

Local Government and Communities Committee

Homelessness

Submission from Bethany Christian Trust

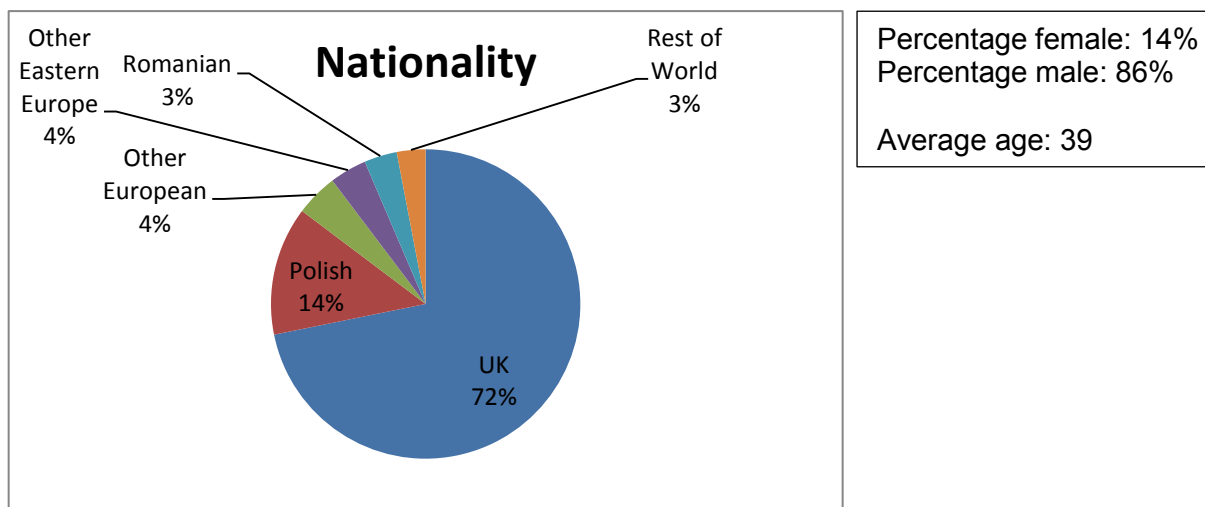
This document is prepared as a response to the call for evidence by the Scottish Parliament's Local Government and Communities Committee. Bethany works to prevent homelessness, intervene in homelessness crisis, and sustain people in their own homes in meaningful fulfilled lives. Rough Sleeping is only one form of homelessness but it is the aspect that we want to highlight as particularly critical currently in response to this call for evidence.

1. INCREASED LEVELS OF ROUGH SLEEPING

Demand for Bethany Christian Trust's Care Shelter in Edinburgh has risen dramatically in recent years. There has been a 144% increase since 2012. During the 2016-17 project an average of 47 people per night have stayed in the Care Shelter.

Year	Duration	Average stayed per night	Presentations	Presentation Increases from 2011-12
2011-2012	20 weeks	28	3920	
2012-2013	21 weeks	28	4112	5%
2013-2014	22 weeks	37	5852	49%
2014-2015	24 weeks	36	6552	67%
2015-2016	27 weeks	45	9072	131%
2016-2017	28 weeks	47	9565	144%

2016-17 Demographics



2. STATISTICS FROM BCT CARE SHELTER 2015 – 16 AND 2016 - 17

2015-16	2016-17
189 nights / 27 weeks	196 nights / 28 weeks
684 unique individuals	706 unique individuals
9072 presentations in total at the service over the course of the 27 weeks	9,565 presentations
8637 beds provided, averaging 45.7 per night	9,251 beds provided averaging 47.2 per night
9450 meals provided	10,550 meals provided
76 churches involved from Edinburgh and Lothians	72 Churches involved
25 venues	25 venues
86% men 14% women	86% men 14% women
>1,000 volunteers	>1,000 volunteers
Advice, support, care, compassion, links with statutory and voluntary partners	9 visiting agencies

3. ROUGH SLEEPING DEFINITION

"Rough Sleeping" is the most extreme form of homelessness. It refers to people living on the street, sleeping in the open air on the streets or in parks/cemeteries, doorways, bus shelters, car parks, stairwells, beside rubbish bins, on benches, sheltered over heating ducts or in any other place not meant for human habitation. It

is usually a last resort for homeless people. Sleeping rough is a dangerous and traumatising experience. Many people who sleep rough will suffer from multiple health conditions, such as mental health problems and drug and alcohol misuse.

The Care Shelter exists to provide for individuals who are Rough Sleeping by the definition above. If the individuals were not in the Care Shelter they would be sleeping rough as their only alternative at presentation that night.

4. POSSIBLE REASONS FOR INCREASE IN EDINBURGH

The presentations at the Care Shelter evidence a significant rise in rough sleeping numbers over the past five years. This season we continued to see the high presentations that we did over a similar period in the previous year.

Possible Reasons for Increase in Edinburgh, as distinct from core reasons for Rough Sleeping, which relates to a more complex set of factors:

- Lack of sufficient temporary accommodation spaces available at the presenting point of need at CEC
- Since January 2014 referral pathways to hostels for referral agents from the Care Shelter, Streetwork etc. were limited completely i.e. referrals to Temp Accommodation are applied through the Council only.
 - The council commissioned hostels have not necessarily always been used to their full capacity, or for the individuals with the most appropriate levels of support need i.e. non-high support need individuals in hostels designed to provide high levels of support. Every bed matters.
 - There has been an increasing reliance on B&Bs for TA by CEC. B&Bs do not provide the support that people with higher levels of need require to sustain a placement.
 - An additional challenge with the introduction of access only via the Council may be that some people who need to access accommodation have known and unknown barriers to engaging with Council services where they may more readily engage with third sector agencies.
- Some increased financial limitations on individuals, either through sanctions or with no recourse to public funds. (UK and non-UK nationals)

- Insufficient accommodation for individuals exiting temporary accommodation i.e. Housing shortage leading to the ‘blocking up’ of TA resulting in a lack of ‘flow’.
- Impact of increasing tears in the safety net of services to support prevention and emergency response, through reduced local funding. Not just housing but also there will be indirect impacts of cuts to e.g. health and substance misuse services.
- Part of a national trend across major cities in UK.

It is important to remember that alongside these more structural factors, the presenting needs of the individual also play a large part. The level of complex needs continue to be very prevalent in homeless and rough sleeping populations, and given the numbers have increased, the delivery and co-ordination of mental health and addictions services becomes increasingly important.

5. PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

5.1 PREVENTION

- Remove the local connection barrier – this needs addressed at a National Strategic level, firstly by national government recognising that in every city there are people on the streets because they have no local connection, and secondly by resolving that it is not a valid reason to not provide a person with emergency accommodation
- Ensure that the right people get in the right temporary accommodation including commissioned bed spaces, with the appropriate support, including the flexibility to move people between different temporary accommodation spaces. There needs to be an increased consideration of the individual’s needs and preferred outcomes.

5.2 PROVISION

- There needs to be an improved ‘flow’ of individuals through TA, so that new places can become available; we understand that this is being reviewed in Edinburgh to consider how this can be improved.
- Linked to this is the need for an increase in social housing, providing increased move on opportunities for individuals and families in temporary accommodation.

- The type of linked up multi-agency support available at the access point/ practice is very appropriate for people with complex needs. Linking the geographical location of the Access Practice and Access Point in a central accessible location would be a positive move.
- The resource cuts faced by local authorities are having a devastating impact on services. The national government has a role in providing funding for homelessness services where local funding has reduced in such significant measure.
- Alternative innovative additional emergency accommodation options should be considered e.g. a council commissioned one night stay hostel for otherwise rough sleeping individuals; a purpose designed venue with showers, medical and cooking facilities, etc.
- The staffing cost of an increasingly high demand Care Shelter service over a longer period is increasing year on year without local statutory contribution – financial support for the increased staffing required to support increased numbers is a key consideration.

Within these recommendations we want to emphasise the excellent joint work that CEC senior management and Bethany management have been regularly engaged in from through to the present, in seeking to deal with the range of pressing issues around the high level of demand, considering and progressing possible solutions, and strategically planning for future provision within a changing social landscape.

6. BETHANY'S CONTINUED RESPONSE

This summary is specifically in relation to rough sleeping in Edinburgh, summarising the plans for the Care Shelter which is one of multiple services provided by Bethany across Scotland:

- Sustain the length of the Care Shelter Operation to 28 weeks.
- Continue to increase the service capacity from 45 spaces per night to 60 spaces per night for the central 8 weeks of the project to match the coldest average temperatures.
- We have increased staffing provision during the evening to assist with the needs of those presenting at the service, particularly when above capacity. The service has increased in capacity and duration for the last four years in light of the presenting need.

- We have excellent relations with third sector partners and health services who all attend the service regularly and we work together with them to make a real difference in people's lives.
- We also have an excellent partnership with City of Edinburgh Council. It would assist greatly if Housing Officers could attend the service twice per week as was done on occasion in the last two seasons.
- We continue to explore and develop the possibility of a year round Care Shelter to respond to the unprecedented level of need.
- The Care Shelter project is a mobilisation of over a thousand volunteers from churches across Edinburgh and Lothians; in 2017-18 local churches and individuals will again respond with enormous generosity and commitment, giving of both their time and resources to make this service possible.

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