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Social Policies and Distributional Outcomes

in a Changing Britain

The Ruling Parties' Record on Homelessness and Complex Needs (May 2015 to pre-COVID 2020)

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The Social Policies and Distributional Outcomes in a Changing Britain research programme. This is one of a series of papers arising from a programme of research called *Social Policies and Distributional Outcomes in a Changing Britain*. The research programme aims to provide an authoritative, independent, rigorous and in-depth evidence base on social policies and distributional outcomes in 21st century Britain. The overarching research we question we address is: What progress has been made in addressing social inequalities through social policies? The research programme combines in-depth quantitative analysis of trends in distributional outcomes with detailed and systematic public expenditure and social policy analysis across ten major social policy areas over the period 2015-2020, together with broader reflection on the changing nature of social policies and distributional outcomes over the 21st century.

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The Social Policies and Distributional Outcomes in a Changing Britain research programme builds on and expands our previous research programme, *Social Policies in a Cold Climate*, which provided an evidence base on social policies and distributional outcomes covering the period 1997-2010. Papers from this programme can be accessed here: http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/case/new/research/Social_Policy_in_a_Cold_Climate.asp.

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1. Introduction

This paper sets out to provide an in-depth analysis of homelessness policy goals, expenditure and outcomes across Great Britain (GB) in the post-2015 period, until the eve of the COVID-19 pandemic, setting developments in this most recent period in their longer-term perspective.

This is one of a series of papers arising from the *Social Policies and Distributional Outcomes in a Changing Britain* (SPDO) that aims to provide an authoritative, independent, rigorous and in-depth evidence base on social policies and distributional outcomes in 21st century Britain. The overarching research question in this programme is: *What progress has been made in addressing social inequalities through social policies?* In the context of this particular paper, this aim translates into an effort to determine the progress made in preventing and resolving homelessness, a social problem inextricably bound up with poverty and inequality in all parts of Britain.

Unlike most other policy papers in this SPDO series, this homelessness-focussed paper does not follow on from a previous in-depth investigation prepared under the predecessor research programme, *Social Policies in a Cold Climate*, which provided an evidence base on social policies and distributional outcomes covering the period 1997-2015. It is thus necessary to provide a fuller account of the policy 'inheritance' pre-2015 than is the case in some of the other papers in this series.

Homelessness as a specialist area of social policy is fully devolved to the three jurisdictions that comprise GB. While there has been recent policy and practice mobility between the GB countries, including since 2015, their trajectories and chronologies remain different enough that it is necessary to trace each of these national homelessness 'stories' separately. So the next three sections of this paper describe the homelessness-specific *inheritance*, *goals* and *policies* for each of England (Section 2), Wales (Section 3) and Scotland (Section 4) in turn. We then proceed to take a comparative approach across all of GB in assessing both *expenditure* (Section 5) and *outcomes* (Section 6) on homelessness, with this comparative perspective throwing into sharp relief the consequences (both intended and unintended) of these differing approaches across the devolved jurisdictions.

While the primary focus in this paper is the nature and impacts of homelessness-specific policies, these must be placed in the broader context of the *wider drivers* of homelessness outcomes across GB in order to gain appropriate perspective on their relative import (Section 7). One core theme that emerges from this broader analysis is the centrality of poverty in driving homelessness at both individual and aggregate level.

Over the course of the paper we also consider the extent to which homelessness, particularly at the sharpest end of rough sleeping, intersects with other complex social problems, especially substance misuse, offending behaviours, and mental ill-health. In the Conclusion (Section 8), we draw together this analysis into a

series of overall reflections and also identify key social policy challenges remaining for the 2020s.

2. Homelessness Policy in England

There are three key time periods in recent evolution of homelessness policy in England: the 'inheritance' from the pre-2010 period; the period from the Coalition taking office in 2010 till 2017 (which we describe as 'peak localism'); and 2017-2020 (we characterise this as the 'retreat from localism'). Each period has had its own distinctive set of policy goals and associated policy measures, which we consider in turn below.

The inheritance (pre-2010)

Much Government action on homelessness over the past several decades has been prompted by concerns about visibly growing levels of rough sleeping, especially in central London. An upsurge in rough sleeping in the late 1980s, particularly amongst young single people, prompted the establishment of the first Rough Sleepers Initiative (RSI1) in 1990 by the then Conservative Government (Jones & Johnsen, 2009). The RSI1 funded outreach and specialist support services, as well as new accommodation units, and achieved significant reductions in street homelessness in London in the early 1990s (Randall & Brown, 1993).

However, the numbers on the streets began to rise again from the mid 1990s, and the Labour Government elected in 1997 announced a new target to reduce rough sleeping across in England by two-thirds by 2002. It set up a cross-departmental body, the Rough Sleepers Unit (RSU), to drive forward implementation, and invested in additional hostel bedspaces, new housing association units, expanded resettlement support, specialist mental health and drug and alcohol workers, and 'assertive' street outreach services. The Government's two-thirds reduction target was met ahead of schedule in 2001 (Randall & Brown, 2002), but the RSU's 'robust' approach to moving people off the streets was controversial, and foreshadowed the later use of enforcement measures to address 'problematic street culture', particularly begging and street drinking (Johnsen & Fitzpatrick, 2007). The street count methods used to demonstrate progress towards the RSU's target also came in for criticism, but the significant nature of the reduction achieved is not in doubt (Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2009).

A landmark policy report - *More than a Roof* - was published by the Labour administration in 2002 which conceived of homelessness as a form of 'social exclusion' rather than simply a housing problem (DETR, 2002). A national strategic framework and 'Homelessness Directorate' was established, and a new target set, to reduce by half the number of 'statutorily homeless' households (mainly families with children) staying in temporary accommodation awaiting rehousing by local authorities. The Homelessness Act 2002 strengthened a range

of aspects of the statutory homelessness arrangements in England, weakened under the previous Conservative administration (Fitzpatrick & Stephens, 1999), and gave local authorities a new duty to develop homelessness strategies for their areas. These strategies were critical in mainstreaming the 'Housing Options' preventative approach wherein local authorities offered families in housing crisis a range of services - such as rent deposit guarantees, mediation or debt advice - designed to avoid the need for them to make a statutory homelessness application (Pawson, 2007). The roll-out of Housing Options led directly to a remarkable 70% decline in statutory homelessness acceptances between 2003 and 2010. While there were accusations that Housing Options was used as a device by English local authorities to engage in unlawful 'gatekeeping' (Alden, 2015) - i.e. diverting potential homeless applicants away from claiming their legal entitlements - evaluative evidence indicated that at least some of this steep decline in statutory homelessness was a result of genuine prevention (Pawson *et al.*, 2007).

In parallel, the 'Hostels Capital Improvement Programme' improved the quality of hostels and day centres for single homeless people, allied with an explicit policy goal that these service sites become 'places of change' which reintegrated their service users into mainstream society rather than supported them in a 'homeless lifestyle' (CLG, 2006). More significant, however, was the introduction, in April 2003, of the 'Supporting People' funding stream, which enabled significant expansion of 'floating' housing support services for single homeless people and other vulnerable groups, as well as providing the main revenue funding for support services in residential projects. The decision to end the 'ring fenced' status of Supporting People funding in England taken in April 2009 has had long-term ramifications, as discussed below.

This issue aside, the last Labour administration bequeathed a largely positive inheritance on homelessness to the incoming Coalition Government in 2010. This included a major reduction in rough sleeping, sustained for almost a decade (CLG, 2008), and an unprecedented decline in levels of statutory homelessness. The key temporary accommodation target - to reduce the numbers by 50% from their peak of over 100,000 in December 2003 - was also met in December 2010. Mandatory local homelessness strategies, combined with the national Supporting People and Hostels Capital Improvement programmes, led directly to new, improved and more flexible services for single homeless adults, while an independent review identified a 'sea change' of improvement in services for young homeless people (Quilgars *et al.*, 2008).

Unresolved problems were most often associated with affordable housing shortages in London and the South, including the long stays in temporary accommodation still endured by some statutorily homeless families. It also remained the case that most single homeless people in England had no entitlement to even temporary accommodation at the end of Labour's time in office, and there was evidence of growing numbers of migrants sleeping rough, especially from EEA countries, in London and elsewhere (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2009).

There was also around this time a burgeoning understanding of the interrelationship between single homelessness in particular, especially rough sleeping, and certain 'complex support needs' (Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2011). Our *Hard Edges* report, (conservatively) estimated that there were 58,000 people in England who faced combined problems of homelessness, substance misuse and contact with the criminal justice system in 2010/11, and a further 164,000 who experience an overlap of two of these issues (Bramley *et al*, 2015) (see Figure 1). These extreme forms of disadvantage were predominantly experienced by white men, aged 25-44, at least 40% of whom also experienced mental ill-health.

Long-term poverty was an almost universal experience amongst this population, and childhood adversity of various kinds, including parental violence, substance misuse and mental ill-health, as well as running away/leaving home early, and very poor experiences of schooling, were also extremely common (see also Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2011, 2013). The quality of life reported by adults experiencing these forms of complex needs was much worse than that reported by other low income and vulnerable groups. Around two in five people of this group had attempted suicide at least once, and almost one third had self-harmed (see also Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2013).

Hard Edges also revealed the exceptional concentration of these complex needs in northern cities and former industrial towns, declining seaside resorts, and some London boroughs. It was estimated that a working age adult in Middlesbrough was ten times more likely than one in Central Bedfordshire to experience at least two of homelessness, substance misuse and/or offending.

Figure 1 'Current' Complex Needs Adult Population, England 2010/11



Source, Bramley et al 2015, Figure 1, based on authors' analyses of Supporting People Client Data for short term services, National Drug Treatment Monitoring System data on drug and alcohol treatment, and the Offender Assessment System data maintained by Ministry of Justice, grossed up with reference to published Offending statistics.

Crucially, the *Hard Edges* research indicated that around two-thirds of those passing through (single) homelessness services had relevant complex support needs; this was also true for a similar proportion of those involved with the criminal justice system (see also HMI Probation, 2016; Cooper & Lacey, 2019), and for around half of those receiving drug treatment services. However, for technical data reasons homeless families were largely excluded from this analysis, and a later Scottish study using a wider range of sources (see Figure 2 below) indicated that, once you take a more comprehensive measure of homelessness, only a minority of homeless people (about 30%) have complex needs as defined in this way. Nonetheless, the extreme needs presented by this (substantial) minority of the homeless population, and the disproportionate costs that their complex support needs impose on the public purse (see Section 5), has seen their policy profile increase in the period since 2010, as picked up further below.

Peak Localism (2010-2017)

The 2010 Conservative Manifesto was lacking in concrete policy goals on homelessness, saying only that "*We will implement a range of measures to address the problems of the homeless, including introducing more accurate street counts and ensuring a Minister in each relevant department has*

homelessness in their brief" (p.75). The Liberal Democrat 2010 Manifesto was entirely silent on the issue.

But immediately on coming to power, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government brought about something of a revolution in homelessness policy in England, calling an abrupt halt the sort of national programmes and focus that had been pursued by successive Labour administrations. Gone were the statistical targets, copious good practice guidance, and deployment of 'practitioner-advisors' drawn from local government which had underpinned Labour's centrally-driven approach. Instead there was a commitment to 'Localism', championed in particular by Eric Pickles, the then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2020).

'Localism' was anchored in a decentralisation ideology shared by both Coalition partners, and implied the retreat of central government from policy arenas like homelessness to give other stakeholders - including local authorities, but also voluntary and community groups and faith-based organisations - space to play a bigger role in public welfare (Deas, 2013). Effectively, this meant that there were to be no national policy objectives on homelessness. While various narrowly targeted homelessness initiatives were supported by austerity-era Westminster governments (see Section 5), and reports were issued by an 'Interdepartmental Ministerial Working Group' chaired by Housing Minister Grant Shapps (Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), 2011; Communities and Local Government (CLG), 2012), in reality there was a complete absence of central strategic direction or leverage over homelessness practice between 2010 and 2017 (Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2011-2019; see also National Audit Office, 2017).

Single homelessness service providers in particular were critical of this Localist agenda, fearing that the withdrawal of central government from this policy arena would disadvantage their complex needs clients who may be perceived locally as 'undeserving' (House of Commons, 2011; Turner 2019):

"We have learnt from the experience of increased localism that investment can be diverted away from population groups [lacking] statutory protection, and ... also among the least popular locally - such as single people who are homeless or sleeping rough." (Homeless Link, 2015)

These sorts of concerns appeared to cut little ice with MPs of all parties, and the Localism Act 2011 was passed to give legal form to the core notion that central government should absent itself from direct involvement in issues such as homelessness. The 2011 Act also contained substantive elements that impacted directly on homelessness service delivery. Notably, social landlords gained new powers to grant fixed-term tenancies to new tenants, rather than traditional open-ended tenancies, and local councils were enabled to restrict access to their housing waiting lists. Local authorities were also given enhanced scope for discharging their statutory homelessness rehousing duty via the offer of a private (rather than social) tenancy. The Housing and Planning Act 2016, subsequently passed under the Cameron-led Conservative Government, sought

to impose on local authorities some measures originally promoted as local 'flexibilities', but the May-led Conservative administration backed off from this coercive stance (see further below).

Nonetheless, the changes instituted and flexibilities introduced under the 2011 Act have had a range of demonstrable impacts on homeless people and those at risk. For example, some councils took the 2011 legislation as a signal that they could exclude some statutorily homeless households from their housing lists altogether, even though by law these households should have continued to receive 'reasonable preference' in allocations¹. Qualitative testimony indicated that these (unlawful) practices have sometimes even been applied to women and children fleeing domestic violence (Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2017). Local authorities' ability to 'threaten' households with discharge of the rehousing duty via a private rented sector offer seems to have been widely deployed to disincentivise homelessness applications (Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2017; see also Turner, 2019).

Post-2010 Localism was applied not only in the housing and homelessness realm, but also to aspects of the social security system (Social Security Advisory Committee, 2015; see also Cooper & Hills, 2020). For example, a greatly expanded budget for Discretionary Housing Payments afforded local authorities' substantial scope for locally-determined welfare expenditure to (partially) offset deep cuts in the national Housing Benefit scheme (Meers, 2019). The discretionary Social Fund – which provided crisis funds to very low-income households – was abolished in 2013, replaced by a power (but not a duty) for local authorities to establish their own Local Welfare Assistance schemes. In a context of severe budget cuts that disproportionately impacted on councils in the poorest areas (see Section 7), many local authorities have now closed or severely reduced these schemes (Gibbons 2017; Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2019). Also in 2013, the national Council Tax Benefit scheme was replaced by local 'Council Tax Reduction Schemes', alongside with a 10% overall budget cut, concentrated wholly on working age claimants.

While some counter-localisation trends can also be identified, most notably local authorities losing their role in the administration of Housing Benefit with the roll-out of Universal Credit, the combined impact of these housing and social security changes has been to significantly increase the role played by English councils in determining the scale and nature of emergency help available to people at risk of homelessness. This has brought about a "*patchy retrenchment*" (Turner, 2019, p.61) in housing and welfare support across England.

However, at least arguably, the Localism-related change with the most serious consequence for homeless people has been the loss of ring-fence Supporting People funding. As noted above, this change was instituted under the last Labour administration, but continued under subsequent Coalition and Conservative Governments, allowing cash-strapped local authorities to divert these funds to other priorities. Between 2010/11 and 2018/19, English local authorities

¹ See R (Jakimaviciute) v Hammersmith & Fulham LBC [2014] EWCA Civ 1438, [2015] HLR 5, CA

reduced Supporting People expenditure by 78% in real terms (see Section 5 below). The targeted homelessness funding pots made available by post-2010 Governments fall a long way short of compensating for this massive reduction in core revenue resources for homelessness services (see also Thunder & Rose, 2018) and Figure 5 below.

This decimation in Supporting People funds had particularly serious effects on homeless people with complex needs who were most likely to require support to sustain their housing. Calls from voluntary sector stakeholders for a more integrated approach to this group appeared to achieve some traction towards the end of the Coalition Government period in office, even being flagged in the March 2015 Budget Statement as an area for future action (Paragraph 2.19), backed by explicit reference to the findings of the *Hard Edges* research (footnote 57). However, in the end no practical steps were taken to establish the called-for national focus on tackling complex support needs in England (The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and MEAM, 2015).

Retreat from Localism (2017-present)

The 2015 Conservative Manifesto had even less to say on homelessness than its 2010 counterpart, remarking only in a sentence on social impact bonds that they would "*look to scale these up in the future, focusing on youth unemployment, mental health and homelessness.*" (p.46). David Cameron's Majority Conservative Government subsequently continued with the Coalition's hands-off Localist stance on homelessness into 2016.

However, the Theresa May-led Conservative administration, stung by official criticisms of its "*light touch*" (National Audit Office, 2017) and "*unacceptably complacent*" (House of Commons, 2017) approach to a growing homelessness crisis in England, and public and media concerns about deaths of homeless people (Office of National Statistics, 2018), was by 2017 signalling a revived policy commitment to tackling the problem. May's Government supported the passage of a Private Members Bill strengthening the homelessness legislation (see below), and in the June 2017 snap General Election, the Conservative Manifesto set out some explicit and significant new policy goals on rough sleeping in England:

"Our aim will be to halve rough sleeping over the course of the parliament and eliminate it altogether by 2027. To achieve this we will set up a new homelessness reduction taskforce that will focus on prevention and affordable housing, and we will pilot a Housing First approach to tackle rough sleeping."

Subsequently, a national Rough Sleeping Strategy (RSS) was published (MHCLG, 2018), backed by new funding of £76million. The RSS also foregrounded the Government's previously announced commitment of £28million to support three major 'Housing First' pilots, an innovative model which offers rapid rehousing and wraparound support to homeless people with complex needs (see Mackie et

al (2017)), supported by an exceptionally robust international evidence base (Woodhall-Melnik & Dunn, 2016).

A new Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI2), linked to the RSS, funded a range of practical interventions including “Somewhere Safe to Stay” pilots, intended to rapidly assess the needs of people who are sleeping rough or at risk, and “Navigators”, who are new specialists employed to help coordinate access to local services for people who sleep rough. “Supported Lettings” and “Local Lettings” schemes targeted on people at risk of sleeping rough were also funded. An internal evaluation of the RSI2 has claimed success, in that the (modest) drop in rough sleeping numbers at national level (2%) between 2017 and 2018 was disproportionately high (19%) in those areas which have received RSI2 funding (MHCLG, 2019).

Even more significant was the May Government’s support for the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA 2017), which as noted above started life as Private Members Bill, and came into force in April 2018, with ‘new burdens’ funding of £72.7million. The HRA 2017 introduced a range of local authority prevention and relief duties owed to *all* eligible households which are homeless or at risk, regardless of ‘priority need’ status (the criterion which has traditionally excluded single people from material assistance under the homelessness legislation). As the HRA took its main inspiration from earlier prevention-focused legislation passed in Wales (see below), it is a key example of policy mobility in the post 2015 period.

Early feedback from local authorities six months after the HRA came into force was largely positive, emphasising the positive ‘culture’ change it had precipitated, with almost two-thirds of councils indicating that the legislation had helped to enable a more ‘person-centred approach’ (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2019). Subsequent to this, the final report of the official evaluation of the HRA found that “*The ethos and principles behind the Act were strongly welcomed by local authorities*”, and that “*the extended prevention duty that stands out as the clearest area of positive impact in terms of tackling homelessness*” (ICF Consulting, 2020, pp. iv; viii). Local practice varied more with respect to the relief duty, strongly mediated by the local affordable housing supply (see also Boobis *et al.*, 2020). Official homelessness statistics show significant numbers of single people being owed these new HRA duties: in 2019/20 this group comprised 49% of prevention cases, and 72% of relief cases, as compared with only around a third of households ‘accepted’ by local authorities as in ‘priority need’ and owed the main rehousing duty. These statistics also indicate, crucially, that a large proportion of all those owed these new duties (between 40% - 58%) were being provided with accommodation (Davies *et al.*, 2019). The early outcomes of this new statutory system are further discussed in Section 6 below.

The 2019 Conservative Manifesto, under Boris Johnson, effectively reaffirmed the commitments from the party’s 2017 campaign, albeit that its promise to ‘*end the blight of rough sleeping by the end of the next Parliament*’ implies that the 2027 deadline has now been brought forward to 2024, though that the language

used to express this goal in 2019 seems somewhat less definitive than that used in 2017.

3. Homelessness Policy in Wales

The 1999 devolution settlement gave limited legislative powers to Wales (Stephens & Fitzpatrick, 2019), and for more than a decade thereafter both homelessness law and policy continued to closely follow that in England. The 'Housing Options' model of homelessness prevention, for example, was actively promoted and funded by the Welsh Assembly Government shortly after its introduction in England, and brought about a similarly rapid decline in statutory homelessness acceptances (Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2012).

However, in the more recent period, particularly since the start of the last decade, there has been considerable independent policy activity on homelessness in Wales (Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2015, 2017) with high profile commitments made on tackling youth homelessness, for example (Schwan *et al*, 2018; Stirling, 2018). The two most significant homelessness policy objectives on homelessness that can be discerned in the post-2015 period in Wales have been to:

- prioritise homelessness prevention, via a reshaping of the statutory homelessness system (2014/15 onwards);
- end rough sleeping, as part of a broader agenda to 'end homelessness' (2019 onwards).

Prioritising homeless prevention (2014-onwards)

The Labour Party Manifesto for the National Assembly for Wales (NAW) elections in 2016 had not much to say on homelessness, making only the rather obscure commitment that:

"In our bid to end homelessness, especially for young people, we will take advantage of every opportunity to bring empty homes back into use." (p.8)

In fact, the remarkable shift in Welsh homelessness policy effected by the Labour administrations in Wales since 2011, especially in the period since 2014, belies the rather anodyne political statements made on homelessness in both the 2016 and 2011 manifestos.

Making early use of enhanced devolutionary powers, the first ever Welsh Housing Bill was introduced to the National Assembly for Wales in November 2013, and was subsequently passed as the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 (HWA 2014). Part 2 of the HWA, which came into force in April 2015, encompassed a radical overhaul of Welsh homelessness legislation which meant that, probably for the first time, Wales was in the vanguard amongst the GB nations in homelessness policy innovation.

Based on the recommendations of a Welsh Government-funded research-based review published in 2012 (Mackie *et al*, 2012), Part 2 of the HWA 2014 sought to address two key weaknesses in the existing legal arrangements:

- first, that the post-2004 emphasis on Housing Options interventions sat uncomfortably alongside the statutory homelessness system, leading to concerns about both unlawful 'gatekeeping' and inconsistency in practice across Wales.
- second, that very often only rudimentary if any assistance was made available to homeless single people without 'priority need'.

The new legislation introduced an emphasis on earlier intervention and pro-active assistance for households who are 'threatened with homelessness', as well as homelessness 'relief' duties, that applied regardless of priority need. If these 'prevention' and 'relief' efforts failed, it remained the case that only households with priority need are then entitled to have housing secured by the local housing authority. Importantly, too, priority need applicants who '*unreasonably fail to cooperate*' with the prevention or relief assistance, or refuse a suitable offer of accommodation, may not progress to this final statutory duty. As noted above, the English HRA 2017 was largely modelled on this earlier Welsh legislation, though with some notable adjustments, including a higher threshold of 'deliberate and unreasonable refusal to cooperate' that only reduces rather than eliminates local authorities' rehousing duty to relevant priority need households. Subsequent legal changes, in December 2019, mean that, with respect to most homeless families with children and young people under 21, Welsh local authorities can no longer apply the 'intentionality' test to restrict access to settled housing.

Even from an early stage, indications were that the new framework under the HWU 2014 enjoyed a considerable measure of support and goodwill across both statutory and voluntary sectors (Mackie, 2014; Shelter Cymru, 2015; Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2015, 2017). Alongside a reportedly genuine reorientation of local authority homelessness services towards a more pro-active, preventative model, single homeless people in particular were said to have received a much improved service response. Criticisms of the new homelessness regime tended to be ones of implementation rather than principle, focussed on issues such as excessive paperwork associated with the multi-stage application process, and unevenness in service responses (Shelter Cymru, 2016; Mackie *et al*, 2017). Nearly three years after implementation of this new Welsh approach an independent evaluation found:

"The overwhelming consensus is that the new statutory homelessness framework ushered in by the Act has had an array of positive impacts. It has helped to shift the culture of local authorities towards a more preventative, person-centred and outcome-focused approach, which has meant a much-improved service response to tackling homelessness. The official statistical returns bear this out, with almost two-thirds of households threatened with homelessness having it prevented and two-fifths of

homeless households being relieved of homelessness.” (Ahmed et al., 2018, p.207)

However, even under this new, much more inclusive, statutory model, there remain substantial groups for whom the Welsh homelessness system fails to yield a resolution. This includes cases which fall out of the system due to ‘non-cooperation’ or for some other reason, and also ‘non-priority’ single person households for whom relief efforts are unsuccessful, and who do not then qualify for the main housing duty, and (Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2017). With regard to this latter point, it should be noted that the Welsh Government has published a review on amending the priority need test or abolishing it altogether (Mackie et al, 2020), which may then see the safety net significantly strengthened again in Wales, and resemble more closely that in Scotland (see below).

Ending rough sleeping and homelessness (2019-onwards)

Documented rough sleeping has risen substantially in Wales since 2015 (see Section 6), and it is said to be ‘universally recognised’ that people sleeping rough affected have benefited least from the new preventative legislation (Ahmed *et al.*, 2018; see also Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2017).

Thus, in September 2017, the Welsh Government announced more funding for local authorities to tackle rough sleeping, and set up an independent ‘Homelessness Action Group’ in summer 2019 with a remit to ‘end homelessness in Wales’ with specific focus on early action to reduce and eliminate rough sleeping². This Homelessness Action Group seems in many ways modelled on the earlier Scottish Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG), discussed below, with both Groups chaired by the Chief Executive of the homelessness charity Crisis.

The Homelessness Action Group’s first report, published in October 2019, made a series of recommendations on both immediate and longer-term actions to address rough sleeping, such as increased assertive outreach services, improved access to support services, and expanded access to emergency accommodation. Future reports will focus on the delivery of ‘rapid and permanent rehousing’ and ‘joined-up local partnerships’ to prevent, tackle and end homelessness in Wales.

While at the time of writing it was too early to assess the ultimate effectiveness of this Action Group’s work in Wales, it seems highly likely to have had a major influence in the future direction of policy. Certainly, the Group was given quite prominent billing in Welsh Labour’s Manifesto for the 2019 UK General Election, which committed the current Minority Labour administration to reshaping homelessness services around a ‘rapid re-housing approach’ and Housing First, and to a ‘whole-system approach to homelessness prevention’.

² <https://gov.wales/homelessness-action-group>

Finally, one significant and benign aspect of the homelessness-specific policy context in Wales, particularly relevant to people at risk of sleeping rough, and single homeless people more generally, is the relative protection that has been afforded to the (still ring-fenced) 'Supporting People' funding to date. This is in contrast to the sharp contraction in funding seen in England, and to a lesser extent in Scotland, and is discussed further below in Section 5.

4. Homelessness Policy in Scotland

Homelessness policy and law in Scotland has diverged significantly from that in the rest of the UK in the post-devolution period (Pawson & Davidson, 2008), with broad continuity in approach between Labour-led and SNP administrations.

As in England, three key time periods can be discerned: 1999-2009, where the focus was on '*strengthening the safety net*'; 2010-2017, when the policy landscape was dominated by a shift towards '*Housing Options*'; and 2018 onwards, where the focus was on '*rapid rehousing and Housing First*'. We now consider the policy objectives, associated policy measures, and evidenced outcomes for each of these periods.

Strengthening the safety net (1999-2009)

Shortly after devolution, in August 1999, a cross-sectoral Homelessness Task Force (HTF) was set up by the then Scottish Executive with the Minister for Social Justice as its chair (Fitzpatrick, 2004). The work of the HTF underpinned two landmark pieces of legislation on homelessness in Scotland: the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 (Part 1), and the Homelessness Etc. (Scotland) Act 2003.

The 2001 Act introduced new duties on local authorities to provide temporary accommodation for 'non-priority' single homeless households, and also imposed obligations on housing associations to give 'reasonable preference' to homeless people in their allocations policies and to rehouse statutorily homeless households referred to them by local authorities.

The 2003 Act signaled much more radical divergence between Scotland and the rest of the UK on homelessness (Pawson & Davidson, 2008). Most significantly, it made provision for the abolition of the 'priority need' test that had, since 1977, been the main rationing device limiting rehousing rights under the homelessness legislation. As a result, from end December 2012, all unintentionally homeless households in Scotland have been entitled to settled accommodation. This has led to much better treatment of single homeless people in particular by Scottish local authority homelessness services (Mackie and Thomas, 2014), and is also likely related to a decline in recorded rough sleeping and repeat homelessness since the 2003 Act came into force (Littlewood et al, 2017) (see Section 6).

While this '2012 commitment' to abolish the priority need criterion continues to command a broad-based consensus in Scotland (Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2012, 2015, 2019), its delivery has generated a number of significant public policy challenges. In particular, the additional demand pressures generated by this widening of the statutory safety net, coupled with a reduction in the number of social lets available, led to massive increase in the number of households living in temporary accommodation in Scotland between 2001 and 2011 (again see Section 6).

In parallel, the proportion of Scottish social landlord lettings absorbed by statutorily homeless households almost doubled over roughly the same time period, from around one quarter in 2001/02, to 45% by 2011/12. After a slight subsequent dip, the latest figures indicate about 40% of lets being allocated to homeless households (Stephens *et al*, 2020), and we might expect that percentage to rise again as a result of the 'rapid rehousing' measures discussed below. Clearly this has implications for other (generally low-income) households in Scotland seeking access to social housing, particularly in high pressure areas like Edinburgh.

The shift towards prevention and 'Housing Options' (2010-2017)

In an effort to reduce 'statutory demand' associated with the 2012 commitment, from 2010 onwards the Scottish Government promoted homelessness prevention measures along the lines of the English non-statutory "Housing Options" advice model. Again, then, this is an explicit example of policy mobility between the GB countries.

A national Scottish Housing Options Hubs programme was launched in 2010, establishing five roughly regional groupings of local authorities with access to modest designated funding. The Hubs were intended to provide practitioners with a forum to benchmark and to share good practice, joint training, commissioned research, development tools, and so on. An independent evaluation concluded that they had proven an effective spur to a new and more activist approach to preventing homelessness across Scotland (Ipsos Mori *et al*, 2012). A Housing Options 'Training Toolkit' is due to be launched later in 2020, after an extended period of development by the Hubs.

Echoing what had happened almost a decade earlier in England and Wales, there was a sharp drop in statutory homelessness acceptances after the introduction of Housing Options. Again as in England, this prompted concerns about unlawful 'gatekeeping', which intensified after a highly critical 'thematic inquiry' report was published by the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) in 2014. The Regulator's report threw into sharp relief the tension between the formal statutory framework in Scotland - which requires local authorities to undertake a statutory homelessness assessment as soon as they have 'reason to believe' that a

household may be homeless - and the more informal, flexible approach to envisaged under Housing Options (SHR, 2014).

As a result, many Scottish councils seemed to lose confidence about any further development of the Housing Options model in their area, fearing rebuke by the Regulator. In any case, the available data indicates that a relatively 'light touch' version of Housing Options had tended to be deployed in Scotland, often limited to active information and signposting, and frequently culminating in a statutory homelessness application. Notably, there appears to be far less use of the private rented sector to prevent or resolve homelessness than in England (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2015, 2019).

A focus on rapid rehousing and 'Housing First' (2017-onwards)

The SNP Manifesto for the Scottish Parliamentary election in 2016 ostensibly devoted a substantial section to homelessness. However, much that was actually included under the rubric of 'homelessness' in the Manifesto fact related to housing older and disabled people's housing, and general dispute resolution between landlords and tenants. The only commitments that were genuinely homelessness-specific were as follows:

"By the end of the next parliament we will ensure that all temporary accommodation is the same standard as permanent accommodation. We will also introduce a cap of one week for families with children and pregnant women living in B&B accommodation unless there are exceptional circumstances. We will restore Housing Benefit for 18-21 year olds if the UK government goes ahead with plans to remove it."

The Scottish Government did tighten the regulations on the use of B&B for homeless families along the lines indicated in the Manifesto, extending the same protection to homeless single people more recently, but a recent review of temporary accommodation in Scotland revealed that much remains to be done beyond this to make this sector 'fit for purpose' (Watts *et al.*, 2018). In the end, the UK Government performed a policy U-turn on removing Housing Benefit from (most) 18-21 year olds (Cooper & Hills, 2020), obviating the need for the Scottish Government to restore it.

Much more significant, though, than these rather narrow SNP Manifesto commitments was the announcement in the Programme for Government in September 2017 of "a clear national objective to eradicate rough sleeping in Scotland and transform the use of temporary accommodation" (Scottish Government, 2017). The background to this announcement was concern about the persistently high levels of temporary accommodation across Scotland, and what some felt were 'unsustainable' levels of social housing allocations to homeless applicants in some areas (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2015). At the same time, it was a matter of public record that some Scottish local authorities were routinely failing in their statutory duty to offer temporary accommodation to all those entitled to it (Shelter Scotland, 2017; SHR, 2018; Taylor, 2018).

A short-life Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG) was appointed by the First Minister,³ alongside the announcement of £50 million additional expenditure on homelessness over the next five years. HARSAG published four reports over the course of 9 months, containing 70 recommendations, all of which were accepted in principle by the Scottish Government, and captured in some shape or form in its *Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan*, published in November 2018.

HARSAG's first three reports focussed, respectively, on "reducing rough sleeping during winter 2017/18", on "how to eradicate rough sleeping", and on "ways to transform temporary accommodation". The Group's final report, published in June 2018, offered recommendations on "how to bring about an end to homelessness in Scotland" (Scottish Government, 2018). It placed an emphasis on 'rapid rehousing' into settled mainstream accommodation as quickly as possible for all homeless people, and the adoption of 'Housing First' approaches for those with complex support needs (Woodhall-Melnik & Dunn, 2016).

When the final HARSAG report was published, the Scottish Government simultaneously announced the allocation of the first £21 million of the £50 million total additional expenditure on homelessness to support the implementation of its recommendations on rapid rehousing and Housing First. A key mechanism for the implementation of the HARSAG recommendations became local authority five-year 'Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans' (RRTP) (Evans *et al*, 2018), with £15million Government funding being made available to support the RRTP implementation process.

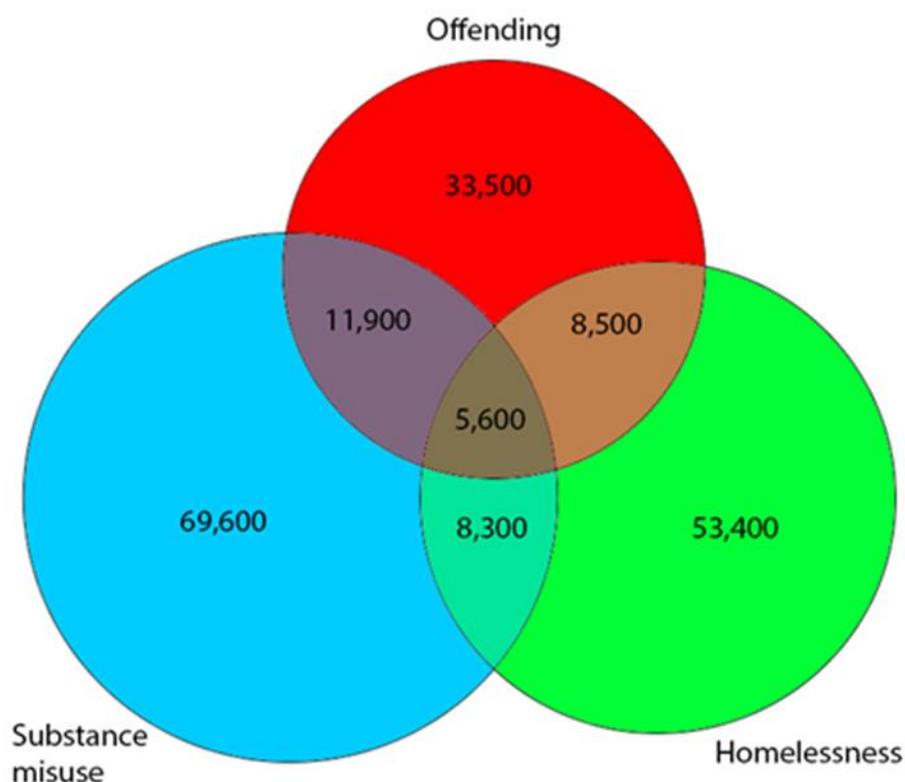
The Scottish Government has also implemented HARSAG recommendations to bring in previously uncommenced provisions of the 2003 Act. This means that Scottish local authorities now have a power not a duty to investigate whether applicants became homeless 'intentionally', and Scottish Ministers can now restrict local authorities' ability to deploy 'local connection' referral rules. These changes are intended to reduce the barriers to homeless people exercising their statutory rights.

At the same time, the Scottish Government committed up to £6.5million over the next three years to support the Housing First Scotland pathfinder programme in five cities in partnership with Social Bite and other charities. The implementation of this Housing First programme has been informed by the *Hard Edges Scotland* report (Bramley *et al*, 2019), a follow-up to the English *Hard Edges* report discussed above. This Scottish report found that a similar proportion of the working age population had experienced all three of homelessness, offending and substance misuse in a single year as has been found in England (the estimate in absolute numbers being 5,600 people affected in Scotland, as compared with 58,000 in England, which has around ten times Scotland's population, see Figure 2 below) (Bramley *et al*, 2019). The *Hard Edges Scotland* report was also the catalyst for an official commitment,

³ <https://www.gov.scot/groups/homelessness-and-rough-sleeping-action-group>

announced in the 2019 Programme for Government (Scottish Government, 2019), to develop a “national vision for severe, multiple disadvantage” and establish an “Inclusive Scotland Fund” of £10million to contribute towards the delivery of this vision.

Figure 2 ‘Current’ Complex Needs in Adult Population, Scotland 2014/15



Sources: Bramley *et al* (2019), Figure 1, based on combination of eight datasets.

A new prevention duty was also recommended by HARSAG, along the lines of the revised legislation already introduced in England and Wales, to “bring ‘Housing Options’ into the heart of the statutory homelessness framework”, and to extend more robust preventative duties to other public authorities. In response, a Scotland Prevention Review Group has been convened by Crisis in November 2019, on the invitation of the Scottish Government, to bring forward legislative proposals to address this recommendation⁴.

It is clear that this HARSAG-related activity has precipitated a degree of legal reform, with the likelihood of more significant reform to come, as well as substantial investment in a national Housing First programme, and quite radical changes in local authority practice on both homelessness and social housing allocations. Whether this is enough to ‘eradicate rough sleeping’, ‘transform the use of temporary accommodation’, or indeed ‘end homelessness’, in Scotland

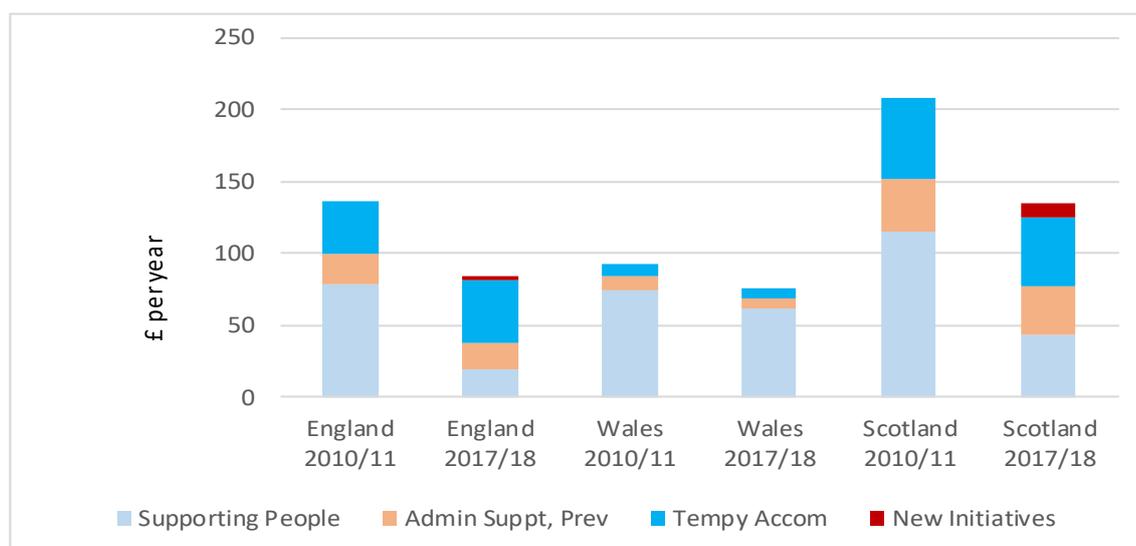
⁴ <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/scotland-prevention-review-group/>

remains to be seen, but at the very least the position of single homeless people with complex support needs should be notably improved.

5. Spending on Homelessness Across GB

It is not straightforward to get precise or wholly comparable expenditure numbers for homelessness-related services across the three GB countries. The numbers are not in any case that large, in comparison with some of the major public spending programmes. However, the spending categories which can be reasonably attributed to homelessness (at least in substantial part) are shown in Figure 3, expressed as annual amounts per total household in each country, at constant prices for two years (2010/11 and 2017/18). Across GB in the more recent year shown current expenditure on these items totalled about £2.4bn. There are some other expenditures which might be attributable directly or indirectly to homelessness, for example Housing Benefit/support with rents, or some health service or law and order spending. Although we do not address these indirect costs here, we return to this issue in the context of 'complex needs homelessness' towards the end of this section.

Figure 3 Current Homelessness Related Current Spending per Household by Component and Country, 2010/11 & 2017/18 @ 2017 prices



Sources: Authors' calculations based on: CIPFA Financial & General Statistics Budget Estimates (annual); Welsh Government Local Government Finance Budgeted Revenue Expenditure by service detail (annual); Scottish Government Local Government Financial Statistics Non-HRA Housing Detail (annual); Thunder & Rose (2019); ONS Census 2011 and modelled household estimates from Bramley (2019).

The first point to emerge from Figure 3 is that overall current expenditure has fallen, in all three jurisdictions, although the fall was more muted in Wales (18%) compared with the drop of 38% in England and 35% in Scotland. These spending reductions are not related to changes in the manifest scale of homelessness, which has clearly increased substantially in this period in England, while tending to fall or be more static in the other two countries (see Section 6). The spending changes result primarily from policies, both the general overarching programme

of austerity for local government (particularly in England), and the varying policy approaches to homelessness, as detailed in Sections 2-4 above. Thus in this period for England the dominant theme was hands-off 'Localism', whereas in Wales homelessness became an increased focus of policy attention and reform, while in Scotland it continued to receive a degree of attention and, in absolute terms, a higher expenditure priority.

The composition of the spending has changed, again differentially. As already noted, Supporting People (SP) lost its 'ring-fencing' in England in 2009 and hence was vulnerable to very considerable cutback in this period of strong austerity⁵. By contrast, Wales maintained the ring fence and the programme was subject to only modest cuts. In Scotland, SP was never so clearly separately identified or ring-fenced, and also suffered significant reductions, again doubtless reflecting the tight budget constraints on local authorities.

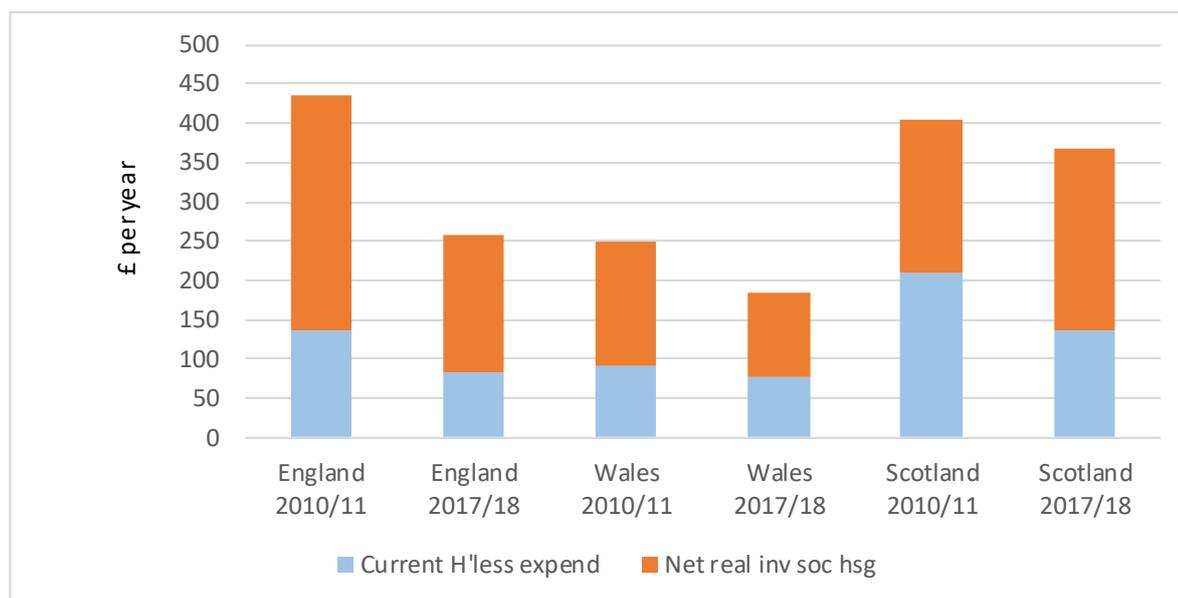
Expenditure on temporary accommodation is more demand-led, reflecting the volume of homelessness, the scarcity of social rented lettings and pressures in the local housing market. Thus in England, despite the policy retreat in this period, authorities were forced to spend more on temporary accommodation. Wales, subject to less of these pressures spent relatively little. Scotland, having given itself a duty to offer temporary accommodation to all single as well as family homeless, continued to incur high levels of spend (see Section 6).

Administrative support and prevention spend tended to fall slightly in real terms in this period, although not by much in England, despite austerity, doubtless owing to the higher and increasing pressures (see also Thunder & Rose, 2019). Scotland spent at a higher level, reflecting higher numbers through the system, but reduced significantly over the period, perhaps due to becoming less proactive on prevention mid-way through this period, as pointed out above. New initiatives with spending pots attached get a lot of publicity in the homelessness sector, but as this figure underlines these made very little impact on the overall level of current spending.

Figure 4 contrasts these totals of current spending (per household) with levels of net public investment in new social/affordable housing in the three countries at these two dates. It should be noted that 2010/11 was a relatively high year for such capital spending, as a legacy of counter cyclical measures taken by the Brown government and the devolved administrations following the financial crisis of 2008-09.

⁵ Not all Supporting People expenditure is targeted at homeless people or people at risk of homelessness.

Figure 4 Current Homeless Spending and Net Investment in New Social/Affordable Housing per Household by Country, 2010/11 & 2017/18 @ 2017 prices



Sources: As for Figure 1, plus Stephens *et al* (2019) *UK Housing Review 2019*, Tables 57a, 58, 59 Scottish Government Affordable Homes Programme Outturn;

Capital expenditure on social/affordable housing is larger in magnitude than current expenditure on homelessness related services, but of course such housing investment is intended to meet a wider range of needs. At the same time, additional social housing lettings may be needed to meet demanding targets for 'rapid rehousing' which are seen as a necessary part of dealing effectively with homelessness, as prioritised in Scotland in particular, and now in Wales too.

The level of capital investment in England was higher than in the other countries in 2010, reflecting both high need pressures and very high costs in London. However, by 2017 the level in England was a lot lower, due more to changes in the funding model with the shift to very shallow grant rates in the 'affordable rent' model favoured there. Capital investment also fell somewhat in Wales and was the lowest per household in 2017, perhaps reflecting a less pressured market and less policy priority, although that has appeared to change subsequently. Scotland is notable for seeing a marked increase investment, reflecting an overt priority of building more affordable housing, including a lot of social and council housing, with more generous grants to support it. There is quite strong cross-sectoral support for this strategy in Scotland, although the evidence on the relative strength of need compared with the other GB countries does not so clearly support this pattern (see Bramley (2018)).

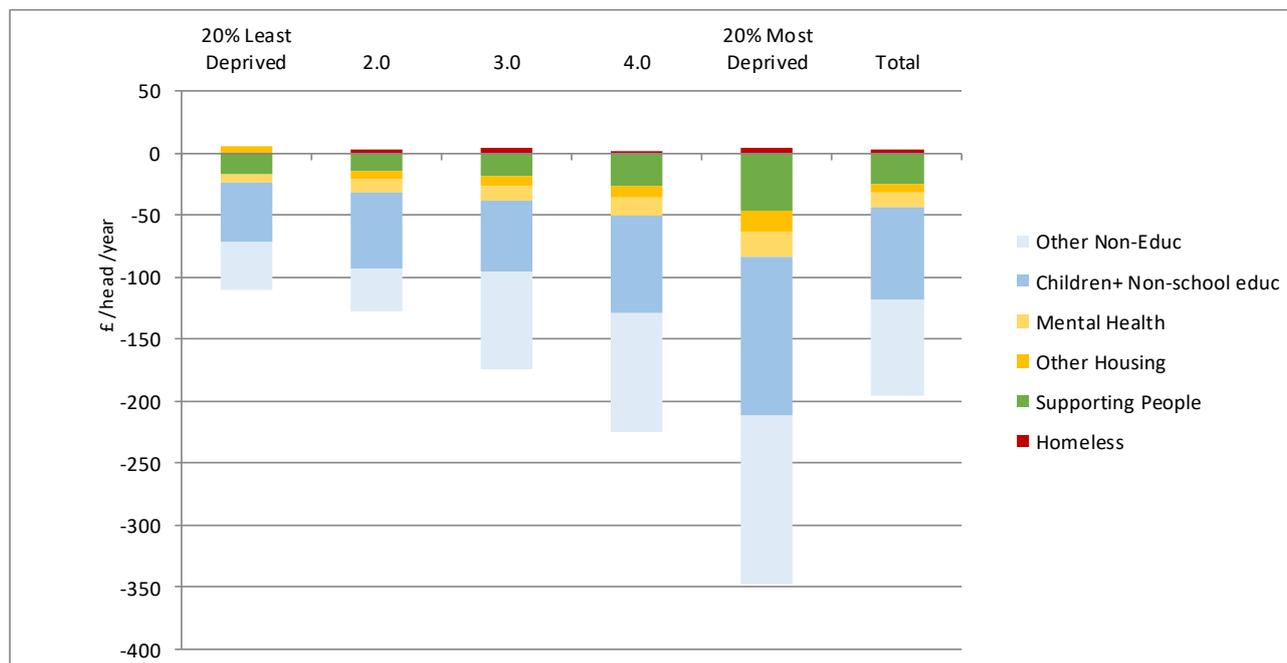
Although the main focus here has been on local spending on services fairly directly related to homelessness at national 'country' level, it is also worth taking account of the wider picture of local government spending in this period of 'austerity', especially in England, and in particular the extraordinarily skewed

pattern of cuts across the dimension of relative deprivation of the local authority concerned.

Figure 5 looks at the pattern across deprivation levels (using Indices of Deprivation Low Income Score quintiles). The most deprived areas in England suffered cuts in per capita spending resources 3.3 times larger than those suffered by the least deprived. While the per capita figures are particularly stark, the percentage change figures show a consistent story, with the most deprived areas losing 22% against 4% for the least deprived. As pointed out in Hastings et al (2017), this reflects an historic (and virtually unannounced) reversal of long-standing principles of 'equalization' in local government finance in Britain, under which successive governments have recognised the significantly higher per capita spending needs of deprived urban areas.

In terms of type of service, the largest cut overall appears to have been in the category of children's services, including non-school education. Other non-education services, which cover a wide range of services falling outwith the other named categories, are second in the scale of cuts. Notwithstanding rhetoric about the need to enhance mental health services (Prime Minister's Office, 2017), which may be particularly relevant to homeless people with more complex needs, these also experienced significant cuts in this period. On the housing front, the Government have given some priority to homelessness, through the mechanism of specific grants, but as these charts make clear this positive element is barely visible, and completely swamped by the relatively large cut in SP (much of which targets single homeless people and those with complex support needs as noted above) and cuts in other housing services, all of which show similar skew.

Figure 5 Real Terms Cuts in Local Government Current Expenditure Per Capita by Relevant Service, by Low Income Deprivation Quintiles, England, 2010-18

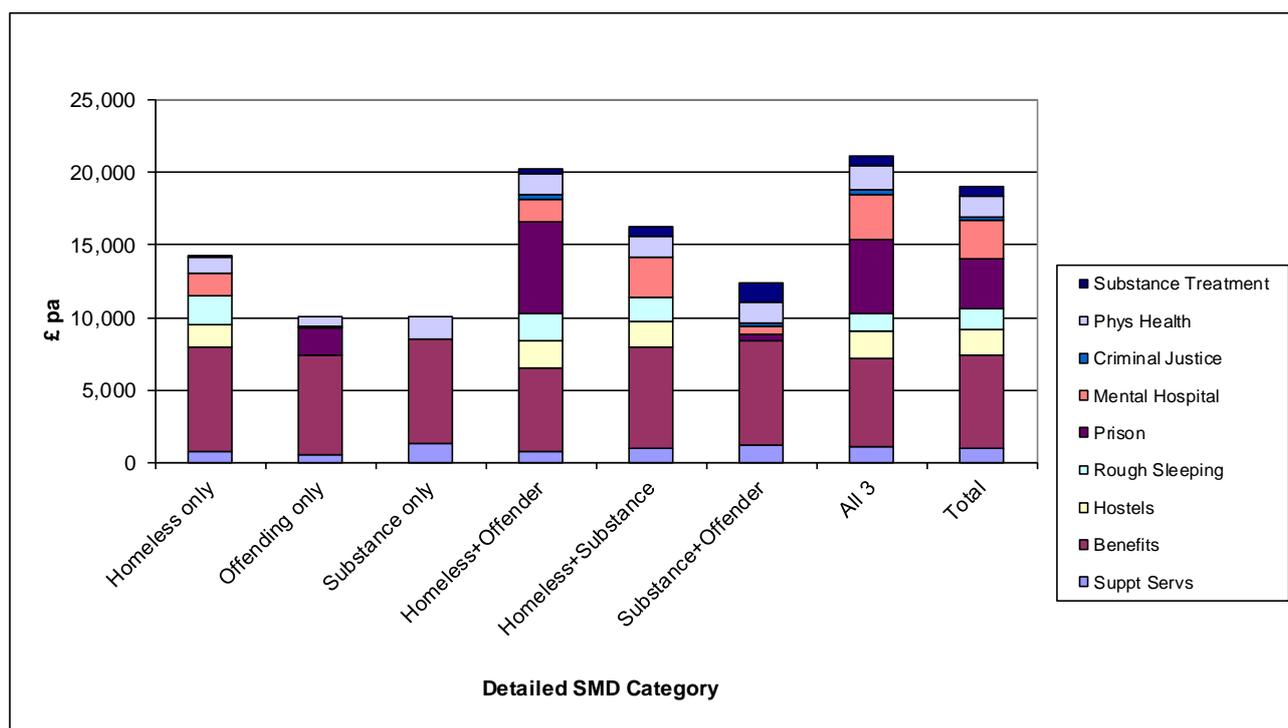


Source: Author's analysis of CIPFA Financial and General Estimates Statistics, annual, as presented in Watts et al (2019).

This underlines the arguments developed in an earlier section that 'Localism' may be a thinly-veiled strategy of cutting back spending and services, and also that the options for deprived urban local authorities facing cuts of the order shown in Figure 5 are deeply unattractive.

There is a different way of looking at 'expenditure' on homelessness and associated complex needs, which is not about planned, deliberate programmes of public spending to tackle these issues, but rather the reactive or unavoidable spending incurred as a range of public services respond to the problems presented by this group. Analysis of this has demonstrated the significant cost burden for the rest of society associated with these complex needs, particularly with respect to disproportionate use of certain public services. Our best attempt at quantifying the excess public spending costs associated with these complex needs was offered within the *Hard Edges* England study (Bramley et al, 2015).

Figure 6 Composition of Annual Public Spending by Detailed Complex Needs Category based on 'Ever Experienced', c.2010/11



Source: Bramley et al (2015) *Hard Edges* report

Figure 6 shows from that study the estimated annual costs for the different 'overlap' or segment groups; these may be compared with a benchmark of £4,600 per adult for public spending on the same range of services. The results suggest that, for the type of complex population represented in a survey on 'multiple exclusion homelessness' (see Fitzpatrick 2011, 2013), total public expenditure relevant costs attributable are around £19,000 per year, 4-5 times the benchmark, with particularly high spend for homeless-offending, homeless-substance and SMD3 categories. The data in this analysis was used to provide a grossed-up cost for our composite estimate of £4.3bn for the population with two or three of the relevant disadvantages, and a figure of £10.1bn for the wider complex need population with one or more of these disadvantages (all figures referring to England in 2010/11). Comparisons with other studies (e.g. Battrick et al 2014) and other evidence suggests that for some categories these estimates are on the conservative side— particularly physical health and criminal justice.

It is important to note here that these complex support needs are inextricably bound up with the long-run impacts of poverty and sustained economic decline (Bramley et al, 2015), including heightened levels of mental ill-health, substance misuse, crime and violence in affected communities (see also JRF, 2016). Poverty has been shown to have a strong causal effect on both physical and mental health (Marmot & Bell, 2012), and the spatial concentration of the most serious forms of drug misuse and chronic offending in the UK point to the structural origins of these problems in processes of deindustrialisation and associated entrenched forms of poverty (Bramley et al, 2015). This means that

these additional costs associated with offending and substance misuse are, like those associated with homelessness (see Section 7 below) in very large part the knock-on effects of poverty.

6. Outcomes on Homelessness Across GB

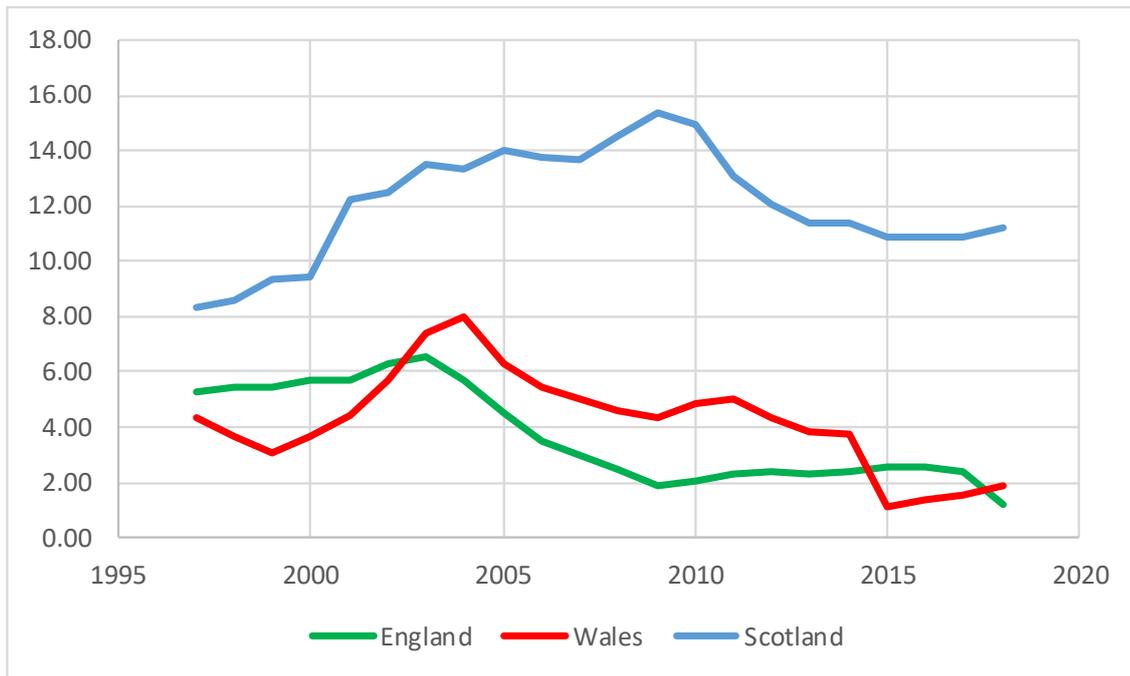
Having reviewed the recent political goals, policies and expenditure on homelessness across GB, we now examine the outcomes associated with these divergent agendas in terms of levels and trends in homelessness.

Figure 7 tracks the most common measure associated with the statutory homelessness system in Britain, namely the number of households accepted by local authorities as homeless and owed the main rehousing duty. In Figure 7, we take the rate of 'main duty' acceptances per year per 1000 households for each country, and we look at a longer period of 22 years to gain a fuller perspective on developments.

It is immediately clear that the statistical trends are fundamentally different in the three countries, with Scotland clearly following a very different course. There is an extraordinary difference in level (relative to household population) in Scotland versus England or Wales, and it appears that this was the case even before the major liberalization implemented after 2001 and up to 2012. Scotland seems to have always been more generous in interpreting the legislation and to have been in a position to rehouse relatively more homeless people, mainly due to having a large social housing stock as well as a less pressured market (Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2009). However, as the priority need distinction was gradually abolished in Scotland up to 2012, it can be seen that Scotland progressively deviated further upwards from both England and Wales. This is essentially a measure of what happens when single and other non-family homeless become eligible for the full 'main duty'. However, since 2010, Scottish numbers have fallen back before levelling off, albeit at a level five to six times higher than that found in either England or Wales.

There are clearly also sharp disjunctures that reflect policy/legal changes at particular moments: in England formal acceptances went sharply down both in 2003, when Housing Options was introduced, and again in 2018, as the HRA came into force; a similar impact can be seen in Wales in 2014, in anticipation of the HWA coming into force the following year; and conversely, and much earlier, in Scotland there was a steep acceleration in acceptances after 2000 as the legislation offered more generous entitlements to single homeless people, while the rolling out of Housing Option saw a sharp reversal of that trend for a few years. These disjunctures affect what might have otherwise been a cyclical relationship with housing markets, which generally (and in the past) have tended to show a positive link between homelessness rates and tighter housing markets (more than offsetting any benefits from better employment prospects in such regions and periods) (Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2011). Some of these wider market context effects are discussed further, alongside other drivers of homelessness, in section 7.

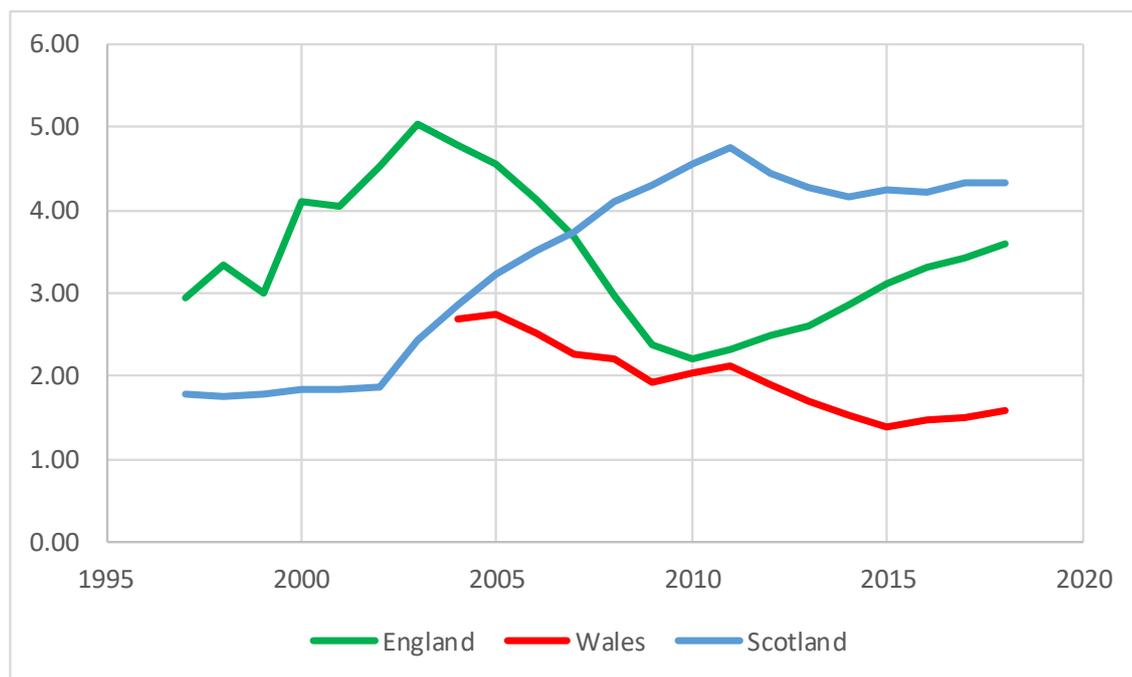
Figure 7 Homeless main duty acceptances per 1,000 households by country, 1997-2018



Sources: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government Live Tables on Homelessness, based on Local Authority P1E returns; Statistics Wales: Homelessness Statistics; Scottish Government: Homelessness Statistics;

Figure 8 takes a look at a different indicator, households in temporary accommodation, over the same time period for the three countries. These will be households who have applied as homeless, who may be accommodated in temporary accommodation pending inquiries and/or while waiting for a suitable settled rehousing opportunity. The temporary accommodation can take a range of forms including conventional social rented housing units let on licence, leased private rental housing, hostels, Bed & Breakfast hotels, or other communal provision. This indicator, unlike the previous one, is a 'stock' measure, namely a snapshot of the number of households accommodated at a point in time (normally, the end of the financial year, 31 March). This indicator is less drastically affected by legislative and policy change than homelessness acceptances, while being more sensitive to the wider housing market context, and also being more comprehensive, in that it reflects outflows from the statutory homelessness system as well as inflows.

Figure 8 Households in Temporary Accommodation per 1,000 households by country, 1997-2018



Sources: as Figure 7

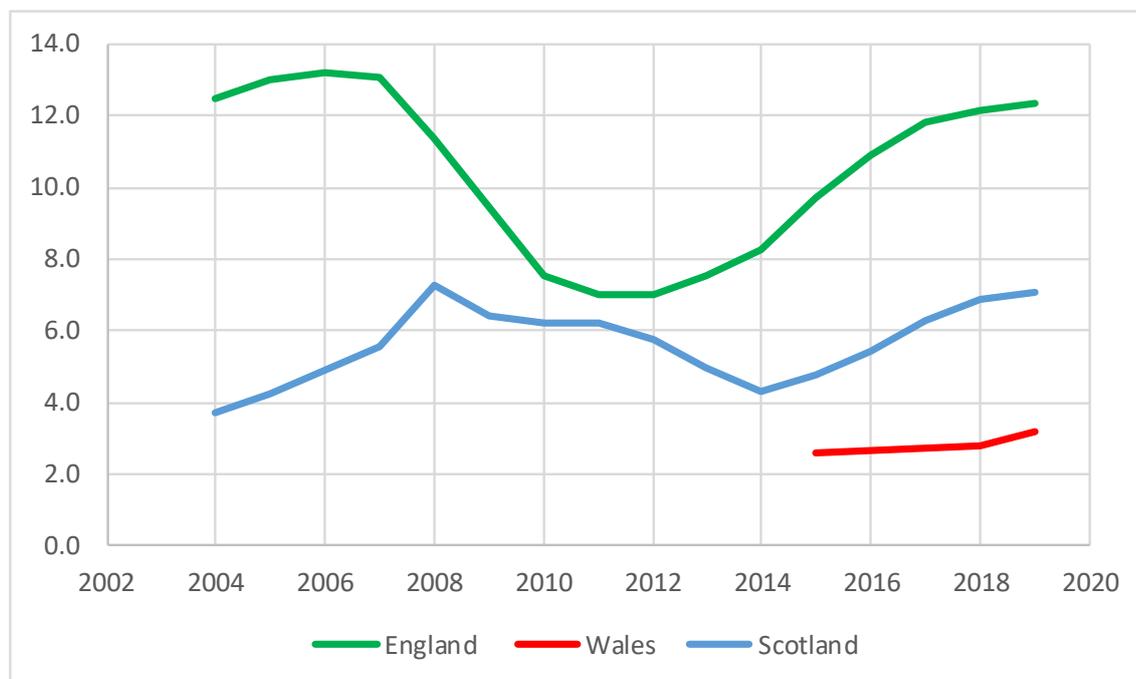
Temporary accommodation rates in England spiked quite significantly in the early 2000s, but following the vigorous pursuit of homeless prevention approaches numbers dropped sharply through to 2010. Since that date, numbers have risen quite steadily, confirming other evidence of growing pressures and problems since that time. Increased applications and acceptances have confronted a declining supply of social lettings, as well as greater difficulty accessing private rental property following the restriction and then the capping of the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) (Fitzpatrick *et al* 2019). As argued in Section 2 and discussed further in Section 7 below, a combination of the Localism approach in England and social security changes (particularly LHA rises), largely account for the post-2010 rise.

Use of temporary accommodation in Scotland rose strongly from 2002 to a level more than double England by 2010, settling back to a level still notably above the other countries. This resulted directly from the greatly widened duty to provide temporary accommodation to single homeless from the early 2000s. In Wales, rates have tended to fall over most of the period covered by this series, albeit with slight upticks in 2010-11 and 2017-18, and recently have been markedly lower than in both the other GB countries.

There are particular concerns about the situation of children living in temporary accommodation, particularly unsuitable forms such as B&B, hostels or other accommodation with shared facilities. Apart from the intrinsic difficulties of sharing cooking, toilet and bathing facilities with strangers, often in cramped conditions, temporary accommodation tends to make it difficult for children to settle in school, neighbourhood and community. Both the number of children in temporary accommodation and recent trends, particularly since 2014, give

cause for concern. Again there is a picture for England of rapid improvement from 2006 to 2011, but major worsening again since then. Despite its higher housing supply, Scotland shows a moderately high level which has increased since 2014. Wales shows a lower level but, again, some moderate increase since 2015.

Figure 9 Children in Temporary Accommodation per 1,000 children by country, 2004-2019

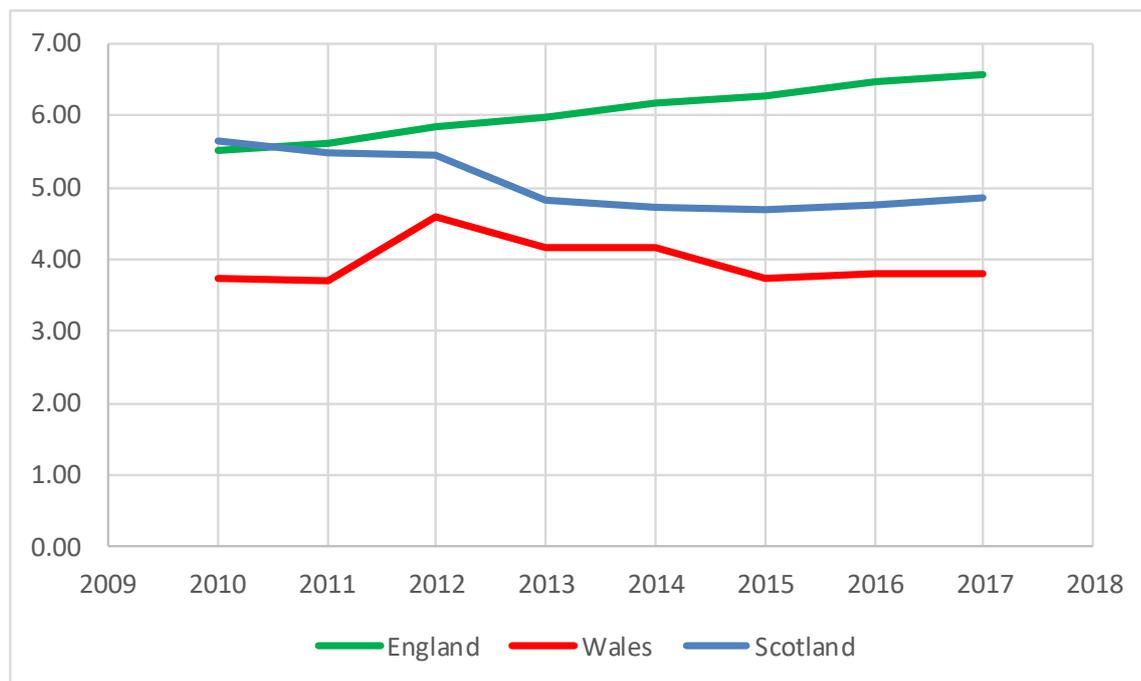


Sources: as Figure 7. Note that the time series is shorter on Wales as result of data availability.

A further useful summary indicator is what we term 'core homelessness', following Bramley (20017, 2018) and Crisis (2018). This is a stock measure of households experiencing the more extreme situations of homelessness, defined to include rough sleeping and similar situations, hostels, unsuitable temporary accommodation (e.g. B&B, non-self-contained, out-of-area placements) and 'sofa surfing' (staying temporarily with others- not immediate family - and overcrowded). These numbers are estimated from a variety of sources, including official homeless statistics, surveys of hostels or of users of emergency services, and household surveys.

The core homelessness measure is not as dependent on policy/legal arrangements as statutory homelessness system-derived statistics, and for this reason it is of particular value for comparing the GB countries. Figure 10 shows that in 2010 England and Scotland had similar levels of core homelessness, but that since then they have diverged. In England levels rose steadily up to 2017, with particular growth in rough sleeping and unsuitable temporary accommodation, while in Scotland there was a significant decline until 2014, after which time levels have been more or less stable. Wales has generally shown a lower level of core homelessness, with no longer term trend but an upward spike in 2012 which took several years to work through.

Figure 10 Core homelessness per 1000 households by country, 2010-17



Source: Bramley (2017) *Homelessness Projections (Crisis)*, and (2018) and *Homelessness Projections – Updating the Base Number* unpublished report to Crisis.

7. Drivers of Homelessness across GB

As noted in the Introduction to this paper, while the primary focus in this paper is the nature and impacts of homelessness-specific policies, these must be placed in the broader context of the wider drivers of homelessness outcomes in order to gain appropriate perspective on their relative importance.

There has been some quantitative literature which reports attempts to model the drivers and risk factors for homelessness. Representative examples of the genre from the US include Quigley et al (2001) and O’Flaherty (2004), with a more recent review paper being by Rukmana (2020). Much of this work is focussed on data aggregated at the city or neighbourhood level and as such may tend to emphasise structural factors like the housing market rather more than micro studies. Of particular interest are studies which look at transitions into and out of homelessness, exemplified by Johnson et al (2015) in an Australian context. Care is needed when interpreting studies from different national systems, given the significance of different policy contexts in affecting measured homelessness.

Within the UK, the current authors (Bramley & Fitzpatrick, 2017) carried out an analysis that involved interrogating three survey datasets which identified homelessness experiences in the general population; two retrospective datasets (Scottish Household Survey, and the Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey (PSE)) and one longitudinal cohort study (British Cohort Study 1970). This analysis demonstrated that poverty and economic disadvantage, going back to childhood

but also in early adulthood and currently, is key to homelessness at individual level (see also Bramley *et al*, 2015, 2019). Health and support needs (e.g. addictions) contribute to the picture, but their explanatory power less than that of poverty. Social support networks, including strong family ties and support, can 'buffer' or moderate economic effects and other adverse life events to some extent, although poor families can be too stressed or stretched to provide so much support.

Where you live also matters – Bramley & Fitzpatrick (2017) found that the odds of homelessness are highest in areas of housing pressure (notably London) -but geography and higher 'market area' level factors appeared less important than individual/household factors, especially poverty. However, these are essentially micro-based analyses and the geographically-based indicators were limited in scope, in two of the three datasets used in this analysis.

Helpfully, it has now become possible to explore the geography of homelessness further, using the new and improved official homelessness statistics in England post the HRA (2017), which suggests some very interesting patterns with respect to the interrelationship between homelessness, poverty and complex needs. In Table 1 below, the first indicator is family homeless cases entering the statutory system as a percentage rate on the resident population. As can be seen, the regional pattern is of high rates in London, followed by the South East and East, reflecting the more pressured housing market there.

The second indicator looks at the share of families in overall homeless cases. This tells a similar story to the data on rates of family homelessness, being highest in the East and South East, and lower in the North and West Midlands, but this time with London close to the average.

Table 1 Selected Indicators of Homelessness Rate and Profile post-Homeless Reduction Act, by Region, England 2018/19

Mean percentage by	Family Homeless % hshlds	Families as % of homeless*	Homeless with SMD % of h'less
Government Office Region			
North East	0.24	37.9	13.2
Yorkshire & Humber	0.24	38.4	11.8
North West	0.25	41.5	11.7
East Midlands	0.27	45.4	8.5
West Midlands	0.16	37.7	6.1
South West	0.26	40.3	10.2
East England	0.29	49.4	7.1
South East	0.29	49.9	8.7
London	0.37	44.8	5.5
England	0.27	43.5	8.9

Source: Authors' analysis of MHCLG data from H-CLIC system reported in Live Tables.

The last column of these tables presents new evidence on the share of complex needs cases within the homelessness cohort. It is striking that 'complex needs homelessness' has a quite different geography from family homelessness, with much higher rates in the northern regions and lowest rates in London, followed by the West Midlands.

We interpret these results as indicating that family ('priority need') homelessness reflects households facing access and affordability issues, which are most acute in the more pressured housing markets of London and the south. Some parallel analysis we have undertaken indicates that relevant households are most numerous in 'cosmopolitan/multicultural' areas which have a lot of families and recent migrants. These family homelessness cases might be viewed as representing the most direct or obvious intersection between poverty and homelessness – the straightforward inability to purchase or sustain housing in a competitive market.

Single homeless people can also face difficulties of housing access and affordability, but the material poverty they face is more often overlaid with complex support needs. It can be seen from the analysis above that the areas with the greatest proportion of such cases are the 'left behind' former industrial and mining areas, smaller towns and less prosperous rural and coastal areas, particularly in the North. This is strongly resonant with the geographical mapping findings of the *Hard Edges* series of reports (see above), with these reports also providing evidence of the overwhelmingly strong relationship between homelessness, complex needs, and poverty (Bramley *et al*, 2015, 2019).

There is growing interest in applying this understanding of the drivers of homelessness to practical use in predictive modelling to inform targeted

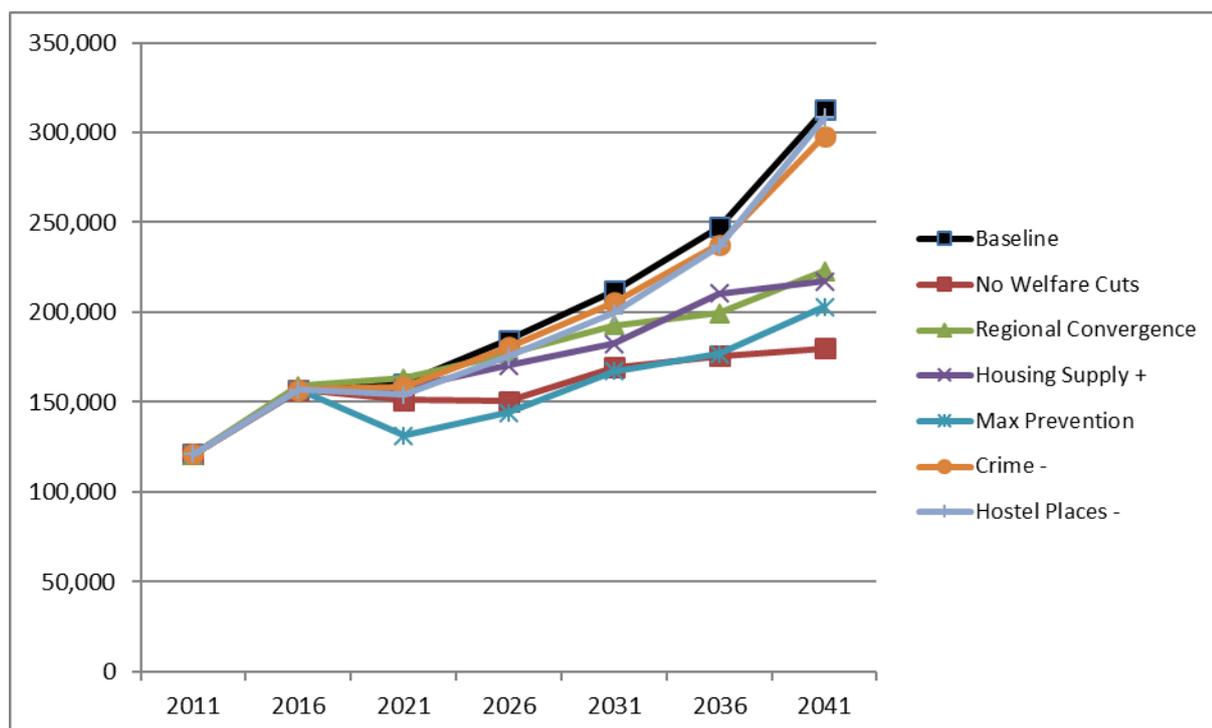
prevention activity (Watts *et al*, 2019), and in official systems developed by government to predict demand/need and to target and refine interventions and responses (Alma Economics 2019a & b).

In work conducted for the charity Crisis to develop a set of models to forecast future prospects for homelessness (particularly 'core homelessness') and how these would be affected by different policy scenarios, Bramley (2017, 2018a & b) developed a suite of forecasting approaches for different elements of homelessness, linked to a broader Sub-Regional Housing Market Model. The key factors identified as significant in the prediction of different elements of core homelessness were as follows.

- *Rough sleeping* – higher risks are associated with younger age adults, particularly males, single person households, current and past poverty, criminal records and areas with more crime, unemployment, in-migration, and high use of unsuitable temporary accommodation (B&B, non-self-contained, or out-of-area placement).
- *Hostels, shelters, refuges* – numbers here are largely supply-constrained, by funding (mainly static or declining since 2010)
- *Homeless acceptances* – rates are positively related, over time and across local authorities, to (in-)migration, certain household types (e.g. singles), certain ethnic groups, low earnings/incomes, low/lack of qualifications, disability, social security cuts, higher house prices and lower social rented lettings supply, crime rates, less active prevention activity, and presence/concentrations of hostels and other communal establishments
- *Unsuitable temporary accommodation* – rates of use of these unsuitable forms of temporary accommodation (see above) are related to the level of and change in homeless acceptances, and negatively related to the supply of social rented lettings
- *Sofa surfing* – models based on both current and retrospective survey indicators show that the risk is influenced by demographic factors (age, migrancy, household types), poverty (income, financial difficulties, past poverty, unemployment, job growth/decline), housing factors (tenure, crowding, social housing supply), criminal records, and institutional accommodation in the locality.

A range of simulations produced in this research for Crisis serve to illustrate the power of this approach (see Bramley, 2017, 2018). Figure 11 provides a concise picture. Under the 'baseline' scenario, carrying on with the policy settings of 2017, core homelessness is forecast to rise at an increasing rate through the 2020s, with an accelerating increase from the mid 2030s. Different policy scenarios have varying degrees of impact in reducing core homelessness, and they also vary in the time profile of impact.

Figure 11 Core homelessness projections with different scenarios, Great Britain 2011-2041.



Source: Bramley (2018), Figure 14.

The policy package which showed the biggest impact in the short term and into the medium term was 'maximum prevention' – essentially all local authorities being as proactive as the best were doing in the base period (up to around 2016). Some of the techniques they might employ are illustrated in the case study of Newcastle City reported in Watts *et al* (2019).

The most important policy package in the longer term is the 'No Social Security Cuts' scenario, which reverses or cancels social security cuts made/announced in 2015 for the following period⁶; particularly important in this package is restoring the level and regular uprating of the Local Housing Allowance levels for supportable private sector rents (see also Cooper & Hills, 2020).

A package of greatly increased housing supply (both overall and especially involving more social rented housing) would have a moderately large impact in the longer-term, but would take quite a time before it would begin to have a noticeable impact. Similar comments apply even more to another, broader scenario, involving greater regional convergence in terms of economic growth rates, between different regions. Policy scenarios which are shown as having relatively modest impacts in reducing core homelessness include achieving a progressive reduction in crime rates, and a gradual reduction in traditional hostel places (as may be expected to accompany the adoption of 'Housing First').

⁶ This scenario entails indexation at CPI and reverses the cuts made to Universal Credit announced in 2015.

Clearly these options do not exhaust the possible routes to homelessness reduction, and the details of their implementation may be worked out in many different ways. For example, targeted homelessness prevention measures with particularly high-risk groups, such as those leaving prison, might be expected to impact on homelessness trends (at least amongst the complex needs groups) over time. Thus, while efforts have been made to stem the flow of ex-prisoners into homelessness via 'through the gate' resettlement services in England (HM Inspectorate of Probation (2016), Scotland (Scottish Prison Service, 2017), and Wales (Madoc-Jones *et al*, 2019) in recent years, implementation and progress has been patchy. A more determined and consistent effort to ensure that prisoners have sustainable post-release accommodation could reap rewards in terms of reduced levels of rough sleeping and other forms of 'core homelessness'. Moreover, given the particular vulnerability of short-term prisoners to homelessness, the presumption against short sentences in Scotland (extended to sentences of less than 12 months in 2019) may also have a beneficial effect over time, and in England and Wales too, should they decide to go down this route.

The main point is that, while there is a clear danger of recent upward trends in homelessness (particularly in England) continuing into the future, this is not inevitable, and a consciously-adopted package of measures from the array illustrated here could substantially reduce core homelessness (Bramley, 2018, Figure 15).

8. Conclusions

This paper sets out to provide an in-depth analysis of homelessness policy goals, expenditure and outcomes across GB in the post-2015 period, till the eve of the COVID-19 pandemic, setting developments in this most recent period in their longer-term perspective. It has demonstrated that the three GB countries have followed quite distinctive policy paths on homelessness in the post-devolution period, with divergent spending and outcomes profiles.

In England, a relatively positive legacy on homelessness was bequeathed by interventionist Labour administrations. Then post-2010 Coalition and then Conservative Governments implemented a combination of deep cuts in social security and a hand-off 'Localism' policy which saw central government largely divest itself of responsibility in this area, leaving cash-strapped local authorities and civil society actors to pick up the pieces. Overall spending on homelessness services fell, even though the numbers affected climbed sharply, and local authorities were forced to channel more of their dwindling resources towards supporting temporary accommodation costs as placements spiralled upwards.

Post-devolution Wales increasingly distanced itself from the English approach by protecting the main source of revenue funding for single homelessness services (slashed by almost four-fifths in England over an eight-year period), and by substantially reforming its homelessness legislation to bolster its preventative focus and to extend material assistance to single homeless people. Generally

adjudged successful, the key tenets of this Welsh legislation was then adopted by England in the HRA 2017, signalling an interesting reversal of the usual direction of policy mobility between these two hitherto closely aligned jurisdictions.

Meanwhile Scotland has long forged its own path on homelessness law and policy, most notably by radically extending entitlements for single homeless people well beyond those in England and Wales as far back as 2001. This stance won the Scottish Government (well deserved) international plaudits but also resulted in rates of statutory homelessness and temporary accommodation use which far outstrip those in the rest of GB, and exceptionally high proportions of social lettings being absorbed by statutorily homeless households. As it became clear that Scotland's major cities in particular were struggling to deliver on single homeless people's statutory rehousing entitlements, a new emphasis from 2010 onwards was placed on prevention, with the roll-out of 'Housing Options', based on a model introduced in England (and Wales) almost a decade earlier.

These examples indicate that one of the theorized benefits of devolution – that it might result in better social policy outcomes via mutual learning and innovation (Katikireddi *et al*, 2017) – does seem to find some basis in the homelessness field. England has quickly adopted (successful) new preventative legislation from Wales, which is now also actively being considered for adoption in Scotland; meantime, Wales is now actively pursuing 'rapid rehousing' and national-level Housing First policies first rolled out in Scotland only last year, and is also considering the abolition of priority need, a radical move pioneered in Scotland some 17 years ago. These examples also therefore indicate that this cross-jurisdictional 'policy mobility' may be multi-directional, slow or fast-moving, and shift in shape and focus over time.

Another key message to emerge from across this GB comparative analysis is that targeted homelessness policies matter and can have real and dramatic effects. Sharp drops in formal homelessness acceptances in 2003 and 2004 in England and Wales respectively, and in Scotland in 2010, as a direct result of the impact of the (non-statutory) Housing Options model are testament to this, as is the more recent downward pressure as a result of the new legislation in Wales and England. These trends are not mere artefacts of changed recording practices, or the manifestation of (unlawful) gatekeeping, with independent evaluations identifying genuine improvements in preventative practice as a result of these policy and legislative-led changes. Predictive modelling analysis has also reinforced the importance and potential utility of these targeted preventative measures, as well as more upstream preventative measures targeting high risk groups like ex-prisoners.

The conspicuous success of the first Rough Sleepers Initiative (RSI) and the Rough Sleepers Unit, and more recently the emerging impact of the current Rough Sleepers Strategy and recent RSI, also demonstrates that even a complex social phenomenon like street homelessness, affecting extremely vulnerable people with a range of challenging support needs, is amenable to tailored policy interventions.

However, it is also clear that homelessness outcomes are driven by factors way beyond specialist ameliorative policies in this field. Both quantitative and qualitative evidence have indicated that the major structural drivers include poverty (especially in childhood), social security cutbacks (especially in housing allowances), and housing market conditions (especially access to social and affordable housing). For example, the sluggish response of temporary accommodation trends to positive change in homeless acceptances rates signals the sensitivity of this indicator to this wider housing market context, particularly the highly constrained nature of social housing supply and access to affordable private rented properties in many parts of England.

Modelling analysis forecasting future trends in the more extreme forms of 'core' homelessness indicate that the policy measure with the biggest impact longer-term would be to reverse or cancel key social security cuts; particularly important here would be to restore the level and regular uprating of the Local Housing Allowance. Greatly increased housing supply (both overall and especially involving more social rented housing) would have a moderately large impact longer-term, so too greater regional convergence in economic growth rates. Thus, while there is a clear danger of recent upward trends in homelessness (particularly in England) continuing into the future, this is not inevitable, and a consciously-adopted package of measures could halt or even reverse this trend.

Tackling poverty is inescapably core to addressing the root causes of homelessness in GB. This is most obviously the case with regard to solving the difficulties that low-income households face in paying for housing in pressurised market contexts – pressures which generate high rates of family homelessness in London and in the South East and East of England in particular. Single homelessness, while for many also reflecting these pressures, for a significant minority, intersects much more strongly with other complex support needs, such as substance misuse, mental ill-health and offending behaviours. These issues exhibit quite a different geography from family homelessness, being concentrated in 'left behind' former industrial areas and struggling rural and coastal communities, but are, crucially, like homelessness, all social problems strongly mediated by poverty (JRF, 2016). The declining value of the social security safety net for non-pensioners, as demonstrated by Cooper & Hills (2020) in parallel paper in this SPDO series, thus strongly reinforces risks of both homelessness *and* complex needs.

Policy challenges looking forward

On the eve of the coronavirus pandemic, key homelessness and complex needs policy challenges included:

- Continuing with the roll-out of Housing First at national level across all UK jurisdictions, replacing outdated and damaging forms of congregate homelessness provision which can compound rather than alleviate vulnerable homeless people's problems. The ongoing need for small-scale, high-quality congregate provision for some specific exceptionally high

needs groups of ex-homeless people is better conceived of as a health and social care rather than a housing intervention.

- Propelling a shift towards a much more determined, consistent and evidence-informed preventative approach to tackling homelessness. This would involve targeting upstream support both on high risk groups, such as vulnerable young people, women fleeing violence, and tenants in rent arrears, and risky transitions, such as leaving local authority care, prison or mental health in-patient treatment.
- Updating the homelessness legislation in all UK countries so that it strikes an appropriate balance between protecting the statutory rights of homeless people on the one hand, but at the same time allows for proactive, flexible preventative approaches on the part of housing practitioners on the other.
- Reversing key social security cuts of the 2010s, and in particular restoring the relationship between Local Housing Allowance rates and actual median market rents.
- Building significantly more social housing at genuinely affordable rents, particularly in pressured regions of the country (primarily southern England). This is necessary to enable the rapid rehousing identified as key to resolving more acute forms of homelessness, while also easing housing market pressures more generally.

The coronavirus crisis struck against this background and resulted in new and additional policy challenges. These challenges include 'building back better', by ensuring that there is no return to the levels of rough sleeping witnessed before the pandemic, but at the same time it is critical to guard against the danger that communal shelter provision may be expanded to ensure that the Government meets its ambition to 'end' rough sleeping by 2024. It is now clear that the elimination of these primitive forms of accommodation should be a public health priority. Finally, it is more necessary than ever to take aggressive preventative action to head off a widely anticipated 'spike' in homelessness cases as the evictions moratorium and furlough schemes come to an end.

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