison in the first place.' It's more bad news mate. 'I'm going to resettle in Nottingham.' Probation will say, ok, and they'll put them in (accommodation with) a poor-quality landlord where there are still those issues of drugs. They don't break away from it and it's not really thought through. Sometimes those institutions try to by-pass the pathways, ... It lasts for 2 weeks or 3 weeks and they've built a network, a negative network sometimes. So that is it then. They need to go to Doncaster. But they don't want to go back to Doncaster. We have people from Barnsley or wherever. They are just not going. That will always be our offer. We will always look at housing and things, benefits and health and stuff like that. You've got services there that can look at you but then we have to review that, don't we, because they are just not going back. We have to look at what we can do locally."*

**Derek**, from the sustained and recurrent groups and an ON Beneficiary, illustrates the problems when prison discharge is unplanned, even where there is a local connection. His considerable mental health, alcohol and behavioural issues resulted in him being judged high risk and barred from many services. He was first encountered at the winter night shelter in February 2013. At the end of the month he got private rented accommodation, but was sleeping rough by November. In December, he was refused by a hostel for past behaviour. He was placed in a B&B until April 2014, being deemed too high a risk for the night shelter. Further private rented accommodation followed in May, from which he was evicted in August due to bad behaviour. He went back to rough sleeping and his mental health dramatically deteriorated, with experiences of paranoia. He went to A&E and was arrested a few times before being sent to prison in December. It was at about this time that his involvement with ON began. He was discharged from prison to rough sleeping in April 2015. He continued rough sleeping until November, having been rejected by one hostel. He could not be housed with his partner because of safeguarding concerns. November saw another spell in prison to the end of February 2016, followed by further discharge to rough sleeping. A couple of weeks in a hostel ended in further eviction. After another month in prison, he moved into a hostel in July, but couldn't handle it so went back to the streets. He was sleeping rough again with a partner in April 2017, but moved into private rented accommodation with his partner in September.

The operation of homelessness legislation may act as a barrier in many cases. For instance, rough sleepers fleeing from another locality may be perceived as having **no local connection** to Nottingham, while others vacating accommodation because of intimidation may be regarded as **intentionally homeless** and single rough sleepers in general may struggle to prove **priority need** status. As we have seen above, the SOT had experience of how prison discharge frequently leaves people in localities where they have no local connection. The following accounts illustrate these issues from the experiences of rough sleepers.

As well as illustrating the problems of establishing local connection when fleeing violence elsewhere, **Ellie** from the recurrent group reflects the struggles more often found with women rough sleepers when a partner is also sleeping rough. In October 2014, she fled from another city with her partner due to threats of violence. She was offered reconnection back to where she came from, but she was afraid to go back. Following a brief stay in hospital, she was accommodated in a hostel in December, but in February 2015 was asked to leave to return to the city where she had a local connection. When

she refused to go back due to the threats of violence against her, she returned to rough sleeping. In February 2016, she was again accommodated in a hostel, but continued to sleep rough as her partner had no accommodation at that time. This continued into 2017.

**Frank**, also from the recurrent group, exemplifies problems of intentional homelessness that might arise from indebtedness and the struggles of negotiating access to benefits following prison discharge. In 2012, he abandoned hostel accommodation. In 2013 during a brief spell in prison, the contact assessment that might have ensured accommodation on release did not reach Housing Aid<sup>5</sup>. He then found himself accommodation, but was evicted due to rent arrears and was classed as intentionally homeless. He was eventually housed in supported accommodation, but lost his bed due to lack of engagement and health and safety issues. In 2014, he was admitted to a hostel after another prison sentence, but was evicted for non-payment of rent due to a delay in receiving benefits. He ended up sleeping rough before being granted supported accommodation. In 2015, he abandoned a hostel to stay with a friend and then slept rough. He secured a place in another hostel and was not seen rough sleeping during 2016. In 2017, he acquired a tenancy but just decided to stay out, and soon after became homeless again before moving in with friends.

**Greg** provides a further illustration of the confusions that can arise over local connection. He was from the sustained group and an ON Beneficiary. In 2016, he slept rough despite having a hostel bed. He then acquired his own tenancy, but was assaulted which made him leave, and he slept rough with a friend. Greg had been sofa surfing elsewhere since 2011 denying him a local connection to Nottingham. In November 2016, he went to the area where he was believed to have a local connection, but housing staff denied owing him a duty as his last address was in another area (although he only stayed there for 2 months) and he had lost contact with his family. In December, a referral was made to a hostel, but he felt unsafe there, although willing to go to London Road. He was placed in hotels that winter via SWEP<sup>6</sup>. In 2017, he received some deposit money from Housing Aid and ON for a private tenancy, and was also referred to the Multiple Needs Tenancy Sustainment (MNTS) team.

## 4.2 Personal Factors

The **level of complex need** encountered in the persistent rough sleeper population generates particular problems in the context of diminishing specialist facilities and tenancy support. The result is unsuitable referral to whatever hostel accommodation is available or premature referral to move-on accommodation, both of which may break down, resulting in eviction. SOT members were well aware of this from their own experience.

*“They go to the hostel but they move through quickly. They are moved into other accommodation because there is a pressure on beds but if they are not ready for it then all of a sudden they have a bedsit or shared house with no support.”*

**Hugh**, from the recurrent group, had been known as a chaotic drinker by the SOT for some time. In January 2012, he was housed in a hostel, which he abandoned in April. In October, though he had been bidding for a council property, he wanted to go into hostel accommodation as he did not feel ready to have his own tenancy and was instead accommodated in supported housing. However, in April 2013, he was evicted for rent arrears. He sofa surfed for a month and then slept rough. In the same month, he was housed at another hostel. There is a gap in the records until September 2016 when he was rough sleeping after losing a tenancy he had been allocated. The condition of the room was very poor and he was not coping well with independent accommodation.

<sup>5</sup> Nottingham's homelessness service run by the City Council <sup>6</sup> Severe Weather Emergency Protocol



During October and November, he kept missing assessments at a hostel and in December missed Housing Aid appointments. His alcohol intake had increased. In February 2017, he managed to attend a Housing Aid appointment, and in March was housed in a hostel.

Moreover, rough sleepers frequently **miss out on mental health or other assessments** that might give access to specialised support often because of the logistics of conducting assessments with rough sleepers. As a result, they are inappropriately allocated places at unsuitable hostels, as the SOT explained.

*“These hostels are not suitable for these people with these levels of mental ill health, so they get much more negative outcomes, aggression towards staff and not coping. Then they get evicted, still with that level of priority need, with us faced with trying to house them with them getting evicted. It’s a huge barrier. B&B isn’t appropriate and the streets aren’t appropriate. So where can you go? This way mental health step in but that pathway doesn’t exist for our client group. We don’t get anybody into that pathway. That’s because there is very little movement.”*

**Irene** from the recurrent group and an ON Beneficiary illustrates the challenges in accommodating homeless people with chronic mental health problems. In May 2012 she was evicted from a hostel. She had been sectioned under the Mental Health Act and claimed upon release that her bed had been given away. She ended up rough sleeping. In June, she declined one hostel from fear of another resident she knew was living there. She did not want to return to the place where she had previously stayed as she blamed them for her current situation, although she ended up moving back there in July. However, by March 2015, she was no longer staying at her accommodation, afraid that someone was after her. She was believed to be rough sleeping and her mental health had deteriorated. It was about then that ON became involved. There followed a sequence of hostel places during which she frequently slept rough.

**John**, also from the recurrent group and an ON Beneficiary, combined mental health problems with substance misuse and a track record of offending, putting him in a high-risk group when it came to accommodation and accessing services, a problem confounded by having no local connection to Nottingham. In April 2013, he was first seen rough sleeping. He was deemed to be a high risk to members of service staff and the wider public and therefore difficult to house. He was barred from two services, and had been evicted from housing for exploiting a vulnerable person and suspicion of drug dealing. He was also barred from a food bank due to drug use. He was told to go back to where he had a local connection to try and get housing there, but he claimed to have a lot of enemies there and did not believe it to be his local connection. He was seen rough sleeping in the city again in September. In October, he received a custodial sentence, but was released in January 2014. In April, he was rough sleeping and staying with friends. In May, he had accommodation in a bail hostel, before returning to prison until September. His drug use was causing serious concern due to risk of overdosing. In December, he was banned from the winter night shelter, and was still at the bottom of the list for a hostel place for having no local connection. He was arrested again in January 2015 and received another prison sentence in 2016. By July 2017, he was back in Nottingham and sleeping rough, by which time he had become an ON Beneficiary.

The narratives of many other persistent rough sleepers also recount an **ambivalent relationship with hostel accommodation**. As we have seen already, there are stories of evictions for rent arrears or inappropriate behaviour. There are stories of abandonment for experiences of intimidation or financial exploitation by other residents. As a result, many refuse offers out of fear of who they might encounter, or of being lured into lifestyles from which they seek to escape, as the case study over the page clearly illustrates.

**Kevin**, another recurrent rough sleeper with both mental and physical health issues, was first found in 2012 sleeping rough in a shed. Although not first seen as in priority need by Housing Aid, this changed due to his health condition and he was placed in a B&B. However, he refused two hostel places, one because he believed it to be full of drinkers and the other because he had problems with a current resident. He was eventually placed in another hostel which he abandoned by mid-spring and returned to rough sleeping. In the autumn he was accommodated in private property with help from the SOT. However, at the end of the year he abandoned the property and slept rough before being placed in another hostel, which he also abandoned by the end of February 2013 to return to rough sleeping, insisting that he did not want to be in a hostel. He neglected to attend appointments at Housing Aid and the Job Centre, as a result of which his ESA<sup>7</sup> was suspended. He worked cash in hand in the summer. During mid-autumn he again refused hostel accommodation, insisting that he was bullied the last time he was there. He was not seen during 2014 and in 2015 was back sleeping rough in the shed. He was remanded in prison and released to NFA at the start of autumn. He was admitted to hospital in the run-up to winter because of the state of his physical health, but was soon after rough sleeping again in the shed. He was seen rough sleeping again in 2016 and into 2017. After a week's hotel accommodation, he was accommodated in a hostel by spring, but was struggling to meet JSA work requirements and missed a vital appointment for a chest x-ray.

Because of mixed hostel experiences and contested relationships with other services, rough sleepers may carry a baggage of **past evictions and negative risk assessments** which leave them barred from many facilities and make them hard to accommodate.

*“Some just have their personalities that mess them up. You get them in somewhere for a couple of weeks and then it all goes wrong. ... (They) go back on the drink, might be somebody else from the hostel. Being accused of something. ... Sometimes they leave of their own accord but they get kicked out. ... Aggression. Owing rent. ... An argument with a resident. Abusive to staff. ... If somebody has got evicted that risk assessment follows them round and it is difficult to rehouse.”*

**Larry** was both a recurrent and sustained rough sleeper and an ON Beneficiary who combined all four complex needs with considerable severity. In January 2012, he had his own tenancy but had an ASBO<sup>8</sup> in the area where he lived so went to the winter night shelter. He was served an eviction notice for his tenancy in July 2013 and was accepted into a hostel in August. From there, he was evicted in January 2014 due to threats to staff and inappropriate sexual behaviour. By March he had been barred from most places and in May was living in a squat. During the summer, he was twice evicted from hostels, and by September was on remand for assault. It was at about this time that he became an ON Beneficiary. He was accepted into a further hostel in 2015, but was again evicted for unacceptable behaviour and once more found himself sleeping rough. This pattern was repeated in September, with eviction for violence. Accommodation in shared housing in November lasted just one night. A further hostel place in 2016 ended when he threatened staff. A period of squatting and sofa surfing in August was followed by the offer of a bond from ON for private rented accommodation, but this was withdrawn in November when he threatened a hostel worker and his partner. He stayed briefly with his partner into 2017, but was sleeping rough again by March after assaulting her.

**Michelle** from the sustained group and an ON Beneficiary with significant physical and mental health and alcohol problems was first encountered in Spring 2016 after she was chased out of her property along with her partner by a gang of men. She went to stay with friends. NCH<sup>9</sup> would not house her because of anti-social behaviour. Late spring,

<sup>7</sup> Employment and Support Allowance <sup>8</sup> Anti-Social Behaviour Order <sup>9</sup> Housing Association

she declined accommodation at a women's refuge. She was sleeping rough with her partner and still had her tenancy, but could not stay at the property because of the risks involved. Despite this, Housing Aid regarded her as intentionally homeless. At the start of the summer, another landlord rejected her as being too high a risk. Housing Aid advised that if she had experienced harassment she should apply for a replacement flat. Police refused to deal with damage to her property as they believed that she was the one who had caused it. NCH also considered ending her tenancy for anti-social behaviour, taking her to court for the damage to the property and for not using it. They offered alternative accommodation, but she refused to live without her partner. The outcome was her sleeping rough with her partner in a campsite. Near to the end of summer, her tenancy finally ended. At the start of the autumn, she was in hospital for a couple of days due to pancreatitis and liver damage. Her alcohol use was extremely high. She was refused a refuge place within the city for fear of the safety of other women, and she refused a refuge outside of the city. In 2017, she moved into a hostel, but refused a request to move to another hostel, making herself intentionally homeless. She then stayed at a flat with her partner.

**Personal relationships may have a toxic** effect in the lives of persistent rough sleepers, as we have already seen with some of the above cases studies. Relationship issues affect men as well as women. It is the case that women are more likely to be trapped in exploitative and abusive relationships which impede solutions to their housing problems. Local authorities are precluded from housing a homeless woman with a partner with whom she is at risk of harm. However, other Beneficiaries (men and women) may be impaired by loyalty to a partner with whom they have a positive relationship. Meanwhile, still others remain homeless from fear of those with whom they might be located. This might be a hostel or shared accommodation, or the only neighbourhood where they have a local connection.

*"Relationships form on the streets as well. If a relationship forms on the street they wouldn't necessarily be seen as part of a household. If you make a housing application and you are priority need, then your household is priority need as well. But if you say, this is my partner, we are out on the street, then they are not part of the household, so there are issues."*

**Nicole** was another who combined recurrent and sustained rough sleeping with being an ON Beneficiary with significant drug and alcohol problems. However, complex relationships played a significant part in keeping her on the streets. Access to secure accommodation was impeded by the Council's unwillingness to house her with a violent partner from whom she was reluctant to be separated. Spring 2013 saw her sleeping rough with her partner and dog when drug dealers threatened them at their property. She was in a domestically abusive relationship, but managed to stay at a friend's house while her partner was in police custody for breaching bail conditions by staying with her and assaulting her. At the beginning of 2014, she had a property, but found herself obliged to sleep rough when drug dealers to whom she owed money took her key. Her Housing Benefit was also suspended. Housing Aid offered accommodation out of the area as she was fleeing violence, but she did not want this and did not want to call the police as she was scared. She was then seriously assaulted in her property and the police advised her not to go back and she was sent to a hotel. However, she soon stopped using the room and slept rough. Late that Spring, her abusive partner was released from prison and they slept rough together. They were accepted in different hostels, but she wanted to be housed together to keep benefit payment simple as she wanted a joint claim. In summer she had pneumonia whilst rough sleeping and she overdosed on heroin. She abandoned a hostel bed as she believed there were people using drugs which she was trying to avoid. She had severe medical issues which meant frequent visits to hospital. Late in 2014, she was severely assaulted by another rough sleeper. She was accommodated

in a hostel, which she left, not wanting to return. Whilst staying there, she became suicidal, and an ambulance was called when she overdosed on crack and heroin. It was at about this time that ON became involved. She refused another hostel again for fear of encountering drugs. In 2015, she was still sleeping rough and very unwell, but refusing help from Housing Aid. Late that winter she agreed to go to a hostel, but was soon evicted for violence. She stayed in a B&B under SWEP, but was now suffering domestic abuse from a new partner. She was also focused on getting into rehab. By mid-spring, she was offered a refuge out of the area, but did not want to go to a refuge or leave Nottingham. She suffered a further assault by a person who had previously assaulted her. A further hostel place was lost because she rarely used it. At the end of the year she was offered supported housing, but her partner opposed it, though in private she expressed an interest in the offer as she wanted to stop drinking, but she was not offered anything immediately. She suffered further attacks, including from a partner, but still preferred sleeping rough to an offer of the winter night shelter. She also went to get detox, but did not complete the course due to the way Librium made her feel. However, she was offered the chance to detox again at the start of 2016. During 2016 she started using mamba and was admitted to hospital with life-threatening pneumonia. Despite having a hostel bed, she still preferred to sleep rough to be with her partner. By the end of 2016, they were in a B&B, awaiting a place at London Road.

**Pete** from the sustained group and an ON Beneficiary shows that relationship issues can constrain men as well as women. He was rough sleeping and sofa-surfing when met by ON. He was at risk from others and struggling to procure help from Housing Aid, in part due to his desire only to be housed with his partner. However, because of his past record of domestic violence, Housing Aid would not agree to them being housed together. He also had physical health issues, drug and alcohol problems and an offending background. He and his partner were eventually accommodated in a B&B, awaiting a place at London Road hostel.

A combination of all the above often results in **an overall disillusionment with what is perceived as a hostile system** that may end up making the streets attractive. The experience of repeated failure, the sense of there being no alternative and the effect of growing numbers in generating a mutually supporting community are generating an inertia in engaging persistent rough sleepers in the pursuit of better options.

*“Increasingly quite a big amount of people gathers in the city. It seems a kind of community. ... It’s kind of their community. It’s what they do, it’s their routine. It’s their life. ... They get food and start talking to homeless people who say, it’s all right here. ... Stick round here for a few days and it’s all right. ... There is a community of people who will look after them. It’s not always the case but they do help out.*”

*“Increasingly rough sleeping increases rough sleeping. People who come out who are engaged in drug activity or are sofa-surfing or whatever just are staying out because a couple of others are staying out and using drugs. So as soon as you come across about six people, well four of them have got .... As that carried on more of them are going to be at risk. It’s that kind of community that can be positive but can be negative. ... The police are keen on moving them on and it kind of moves people together a bit. We will all go here and look after each other. It just grows.”*



## 5. Conclusion and the Way Forward

Beneath the headline figures depicting a seemingly inexorable rise in rough sleeping in the UK, there lies a sub-group of persistent rough sleepers unable to escape from a life on the streets either because of the barriers they face or because they perceive no alternative. Thankfully, they are relatively few – those sleeping rough for at least 36 nights between 1st April 2016 and 31st March 2017 amounting to barely 5% of the total – suggesting that most find a way out quite quickly. Neither is there anything to suggest that persistent rough sleepers form a distinct population with unique characteristics. However, this study of the issue in a single location – the City of Nottingham – sought a deeper understanding of what binds some people more than most to a damaging and life-threatening set of circumstances and what might provide clues to effective prevention and remedial action. There is nothing unique to Nottingham in what we have found. It is likely to resonate with any large or medium sized city in the UK.

The study relied for evidence on two databases and the testimony of the Nottingham Street Outreach Team who encounter rough sleepers through their early morning rounds on a daily basis. The two databases were firstly the one compiled by the SOT themselves on the characteristics and circumstances of the people they encounter, and secondly the quarterly records of changes in the lives of Opportunity Nottingham Beneficiaries – adults with multiple and complex needs – which are gathered by their Personal Development Coordinators. In addition to the statistical data in these records, the study relied on the running commentaries of SOT members and PDCs recorded in the data of their knowledge of the events and changing circumstances of the rough sleepers with whom they work. A limitation of the study has been that no direct evidence was gathered from rough sleepers themselves, because this would inevitably have been selective in scope in contrast to the fairly comprehensive databases that were used.

The definition of ‘persistent rough sleeper’ sought to capture two overlapping populations of ‘sustained’ rough sleepers who slept rough fairly continuously over a restricted period, and ‘recurrent’ rough sleepers who repeatedly returned to the streets over a much longer period. The study therefore focussed on the 72 people who slept rough either on at least 36 nights between April 2016 and March 2017 or who spent significant time rough sleeping at least every other year between 2012 and 2017. We found that, compared with rough sleepers generally, these 72 were more likely to be male and of White British ethnicity than rough sleepers generally. Moreover, compared with the wider population of adults with multiple needs who are Beneficiaries of Opportunity Nottingham, they were more likely to have support needs arising from problematic substance use, mental ill health and offending, to have spent significant time in prison, to have been evicted from accommodation or excluded from or refused services, and to engage in begging as a significant source of income. Furthermore, those who were Beneficiaries were a needier group who made less progress through their engagement with Opportunity Nottingham. It would be reasonable to conclude that persistent rough sleeping impedes progress for ON Beneficiaries.

We further found that not only do persistent rough sleepers show certain rough sleeping characteristics and experiences to a greater degree than rough sleepers generally, but also that there are recognisable factors in their rough sleeping narratives that help to explain their persistence. It would not do justice to those accounts to categorise individuals according to which factors predominate, since it is precisely the way in which several factors compound one another that most effectively works against attempts at resolution. However, we have been able to abstract from people’s stories systemic and personal factors by which people disabled by negative life experiences find themselves ill-equipped to negotiate what they encounter as a hostile system. The system offers a limited range of options in terms of available hostel or affordable private rented accommodation, access to which might be thwarted by lack of access to public funds, accumulated debts or the structures of a welfare benefit system that might make begging appear a more rewarding source of income. The very homelessness system that has been set up to respond to their needs merely erects further barriers by failing to recognise them as ‘vulnerable’,

denying them a 'local connection' when they are fleeing violence, or declaring them 'intentionally homeless' when refusing offers of accommodation out of fear. Moreover, the intervention of a prison sentence or hospital stay may lose any accommodation that has been gained, with no guarantee of replacement.

We are often asked why rough sleepers reject help when it is offered, and the conclusion people frequently draw is that persistent rough sleepers are sleeping rough out of choice. However, the truth is that rough sleeping is rarely the only problem that persistent rough sleepers face. Often they manifest an accentuated intensity of complex needs and negative life experiences of domestic violence and personal victimisation. Many of them carry a baggage of negative risk assessments arising from past anti-social behaviour, accumulated indebtedness, eviction, rejection, disqualification and disempowerment that may bar them from whatever accommodation and other services might be on offer. Meanwhile those without such a reputation often refuse offers of accommodation out of fear of whom they might encounter either in a hostel or in a neighbourhood in which they have been housed. Or they may abandon such offers when their fears appear to be justified by experience. They may also attach greater importance to a valued relationship than to an offer of accommodation in which the valued partner cannot be included. When the street population expands as we have seen dramatically in recent years, paradoxically it loses some of its hostility, becoming instead a refuge from a hostile world from which some degree of mutual support and self-respect can be found.

A limited study of persistent rough sleeping in a single locality cannot form the basis for far-reaching solutions, but there are a number of initiatives that are worthy of further research and experimentation.

- This report is published just a few weeks before the **Homelessness Reduction Act 2017** is due to be implemented in England, with new duties for local authorities to supplement those from existing legislation, and a draft code of guidance has been published to accompany implementation (CLG, 2018a). Alongside new duties to provide advice and the extension of the duty to prevent homelessness, there is a new duty to relieve homelessness regardless of priority need and intentionality. This will involve undertaking an assessment and producing a **personalised housing plan** that will enable an applicant to find suitable accommodation, including securing an immediate safe place for someone sleeping rough. It is our hope that every persistent rough sleeper will benefit from an effective personalised housing plan when the Act is implemented.
- We have shown how an ambivalent relationship with hostels can leave rough sleepers stranded. This might arise from fear or bad reputation. We therefore encourage the adoption by the City Council and other social housing providers of schemes like **Housing First** that effectively by-pass hostels by accommodating rough sleepers straight from the streets, building all necessary support services around them. A good deal of research and experience (Bretherton and Pleace, 2015) has shown how well this can work in many cases, provided crucial conditions are met and it is not used as a panacea.
- The complexities of human relationships have always posed challenges in responding to rough sleeping. Our research has shown how rough sleeping can be sustained both when people fear damaging relationships from which they wish to escape, and out of loyalty to supportive relationships which they wish to sustain. **Complex relationships should be recognised**, for instance in drawing up personalised housing plans, so that on the one hand local connection and intentionality rules are not applied too harshly to people with genuine fears, and on the other hand couples in a valued relationship can be accommodated together.
- We have further shown how the presence of complex needs can result in inappropriate referrals to accommodation that is later abandoned or from which a rough sleeper ends

up being evicted. Mental health problems have been shown by other research to feature prominently in Nottingham's homeless population (Archer et al., 2017). The Care Act 2014 was introduced to make **social care assessments** more readily available to all who need them, but there is evidence that homeless people struggle to access this provision (Cornes et al., 2015). We urge Adult Social Care services to establish suitable machinery to remedy this shortcoming.

- The correlation between persistent rough sleeping and recent spells in prison, especially among ON Beneficiaries, reflects a failure in offender rehabilitation that was supposed to have been remedied by the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014. The Prison Service has no obligation to short-term prisoners on discharge beyond a small prison discharge grant and research (Bowpitt, 2015) shows that many are discharged to 'no fixed abode', even those who may have had accommodation at the time of sentence. Moreover, the chance of reoffending is reduced if accommodation can be procured at the point of discharge. We urge the Community Rehabilitation Company to commission services that increase the **support provided to short-term prisoners on discharge**, especially accessing accommodation.
- This research would not have been possible without the meticulous work of the Street Outreach Team and the ON Personal Development Coordinators in maintaining contact with Nottingham's rough sleepers and brokering access to accommodation and other services. A related service – the Multiple Needs Tenancy Sustainment (MNTS) service – is effective in preventing further rough sleeping. It is vital that these **personalised services** are, if anything, extended to form part of the personalised package that is planned following the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act for all those who experience or are threatened with rough sleeping.
- Nottingham is in many ways blessed by its vibrant, long-standing and pervasive voluntary sector operating in the field of homelessness, housing and personal support that embraces a **network of faith communities and small voluntary organisations** in the provision of soup runs, food banks, day centres, night shelters, hostels, supported housing projects and specialised support services. It is vital on the one hand that this network is recognised and supported for the vital role that it might play in any planned response by the City authorities to persistent rough sleeping, but on the other hand that there is no attempt to subvert its independence and spontaneity within constraints imposed by local government bureaucracy.



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