



**Homeless Link**

# **South Yorkshire Homelessness Research**

**An evidence base for the SYMCA Homelessness  
Task Group**

**July 2024**

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**Produced by Homeless Link, with support from Changing Futures Sheffield (2024)**

### **Acknowledgements:**

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## Executive summary

Homeless Link was commissioned by the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA) and key stakeholders who are members of the South Yorkshire Mayoral Homelessness Task Group to produce a piece of research which will provide an evidence base to inform future policy, practice, systems and resource allocation in activity to prevent homelessness and support people experiencing homelessness. The research ran from October 2023 to June 2024.

### Key findings from the research

South Yorkshire faces unique and significant challenges in addressing homelessness. The indicators for homelessness are concerning, highlighting a significant rise in homelessness and demand for services. However, the effectiveness of support in preventing and relieving homelessness has evidently decreased. Last year, only half of those presenting to local authorities at risk of homelessness and a third presenting as homeless secured accommodation. This has led to an increasing number of households in temporary accommodation, placing a substantial financial burden on council finances (£4,725m in 2022/2023) and having the known detrimental effects on individuals and families.

The homelessness challenges in South Yorkshire reflect national trends but evidence gathered also highlights some clear specificities, including:

- A disproportionate impact of homelessness on certain groups, including young people and ethnic minorities. These groups often experience hidden forms of homelessness such as sofa-surfing or temporary stays with family, which frequently escalate to formal homelessness. These hidden forms of homelessness, although often overlooked in official statistics, represent a significant portion of housing instability in the region.
- An increasing number of families with children presenting to services. In 2023/24, this concerned 950 households.
- A notable increase in the number of female rough sleepers (+30% since 2020) reflecting unique vulnerabilities and complex needs of women experiencing multiple disadvantages in the region.
- A sharp rise in households presenting to services with support needs, surpassing the national average by 20%.
- An important increase in household facing the threat of homelessness despite being employed (22% of all owed a prevention duty) compared to national figures, indicating rising in-work poverty and housing affordability issues.
- Domestic abuse continues to be a major factor driving homelessness in South Yorkshire, above national trends. Around 1,500 households required housing assistance from the councils due to risk of or homelessness in 2023/24.
- Local prisons are at capacity and release into homelessness are higher in South Yorkshire than elsewhere in the UK. Evidence also indicates ongoing challenges in securing stable housing after release.

In relation to housing:

- Historically, South Yorkshire had more council housing available than other regions and relied heavily on social housing to relieve homelessness. Consequently, prevention work was not prioritised. However, effective prevention work is essential now relieving homelessness through social housing alone cannot be the sole solution.

- There is a significant shortage of affordable housing and heightened competition for available stock. Relatively low house prices in the region attract various parties, including the Home Office, making it difficult for stakeholders in the region to access affordable and suitable stock, including Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO).
- Local councils in South Yorkshire heavily rely on social housing and B&Bs to provide emergency accommodation, resulting in substantial expenditure and placing increased pressure on council finances.
- A significant proportion (18%) of substandard housing conditions in the private rented sector contributing of mental and physical health issues, evictions, and heightened competition for quality housing, exacerbating the risk of homelessness.

It is clear that housing quality, affordability and availability, health disparities, and socio-economic deprivation stand out as prominent factors amplifying the risk of homelessness. Long standing issues of poverty have been exacerbated by austerity, welfare reforms and the cost-of-living crisis causing increased hardship and confusion for people and services. Funding mechanisms have also been short-term in nature and the localism agenda has meant that more responsibility has been shifted to local authorities at a time of reduced funding and increasing demand.

While there is no quick fix for the structural issues underlying the broader social and economic challenges that the region and its population is facing, there are a number of key areas in which the region can improve its response. This includes mitigating the impact of structural issues and embedding a culture of homelessness prevention into systems and processes, supporting those that are multiply excluded, victims of domestic abuse or leaving institutions. This also means supporting those households, including families with children, before they become homelessness. Crucially, this also includes ensuring the right supply of affordable and suitable homes which respond to the needs and circumstances of each household.

### **Identified priority and areas for action**

The region is well-placed to address these challenges due to its dynamic and diverse voluntary and community sector (VCS), a willing social housing and supported accommodation sector, and dedicated partners across housing, health, criminal justice system, skills and employment who care deeply about these issues and actively work in partnership. The region also benefits from strong local leadership, innovative practices in service delivery, and a commitment to multi-agency collaboration. The Sheffield [Homewards](#) programme, for example, is a promising example of how cross-sector partners can be brought together behind the single cause of preventing and ending homelessness. However, while the foundational elements are in place, the system is not functioning as it should. By enhancing coordination, improving communication, and ensuring that the dots are appropriately joined between homelessness and the other strategic agendas (health, housing, skills and employment, communities) the region can better leverage these strengths. A concerted effort to break down the silos that too often isolate homelessness can drive meaningful changes, ensuring that the system works more effectively to prevent homelessness and support those in need.

### **Strategic priority: Ensuring all residents have access to suitable and accessible homes**

In its manifesto, the newly re-elected Mayor highlighted his ambition for a *"right to safe, secure, warm housing for everyone."* This is essential, and SYMCA and partners have a significant role to play. It is estimated that 5,000 new homes per annum are needed to meet the current housing demand in South Yorkshire, including 2,000 affordable homes. The [SYMCA Housing Framework](#) sets out how it will increase social housing stock, provide more specialist support housing, and work

to improve quality standards. The development of a pipeline through the newly formed [Strategic Place Partnership](#) with Homes England is a step in the right direction, but there is a need to further define the housing need of those at risk of and homeless in the region and create **a dedicated housing pipeline that responds to homeless households**. This means ensuring the right type of housing, with the right design, in the right place. There is a risk that homelessness housing needs, once again, are addressed in silos, leading to fragmented efforts and suboptimal outcomes.

Provision of new homes does not always have to involve new builds; acquisition of existing properties can also play a vital role. And whether this is intentionally recognised or not, the PRS serves also as a solution, despite being at the same time a key cause of homelessness. The ongoing [Let Zero](#) project is an example of efforts to improve conditions in the PRS. This 18-month pilot project will focus on 200 homes in South Yorkshire, providing landlords with a 'trusted path' for upgrades tailored to the specific needs of their tenants. Homewards Sheffield's Innovative Housing Project is focusing on exploring innovative ways to work with landlords, tenants and community organisations to support families to access the PRS and sustain tenancies. Work by Homewards is also underway to explore best practice in homeless prevention and tenancy sustainment in the PRS, involving a range of partners across the public, private and philanthropic sector. The newly formed SYMCA PRS Steering Group is also looking at improving conditions in the PRS. However, there is a need for a more strategic vision around the PRS, recognising its dual role as both a solution to and a cause of homelessness and establishing a foundation **for improved quality, security, and availability of PRS** housing for vulnerable households.

Supported housing plays a crucial role in both preventing and alleviating homelessness, providing essential day-to-day support for households with specific needs and those facing multiple disadvantages. The sector has grappled with short-term funding challenges, making stable accommodation a persistent issue. However, recent regulatory changes present a timely opportunity for local authorities in South Yorkshire to integrate their supported housing assessments with strategic planning, ensuring targeted and adequate provision. However, **increasing local supply of quality supported housing can only go so far without a strategic, partnership-led approach**. To achieve this, it is crucial that different partners of the system embrace the philosophy that housing is everyone's business, developing a shared understanding of each agency's respective responsibilities. Housing and Health roundtables organised in South Yorkshire in 2024 have provided valuable platforms to explore how relationships between health providers and the housing sector can be strengthened. Whilst health has a key role to play, it is also crucial for relationships with social care to evolve to ensure cohesive support for vulnerable populations. **By joining the dots between housing, health and social care sectors**, South Yorkshire can enhance its ability to provide holistic and effective support, ultimately improving outcomes for individuals facing homelessness and multiple disadvantages.

## Areas for action

The research identified the following areas for action for SYMCA and its partners.

<p><b>Prevention-focused policies and interventions</b> <i>Early support measures and targeted programme to prevent households from becoming homeless</i></p> <p><b>A new regional workstream: PRS access, prevention and health</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Develop a strategic vision for the PRS bringing together PRS access, prevention and health (compliance) workstream.</li> <li>— Consider a range of PRS tools and incentives as a region, drive a PRS campaign targeting landlords to maximise supply, and explore opportunities for setting up a social letting agency.</li> <li>— Ensure that the PRS access work takes a compliance approach.</li> </ul> <p><b>Alignment:</b> <i>Ongoing Homewards work around PRS access and prevention (Innovative Housing Project, work looking at reducing the number of empty homes in Sheffield, identification of best practices); SYMCA Housing and Health roundtable; SYMCA PRS Steering Group work around PRS conditions; Let Zero project.</i></p> <p><b>Who:</b> SYMCA, Local authorities Housing, Homewards, National Landlord Association, South Yorkshire Landlord Forum.</p>
<p><b>Regional whole-family programme</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Explore what a whole-family programme to prevent family breakdown, domestic abuse and family and youth homelessness could look like in the region. This should focus on upstream prevention activities such as schools programme, mediation, parenting support and the provision of intensive family support for those with higher needs. The approach should aim to reduce youth and family homelessness, prevent domestic abuse, and ultimately reduce the need to move families and costs of temporary accommodation.</li> </ul> <p><b>Alignment:</b> <i>Homewards Sheffield pilot projects including The Upstream Survey ( a universal homelessness prevention model in secondary schools), working with people with lived experience to raise awareness and share knowledge and skills in schools; exploring ways to support and scale existing upstream and targeted prevention activity for young people and families.</i></p> <p><b>Who:</b> SYMCA, Local authorities' Housing, Domestic Abuse, Children and Social Services; Homewards, VCS sector, PCC, Domestic abuse; social landlords.</p>
<p><b>Specialist support and provision</b> <i>Combining resources, providing specialist provision and encouraging innovation in service delivery</i></p> <p><b>SYMCA specialist provision pipeline</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Development of pipeline investment projects addressing the need for specialist accommodation and support services of groups which are currently failed by the current provision. This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Women with multiple disadvantages / complex needs, including those with children or who have had their children removed.</li> <li>○ Older prison leavers with health and care (and sometimes social) needs.</li> <li>○ Revolving door cohort – combining complex issues such as drug and alcohol addictions, homelessness and repeated low-level non-violent offending. Their health, care and offending related needs go hand in hand with trauma, persistent poverty, long-term unemployment and social exclusion.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

- Individuals with housing needs willing to work – those needing financial support to take on employment due to wage not being sufficient to cover the cost of independent or supported living.
  - Families at risk of breakdown
- Opportunity for local authorities to better strategic plan for their supported accommodation provision with the new regulation and the requirement for new needs assessment.

**Alignment:** *Target Housing GROW project (new pilot provision for women with complex needs who have had their children removed); Housing First programmes; Local authorities' requirement for new Supported Accommodation Needs Assessment.*

**Who:** SYMCA; local authorities' Housing and Adult social care; social landlords and supported accommodation providers (incl. SYHA and Target Housing), ICB, Probation.

### Regional Housing First

- Expansion of and improvements to the fidelity of Housing First provision in the city for those with complex needs, exploring national devolution opportunities and inter-agency working. Opportunity to develop more consistency, collaboration opportunities (joint-bidding, sharing of best practice/ resources/learnings) and need to embed health and wider partners (e.g., police, probation).

**Alignment:** *Existing Housing First programmes in Sheffield, Doncaster and Rotherham.*

**Who:** SYMCA; local authorities' Housing and Adult Social Care, SYHA, Target Housing, NHS ICB, Probation, PCC.

### Pro-active engagement at key transition points

*Establish robust frameworks that ensure no one slips through the cracks of support services*

#### Transition protocols and systems guidance

- Development of protocols and system guidance (e.g. prison release, hospital release) to ensure early identification of needs and continuity of engagement at key transition points in the system. This should involve the review of all key accommodation support pathways and the identification of reasonable adjustments to be made for different groups / profiles. See *section 3.1 for specific recommendations around the homeless prison leavers cohort.*
- Review of existing information sharing system and scoping of potential investment to ensure better continuity of care.
- Review efficacy of multi-agency resettlement support panels (and how these follow-up individual pre- and post- release)
- Explore the opportunity to embed more peer-navigators at key transition points / scale up existing initiatives. Look to develop commissioning framework.

**Alignment:** *NHS Reconnect, A&E Navigators..*

**Who:** Local authorities' Housing and Adult Social Care, Probation, PCC, local prisons, NHS ICB, VCS sector, social landlords and supported housing providers.

### Employment and skills support

*Develop employment and skills opportunities to raise equality of skills of vulnerable households, champion lived experiences and build a more resilient sector*

#### Work and skills development pathways

- Develop work and training opportunities for those experiencing multiple disadvantages and those transitioning out of homelessness. This should include different pathways, including a peer-support pathways linked to job placement and opportunities to create a pool of peer-support workers for the region.
- Ensure that work and training opportunities developed in the region are accessible to those at risk of homelessness or homeless.
- Support frontline workers: explore better training and career progression opportunities for frontline workers.

**Alignment:** *Changing Futures Sheffield peer-worker programme; Homewards Sheffield looking to map out skills gaps in the region and to facilitate new employment opportunities and pathways via partners; SYHA Good Work project.*

**Who:** SYMCA, Local authorities' Employment and Skills, Homewards Sheffield, SYHA, skills and employment providers, NHS ICB, VCS sector, Careers Hubs.

### Working together

*Achieving collective and sustainable outcomes*

#### Evidence-driven and collaborative partnerships and decision-making

- Identify KPIs and measures to align understanding of homelessness and key issues across the region. These should be used to track progress against collective objectives and cross-cutting projects.
- Explore how health can be better integrated in ongoing homelessness work across the region.
- Explore ways to better identify households at risk of homelessness in more 'hidden' situations (those in the PRS, sofa/surfing and staying with friends and family etc).
- Develop a lived experience pledge to ensure lived experiences are involved in the design and delivery of services across South Yorkshire.
- SYMCA to create capacity to steer and coordinate the delivery of regional homelessness workstreams.

**Alignment:** *NHS ICB Health Inclusion Strategy; Homewards ongoing work on data and analytics; Changing Futures.*



## 1. Introduction

### About the research

Homeless Link was commissioned by the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA) and key stakeholders who are members of the South Yorkshire Mayoral Homelessness Task Group to produce a piece of research which will provide an evidence base to inform future policy, practice, systems and resource allocation in activity to prevent homelessness and support people experiencing homelessness.

Members of the Task Group include: SYMCA, Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council, City of Doncaster Council, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, Sheffield City Council, Changing Futures, South Yorkshire Housing Partnership, Housing First Provider, Voluntary and Community Sector representative, Office of the Crime Commission, South Yorkshire Probation Service and Public Health representative. The research was undertaken from October to June 2024.

### Methodology

The research employed a mixed-methods approach, using both quantitative and qualitative research methods. To establish a comprehensive baseline understanding of the prevalence and key causes of homelessness in the region, a range of governmental and statutory homelessness data were compiled and analysed. Requests for data were sent to local authorities and organisations working with the homeless population across various systems. As a result, additional data pertaining to various aspects such as migration, ambulance call-outs, and probation, was obtained. This collaborative approach allowed for the gathering of a more comprehensive dataset and insights from multiple perspectives, enriching the understanding of the homelessness landscape in the region. However, clear gaps in the data still exist.

The initial quantitative baseline offered an overall picture of homelessness in the region, highlighting recent changes and trends. A review of this baseline prompted discussions on areas to focus on during the qualitative research phase. It was decided to concentrate on the primary or emerging causes of homelessness identified in homelessness applications.

- **Prison leavers:** Homelessness among prison leavers in South Yorkshire has increased in recent years, with stakeholders reporting persisting challenges in securing suitable accommodation and support for parts of this cohort. Qualitative research aimed to identify and articulate the specific challenges and gaps in provision for this cohort. Stakeholder consultations, including two focus groups, took place in March and April 2024 to gather insights from stakeholders working across the system. In addition, with support from peer researchers from Changing Futures, lived experience research was undertaken and more than 25 people with experience of the criminal justice system and homelessness were engaged.
- **Domestic abuse:** Domestic abuse remains a significant driver of homelessness in South Yorkshire. Qualitative research sought to understand existing gaps in provision and support, and to explore the role that SYMCA could play in supporting the domestic abuse prevention and relief agenda. Stakeholder consultations took place in April 2024.

## 2. The causes and prevalence of homelessness in SYMCA

To provide a comprehensive understanding of the prevalence and key causes of homelessness in South Yorkshire, we have conducted quantitative data analysis on a range of data including statutory homelessness statistics, ONS and government statistics as well as data received from Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield councils. The data was analysed, questioned and tested with stakeholders consulted as part of the research. The analysis was complemented by a literature review to ensure accurate interpretation, address any gaps, and add qualitative insights and nuances.

### 2.1 What are the levels of homelessness in South Yorkshire?

#### Headline findings

Overall, the indicators for homelessness in South Yorkshire are concerning, highlighting a significant rise in homelessness and increasing difficulties in effectively addressing it.

- **Rising demand for housing support, including prevention:** In the last three years, South Yorkshire local authorities have observed a significant rise in homelessness presentations and applications under the Homeless Reduction Act, signalling an increasing need for housing support services across the region. In 2022/23, 8,067 homelessness applications were processed by local authorities. Specifically, there has been a noticeable surge in individuals at risk of homelessness seeking assistance.
- **However, the effectiveness of the support in preventing and relieving homelessness has decreased:** South Yorkshire local authorities have had more challenges in preventing homelessness (in 2022/23, 52% of those owed a prevention duty became homeless) and in securing accommodation for those homeless (32% of those owed a relief duty secured accommodation) in recent years. In 2022/23, 1,867 households were owed the main housing duty whilst 632 were homeless at the end of the relief duty.
- **More households in temporary accommodation:** This rise combined with the lack of suitable accommodation options for those owed a duty has led to an increasing number of households in temporary accommodation and in the social housing register. In December 2023, there were 1,018 households in temporary accommodation across South Yorkshire, including 336 with children. This costed £4,725m to SY local authorities in 2023-24.
- There were also 937 homeless households on the social housing registers.
- **An increasing number of rough sleepers:** The number of people sleeping rough in South Yorkshire has also increased by 35% since 2020 with 198 people seen rough sleeping in December 2023. In 2023, Sheffield's rough sleeping rate per 1,000 people is over three times the national average. The prevalence of long-term and returning rough sleepers in Sheffield, Doncaster and Barnsley suggest potential gaps in support services, whilst the prevalence of new rough sleepers in Rotherham suggest challenges in addressing homelessness in the first place.
- **Hidden homeless:** There are also other groups that are not accessing statutory services nor visible. This includes those living in overcrowded or uninhabitable conditions (we know that housing conditions is an issue in South Yorkshire); sofa-surfers or persons or families living with friends or family because they cannot afford their own

home (we also know that this concerns an increasingly high number of young people and that many people presenting to services as homeless or at risk of homelessness is in this situation). This also includes those that typically remain less visible and rely more on informal support such as women, ethnic minority groups and those with intersectional characteristics.

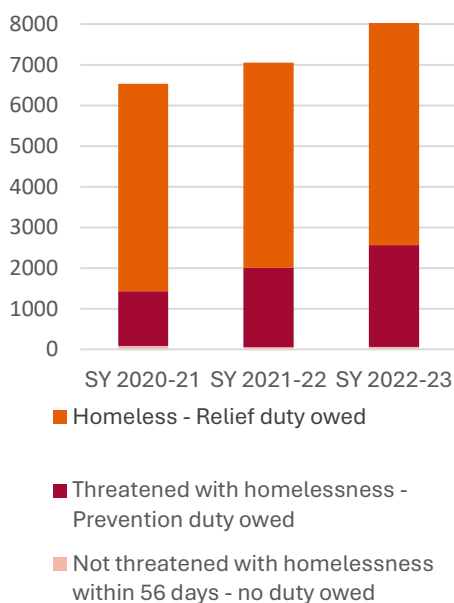
As homelessness manifests in various forms, it can be challenging to account for all instances. To provide a comprehensive picture, this section includes several categories of homelessness and describes the trends over the last few years. These categories are:

- Households where we owe a statutory duty to assist to Prevent and Relieve homelessness
- Households where we have accepted a Main Duty
- Households in temporary accommodation
- Households included on the General Register for social housing and who are in the highest preference groups.
- Rough sleeping
- Hidden homelessness

## 2.1 Homelessness assessment and duty under the Homelessness Reduction Act

### **Assessment and duty owed**

#### **Initial assessment of homeless circumstances and needs in South Yorkshire (HRA)**



The adjoining graph and table below show that in 2022/2023, South Yorkshire local authorities assessed around 15% (although this varies from 13 to 25% across the four local authorities) more households for their homelessness circumstances compared to the previous year.

Most of these households were determined to be owed a duty, leading to an increase in the number of households receiving support, particularly under the prevention duty. This trend suggests that more individuals are seeking assistance when threatened with homelessness, which could imply either a rise in those at risk or improved accessibility and awareness of the services. Discussions with local authorities, along with the increase in presentations to services for advice, suggest a rise in those at risk of homelessness. This includes new profiles of households seeking support who had not previously engaged with services. In 2023/24, 1,763 households presented to the Barnsley council for advice; 2,985 in Doncaster and 1,787 in Rotherham.

↑ **Source: Statutory homelessness statistics, 2020–2023**

The escalating demand is also reflected in the figures for accepted Main Housing Duty (1,867 in 2022/23), which are increasing across all local authorities. Doncaster shows a particularly notable rise of 51%. This is also accompanied by

an increase in the number of individuals found homeless at the end of the prevention and relief duties due to lack of priority need or being intentionally homeless. Across South Yorkshire, this concerned 524 individuals in 2021/22 and 632 individuals in 2022/23.

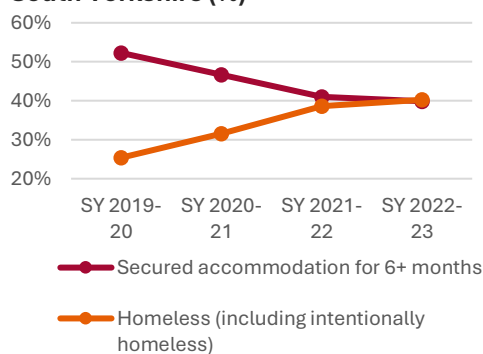
	<b>Barnsley</b>	<b>Doncaster</b>	<b>Rotherham</b>	<b>Sheffield</b>
Homelessness applications	839 (+19% since 21-22)	2,090 (+25% since 21-22)	1,240 (+17% since 21-22)	3,898 (+13% since 21-22)
Prevention duty owed	329 (+22% since 21-22)	718 (+45% since 21-22)	428 (+25% since 21-22)	1,033 (+25% since 21-22)
Relief duty owed	506 (+16% since 21-22)	1,372 (+20% since 21-22)	808 (+12% since 21-22)	2,814 (+8% since 21-22)
Main Housing Duty accepted	49 (+15% since 21-22)	581 (+51% since 21-22)	211 (+30% since 21-22)	1,026 (+11% since 21-22)
Homeless + no priority need / intentionally homeless	52 (+11% since 21-22)	318 (+34% since 21-22)	28 (+12% of since 21-22)	234 (+6% since 21-22)

↑ **Homelessness applications: key figures**

**Source: Statutory homelessness statistics (2022/23) and local authority data**

## Prevention and relief duty outcomes

**Evolution of positive and negative prevention duty outcomes in South Yorkshire (%)**

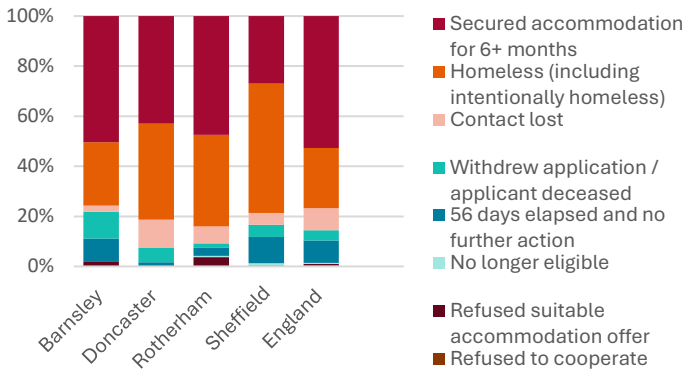


↑ **Source: Homelessness statistics Government data 2019/20–2022/23**

### Prevention duty

When a household becomes threatened with homelessness within 56 days and a Prevention Duty is owed under the Homelessness Reduction Act, local authorities in South Yorkshire face several challenges. In 2019/2020, local councils assisted 53% of households owed a prevention duty by securing accommodation (either existing or alternative) and preventing their homelessness. This number decreased to 40% in 2022/23. Additionally, there has been an increase in prevention duties ending with homelessness. In 2019/20, 25% of prevention duties ended in homelessness, whereas in 2022/23, this figure rose to 41%. During this period, the number of households owed a prevention duty also increased.

**Outcome end of Prevention duties**



↑ **Source: Homelessness statistics Government data 2022/23**

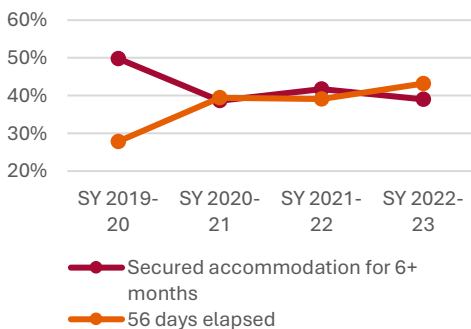
The success of the councils in preventing homelessness vary across local authorities. Sheffield is the one managing the least with only 27% of households owed a prevention duty securing accommodation at the end of the duty and 52% becoming homeless.

Compared to the national prevention outcomes for accommodation secured at end of prevention duty, South Yorkshire has lower positive prevention duty outcomes.

To prevent homelessness, local councils primarily engage in activities such as securing accommodation via housing options (32%), securing accommodation by the applicant with or without financial assistance (22%), providing supported housing (10%), and conducting negotiations, mediation, or advocacy work to prevent eviction or repossession (8.50%). The latter activity has decreased in recent years due to local authorities' lack of capacity and resources for effective prevention work. Consequently, the rate of households assisted to stay in their existing accommodation is lower compared to the national and regional picture. There is a higher prevalence of households moved to alternative accommodation at the end of the duty rather than staying in existing accommodation, with 75% moving and 25% staying. This is higher than the national and regional picture (66% moving and 33% staying). Improving efforts to prevent households from having to move from their existing homes seems however crucial, especially given the difficulty in accessing affordable alternative accommodation.

To prevent homelessness, local councils

**Evolution of positive and negative relief duty outcomes in South Yorkshire (%)**



↑ **Source: Homelessness statistics Government data 2019/20-2022/23**

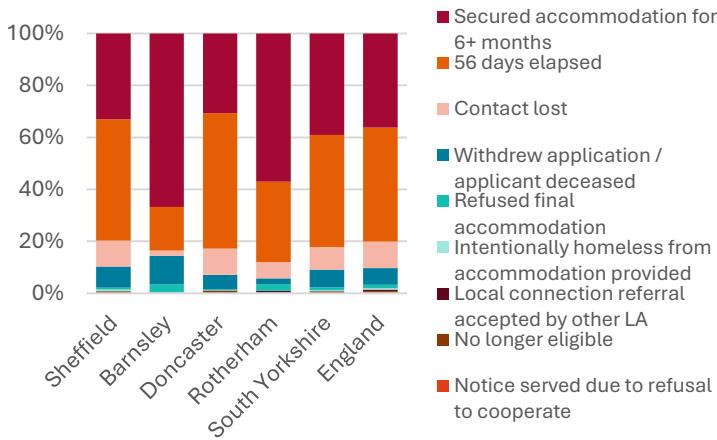
**Relief duty**

The relief duty, established under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, requires local authorities to help individuals and families who are already homeless to secure suitable accommodation. This duty lasts for 56 days, during which the local authority must take reasonable steps to assist the household in finding a place to live.

In 2022/23, 39% of households secured accommodation for six months or more at the end of the relief duty in South Yorkshire. This figure decreased since 2019/20 with more than 50% of households securing accommodation at the end of the relief duty then. Concurrently, the proportion of relief duties ending without securing accommodation has increased, rising from 28% in 2019/2020 to 43% in 2022/23. This

suggests a widening gap between the demand for housing and the availability or accessibility of suitable options.

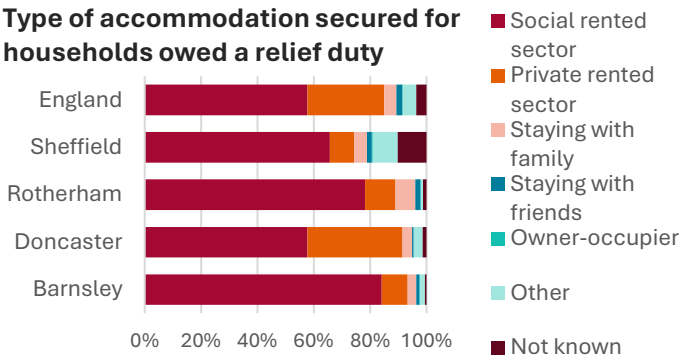
**Outcomes end of Relief duties**



↑ **Source: Homelessness statistics Government data 2022/23**

However, outcomes vary greatly across local authorities. In Sheffield and Doncaster, only 32% of households owed a relief duty secured accommodation at the end of the relief duty in 2022/23. Barnsley performed better, with 66.8% securing accommodation, and Rotherham saw 57% securing accommodation.

**Type of accommodation secured for households owed a relief duty**



↑ **Source: Homelessness statistics Government data 2022/23**

For households where accommodation was secured at the end of the relief duty, a very high proportion of households in South Yorkshire are being assisted to secure social rented accommodation, higher than the national level. This indicates a significant reliance on social housing to meet immediate housing needs in the region and the crucial role of the sector in addressing homelessness. Outside of Doncaster, the private rented sector (PRS) is used relatively little to relieve homelessness. This suggests potential barriers or challenges within the PRS, such as limited availability of affordable and suitable PRS properties, reluctance of landlords to participate in housing schemes, or difficulties in accessing and maintaining tenancies within the private sector.

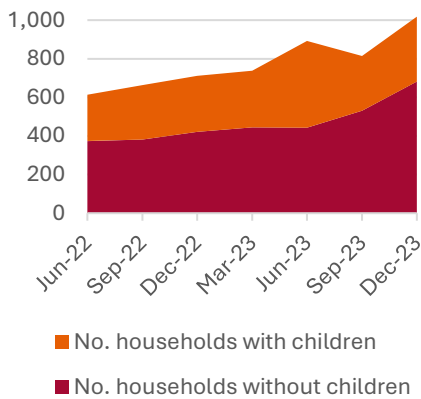
**2.1.2 Temporary accommodation**

The number of households in temporary accommodation (TA) over the last year has almost continually increased quarter after quarter, passing from 789 households across South Yorkshire in December 2022 to 1,0191 in December, an overall increase of 40%. Increases were particularly significant in Sheffield (+51% in a year), Doncaster (+29% in a year) and Rotherham (+24%). The number of households in TA has however reduced in Barnsley over the last year.



The last year has also seen more families with children in TA (+15% across South Yorkshire).

**Number of households in TA in South Yorkshire (June 22 - Dec 23)**



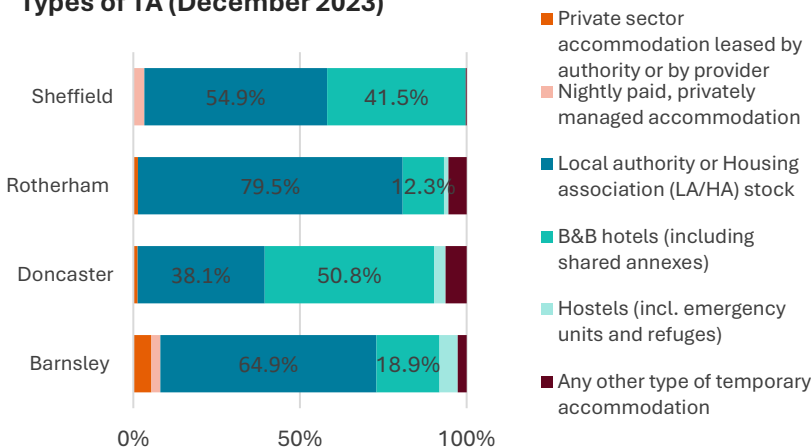
**Number of households in TA in South Yorkshire (Dec 22-Dec 23)**

LA	Dec-22			Dec-23		
	Total no. household in TA	Incl. with children	Per 1000	Total no. household in TA	Incl. with children	Per 1000
Barnsley	48	28	0.43	37	17	0.33
Doncaster	183	100	1.36	236	88	1.75
Rotherham	117	15	0.35	146	36	0.64
Sheffield	441	148	1.8	672	195	2.7
<b>TOTAL SYMCA</b>	<b>789</b>	<b>291</b>		<b>1,091</b>	<b>336</b>	
Yorkshire & the H.	2,400	1070	1.2	3080	1250	1.3
England	100510	61980	4.2	112600	71280	4.7

↑ **Households in temporary accommodation in SYMCA (June 22-Dec 23)**  
**Source: Government data**

Compared to national and regional levels, level of households in temporary accommodation are relatively low. However, the rate of increase in households in TA in South Yorkshire (43%) is significantly higher than the overall regional increase in Yorkshire & the Humber (28%) and in England (12%).

**Types of TA (December 2023)**



↑ **Temporary accommodation data, Dec 2023**  
**Source: Government data**

Most of the TA stock operated by local councils in South Yorkshire is managed either through local authority or housing association (LA/HA) stock (62%).

For urgent housing needs, households may be placed in 'nightly charge' accommodations, such as hotels or B&Bs. As of December 2023, this category represented 30% of the TA stock in use across South Yorkshire. This indicates a significant reliance on such provisions to fulfil immediate housing duties, despite the high costs that this incurred to local authorities.

Overall, there is minimal dependence on private sector leased properties for TA.

Shorter stays in temporary accommodation mean households are less likely to experience the negative impacts associated with prolonged insecurities, and they reduce costs for local authorities. The average length of stay for households in TA varies greatly across the South Yorkshire local authorities. In late 2023, the average stay was 57 days in Barnsley and 199 days in Doncaster,

highlighting substantial differences and demonstrating a lack of move-on options in Doncaster. Evidence also suggest that larger families typically stay in TA longer reflecting the lack of move-on accommodation options for families. In addition to the challenges related to the numbers and length of stays, local authorities have also reported an increasing number of individuals placed in TA with multiple and high support needs, requiring significant assistance to manage their accommodation independently. This presents several challenges concerning the type of support needed and the suitability of the available accommodation.

### Cost of TA

In 2022/23, TA costed a combined £4,725m to local authorities in South Yorkshire.

TA spend	2020/21	2021/2022	2022/2023
Barnsley	£463,751	£451,524	£518,167
Doncaster	£796,803.89	£934,891.00	£674,229.59
Rotherham	£846,734	£1,712,097	£1,709,230
Sheffield	£884,862	£1,007,026	£1,824,146

↑ **Cost of temporary accommodation – net spend(2020/21–2022/23)**

**Source:** Local authority data

#### The impact of TA on households

A range of different research carried out over the last decade shows that stays in interim or temporary accommodation have detrimental effects on households, particularly on children. Being uncertain of the future of their housing situation and living in a place that can't really be called a home, have negative effects on mental and physical health, education, and ultimate life chances<sup>1</sup>.

### 2.1.3 Households included on the register for social housing

The number of households on local authorities' registers for social housing provides an indication of the demand for more secure, suitable, and affordable accommodation. However, this figure likely only offers a partial view of the true demand, as each authority manages its own allocation scheme and register rules, which may include or exclude different groups. Additionally, variations in the profiles and levels of social housing stock across different areas can affect the observed demand.

As of March 2023, 34,008 households were registered on the councils' registers for social housing in South Yorkshire, representing 2.5% of the total population. Of these households, 5,618 fall under the specified reasonable preference categories: 17% due to homelessness, 17% due to living in overcrowded or insanitary conditions, and 44% due to medical or welfare grounds.

<sup>1</sup> Local Government Association (2017) *The Impact of Homelessness on health*. Available online:

[https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/22.7%20HEALTH%20AND%20HOMELESSNESS\\_v08\\_WEB\\_0.PDF](https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/22.7%20HEALTH%20AND%20HOMELESSNESS_v08_WEB_0.PDF)

Shelter (2023) Still Living in Limbo: Why the use of temporary accommodation must end. Available online:

[https://downloads.ctfassets.net/6sxvmndn0s/2tH1VaV0nD4E1yfkNVgZpd/18a40c539d3d6b8771c55c318f4c0a74/Still\\_Living\\_in\\_Limbo.pdf](https://downloads.ctfassets.net/6sxvmndn0s/2tH1VaV0nD4E1yfkNVgZpd/18a40c539d3d6b8771c55c318f4c0a74/Still_Living_in_Limbo.pdf)

NSPCC (2016) The impact of homelessness on babies and their families. Available online: [https://qni.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/homelessness\\_babies\\_families.pdf](https://qni.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/homelessness_babies_families.pdf)



Comparing with the preceding year, the total number of homeless households on the housing waiting list have significantly increased (+57%).

	Barnsley		Doncaster		Rotherham		Sheffield		Total SY	
	21-22	22-23	21-22	22-23	21-22	22-23	21-22	22-23	21-22	22-23
<b>Number of households on the housing waiting list</b>	5,855	6,725	8,917	7,049	6,606	6,572	10,909	13,662	38,859	34,008
<b>Incl. in a reasonable preference category</b>	1,472	1,558	1,954	2,037	1,482	1,338	641	685	5,549	5,618
<b>Homeless</b>	80	155	181	217	97	365	247	200	598	937
<b>Occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing</b>	389	418	505	498	256	30	9	10	1,159	956
<b>Need to move on medical or welfare ground</b>	340	373	1,008	1,061	921	867	147	140	2,416	2,441

↑ **Households on the local social housing registers**

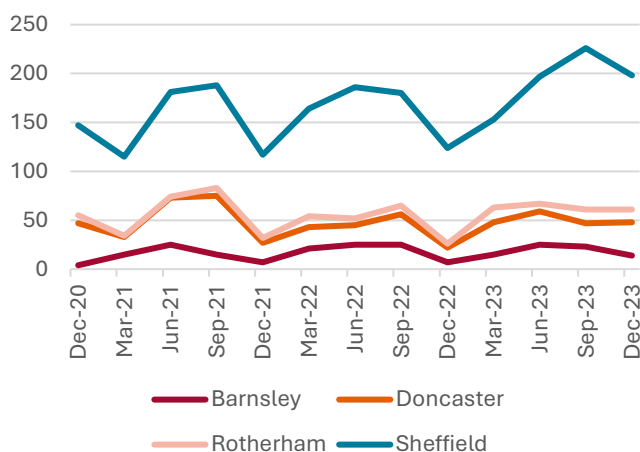
**Source:** Local authority housing statistics, Government data 2021/22–2022/23

### 2.1.4 Rough sleeping

The number of people sleeping rough across South Yorkshire has increased since 2020 (+35% from December 2020 to December 2023), with notable fluctuations across local authorities. Sheffield consistently shows the highest numbers of rough sleepers, with a clear upward trend over the observed period.

Comparing to regional and national figures, the rates of rough sleeping per 100,000 people across South Yorkshire vary significantly, with Sheffield having the highest rate at 24.2, more than three times the national rate of 6.8, followed by Doncaster at 10.9. Barnsley (5.7) and Rotherham (4.8) have lower rates, closer to the regional average of 4.9 and below the national average.

**Number of people seen sleeping rough over the month (Dec20-Dec23)**



**Snapshot rate of rough sleeping for 100,000 inhabitants (Dec 23)**

	Rate per 1,000
<b>Barnsley</b>	5.7
<b>Doncaster</b>	10.9
<b>Rotherham</b>	4.8
<b>Sheffield</b>	24.2
<b>Yorkshire and the H</b>	4.9
<b>England</b>	6.8

↑ **Source:** Rough sleeping statistics, Government data, Dec 2020 – Dec 2023

### Rough sleeping figures for South Yorkshire (December 2023)

	Total number seen over month	New people seen sleeping rough over the month	People seen sleeping rough who left prison or justice accom.	People seen sleeping rough who left Asylum services	Long term rough sleeping	People seen sleeping rough who are returning to rough sleeping
<b>Barnsley</b>	14	6	2	0	1	7
<b>Doncaster</b>	34	5	6		8	21
<b>Rotherham</b>	13	9	1	5	3	0
<b>Sheffield</b>	137	13	25	3	65	6

↑ **Source: Ending rough sleeping framework, DLHUC  
Government data, Dec 2023**

- In December 2023, over half of the rough sleepers seen by the outreach team in Rotherham were new rough sleepers, a notably high rate. Similarly, Barnsley had 40% of its rough sleepers as new, both exceeding the national and regional rates of new rough sleepers for this period<sup>2</sup>.
- Across South Yorkshire, 34 people seen sleeping rough in December 2023 had left prison or justice accommodation, and 8 had left asylum services within the last 80 days.
- Long-term rough sleeping is a significant issue, particularly in Sheffield, with around 45% of rough sleepers seen in December 2023 identified as 'long-term'.<sup>3</sup> This is compared to the national rate of 34%.
- High rates of individuals returning to rough sleeping are observed, particularly in Doncaster (61%) and Barnsley (50%)<sup>4</sup>. These rates far exceed the national (13%) and regional (12%) averages, indicating potential gaps in ongoing support services.

### 2.1.5 Hidden Homelessness

The number of households included in the various groups of homelessness accounted for above is well-documented and are therefore included in one of the data sources used. However, it is acknowledged that there are groups of people who are homeless but not routinely captured in the data. This group is often referred to as the 'hidden homeless.'

Those included in the 'hidden homeless' group can include those living in overcrowded, insecure or uninhabitable conditions; people living in squats; sofa-surfers; or persons or families living with friends or family because they cannot afford their own home. They are described as 'hidden homeless' because they do not appear in any data or statistics. The Government's own statistical

<sup>2</sup> A person is considered new if they have not been seen sleeping rough in the local authority in the 5 calendar years preceding the date they were seen sleeping rough during the reporting period (DHLUC Rough sleeping framework).

<sup>3</sup> Long term rough sleeping is defined as the number of people seen recently (within the reporting month) who have been seen sleeping rough in 3 or more months out of the last 12 months (DHLUC Rough sleeping framework).

<sup>4</sup> A person is considered a 'returner' if they are seen sleeping rough again after no contact for 2 or more quarters (180 days), whichever is shorter, measured from the last date the person was seen (DHLUC Rough sleeping framework).

releases on homelessness note 'hidden homelessness' as a phenomenon, but also states they cannot quantify it in numbers.

From the English Housing Survey, we know that there were 583,000 households that had someone staying with them who would have otherwise been homeless from 2019 to 2021<sup>5</sup>. The Office for National Statistics also published data on young adults living with their parents across the country<sup>6</sup> which gives further insight into the issue of sofa-surfing. It shows that between 2013 and 2023, the percentage of 20–34-year-olds living with their parents increased from 23% to 28% nationally. It is, of course, difficult to know if any or some of these households were in touch with the councils or other homelessness services. Looking at the accommodation information given at time of application for those we owe a duty towards, it is possible to get a sense of the number of households that may have been sofa-surfing prior to approaching the councils in South Yorkshire. The data shows that 25% of those owed a prevention duty and 28% of those owed a relief duty in 2022/23 were previously living with friends or family and therefore may have been sofa-surfing and so 'hidden homeless' before they approached the local authorities for assistance. In addition, the number of people at risk of or being homeless with the primary reason being 'leaving friends and family' has increased by 38% between 2020/21 and 2022/23.

## Women

Research into 'hidden' homelessness suggest that women are more likely than men to experience this type of homelessness specifically. Official statistics show that women represented about 13% of rough sleepers in England in 2021, but this likely underestimates the true scale. Research shows that women often use strategies to remain invisible, such as hiding while sleeping or staying in 24-hour services. Before approaching local authorities, women tend to exhaust informal housing options, like staying with friends or family, which keeps them hidden longer<sup>7</sup>. Other research<sup>8</sup> shows that more women than men tend to deal with their situation informally – especially when they have had bad experiences from initial presentation to service – and may resort to extreme measures like walking around all night, sleeping on buses, or in hospitals to keep out of sight. Additionally, women are more likely to engage in risky behaviours to secure accommodation, including exchanging sex for a place to stay<sup>9</sup>.

## Young people

Young people aged 16 to 25 are particularly vulnerable to "hidden" homelessness, often relying on informal support networks without recognising themselves as homeless. Typically, young people experience homelessness as a journey into and out of different forms of homelessness characterised by moving between a range of informal and precarious forms of accommodation

<sup>5</sup> Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 29 March 2023, ONS website, Article, "Hidden" homelessness in the UK: evidence review.

<sup>6</sup><https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/families/datasets/youngadultslivingwiththeirparents>

<sup>7</sup> REEVE, Kesia (2018) Women and homelessness: putting gender back on the agenda. *People, Place and Policy Online*, 11 (3), 165-174

<sup>8</sup> BRETHERTON J., PLEACE N., (2021) Women's Homelessness in Camden. Available online: <https://www.shp.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=5fee2c27-c387-4a68-b574-8d00a6ce7e76>

Solace Women's Aid (2020) The Hidden Housing Crisis. Available online: [womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/The-Domestic-Abuse-Report-2020-The-Hidden-Housing-Crisis.pdf](https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/The-Domestic-Abuse-Report-2020-The-Hidden-Housing-Crisis.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Reeve, K. (2011) The hidden truth about homelessness: Experiences of single homelessness in England. London: Crisis

including sofa surfing, squatting, staying in overcrowded and unsuitable accommodation, as well as rough sleeping<sup>10</sup>. The former of these is often described as hidden homeless as they are not visible to homelessness services and support. But the damaging and negative experiences in these forms of accommodation should not be underestimated. The evidence across youth homelessness suggests that young people may experience multiple forms of 'hidden' homelessness before they reach homelessness services.

### **Ethnic minority groups**

Evidence suggests that ethnic minority individuals are at a higher risk of experiencing 'hidden' homelessness. A literature review on the housing needs and experiences of ethnic minority groups in Scotland published in 2021<sup>11</sup> reveals these groups are more likely to deal with housing difficulties informally and to stay with friends and relatives. They were also less likely to perceive themselves as homeless and therefore less likely to access homelessness services, making homelessness in these communities less visible. Ethnic minority households are also more likely to live in overcrowded conditions, based on estimates from the English Housing Survey.

### **Intersectionality**

For people of colour, with disability, or from lower socioeconomic statuses the experience of homelessness often means enduring overlapping forms of discrimination and bias which contribute to the hidden homelessness. These factors can contribute to their homelessness being even more 'hidden', as they may encounter additional barriers to accessing assistance. Discrimination and bias can intersect with experiences of homelessness, exacerbating vulnerabilities and making it more difficult for these individuals to seek help. Therefore, understanding and addressing the intersecting factors that contribute to hidden homelessness is essential for developing effective support systems that meet the diverse needs of all individuals experiencing housing instability.

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<sup>10</sup> Boyle, F. (2021) *Experiences of Youth Homelessness*. Available online: <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/getattachment/b587df37-64cb-4094-8260-cf1e57b69906/Experiences-of-Youth-Homelessness.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Scottish Government (2021). Housing needs of minority ethnic group. Available online: [Housing needs of minority ethnic groups: Evidence review \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/housing-needs-of-minority-ethnic-groups-evidence-review)

## 2.2 Who Is homeless and becoming homeless in South Yorkshire?

### Headline findings

The review of the profile of those accessing statutory homelessness services highlights disproportionate impacts on certain groups, along with a rising trend of support needs among those seeking assistance, and an emerging need for prevention services among families and employed individuals. This implies a growing demand for specialised and targeted support and resources to address multifaceted challenges and prevent homelessness.

- **An increase of family with children seeking homelessness prevention support:** Over the past three years, single males have consistently formed the largest group owed both prevention and relief duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act. However, there has been a notable doubling in the proportion of couples with children owed prevention duties during this period.
- **A rise of female rough sleepers:** There has been a notable increase in the number of females found rough sleeping—a 30% rise since 2020. Yet, figures are likely underestimating the extent of female homelessness.
- **Black/African/Caribbean/Black British individuals are disproportionately affected by homelessness in South Yorkshire:** Moreover, evidence suggests a higher risk of ‘hidden’ homelessness among ethnic minority individuals, potentially leading to underrepresented.
- **A relatively young homeless population:** 25–34-year-olds constitute the largest proportion of households owed a duty towards, with Sheffield showing an overrepresentation of younger age groups compared to the regional and national averages.
- **More people at risk of homeless whilst in work:** The increasing presence of households facing threat of or homelessness in South Yorkshire, despite being employed indicates increasing in-work poverty and housing affordability issues.
- **Sharp rise in households with support needs:** South Yorkshire experiences a significant increase in households with identified support needs, surpassing the national average by 20%.

This section explores who is affected by homelessness and how patterns have changed in the past and may change in the future. Unfortunately, available data is limited on certain protected characteristics, such as sexual orientation, to provide detail and analysis. The data is also limited to those having accessed statutory homelessness services and does not allow us to look into outcomes based on profile and characteristics.

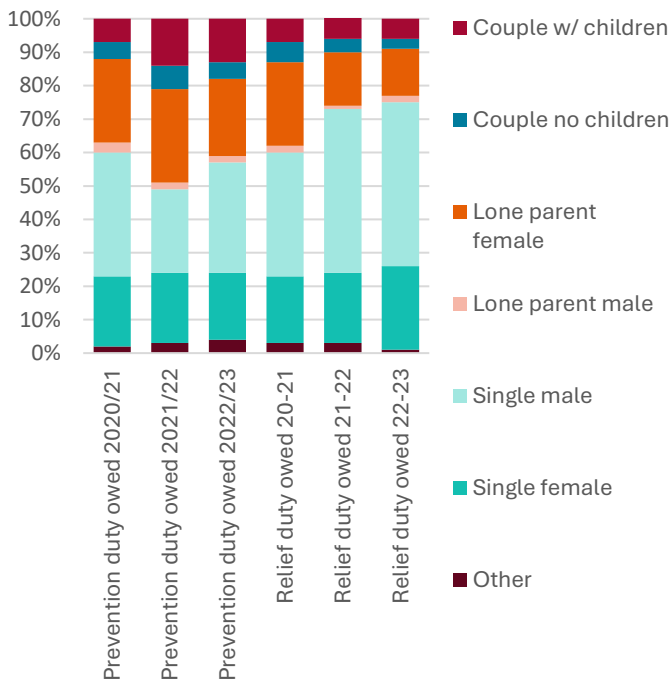
### 2.2.1 Household type and gender

Prevention and Relief Duties are blind to priority need and whether a person is intentionally homeless. Councils are therefore obliged to prevent and relieve homelessness to all presenting for support.

Over the past three years, single males consistently form the largest group owed both prevention and relief duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act (33% and 49% respectively in 22-23). Single females also represent a significant portion 23% and 14% respectively in 22-23). Lone female

parents represent around 23 to 25% of the households owed a prevention duty, a trend that has been consistent over the past few years. Typically, female households are more likely to present to services before they lose their accommodation, however they are also more likely to deal with their situation informally as well as engage with risky behaviours to secure accommodation (see section 2.1.5 Hidden Homelessness).

Household type by duty owed (HRA)



The proportion of couples with children owed prevention duties increased significantly from 7% in 2020/21 to 14% in 2021/22 and 2022/23. This indicates that more families with children are seeking support to prevent homelessness.

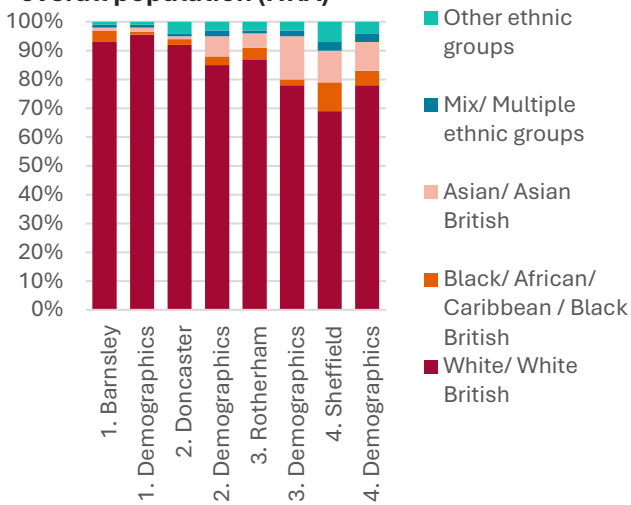
← **Source: Homelessness statistics Government data, 2020/21-2022/23**

The gender breakdown of those rough sleeping in the city has evolved over the last few years. While males are still more likely to be found rough sleeping than females, with 70% of rough sleepers being male and 30% female in 2023, there has been a significant increase in the number of females found rough sleeping—a 30% rise since 2020. Notably, the representation of females in the rough sleeping population is higher than the national level, where females constitute only 17%.

### 2.2.2 Ethnicity

Whilst White British makes up the largest proportion of households owed a duty towards in South Yorkshire (82%), this is a slightly lower share compared to their population proportion (87.5%). Overall, Black/African/Caribbean/Black British individuals are proportionally more affected by homelessness than any other ethnic groups relative to their overall population share in South Yorkshire. In contrast, Asian and Asian British persons are under-represented among applicants compared to their overall population.

**Ethnicity of main applicant in households owed a duty compared to overall population (HRA)**



As discussed earlier in section 2.1.5, evidence suggests that ethnic minority individuals are at a higher risk of experiencing "hidden" homelessness. This implies that the official statistics may underreport the true extent of homelessness among these groups. Hidden homelessness, which includes situations such as couch-surfing, staying in overcrowded accommodations, or temporary shelters, often goes unrecorded in formal counts.

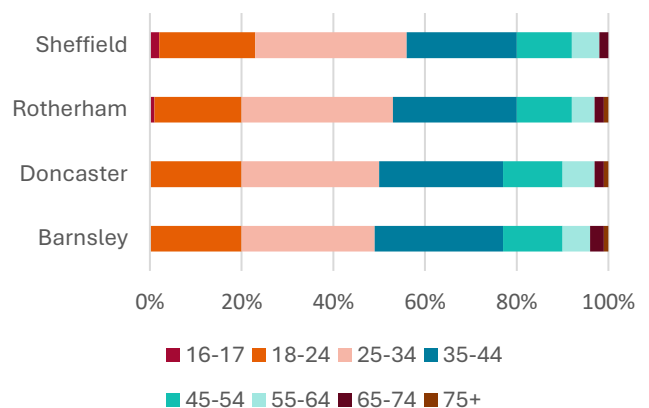
← **Source: Homelessness statistics**  
**Government data, 2022/23**

**2.2.3 Age**

In 2022/23, 25–34-year-olds made up the largest proportion of households owed a duty towards, at 32%, closely followed by the 35-44 age group at 26%. The age distribution of the main applicants owed a duty in South Yorkshire in 2022/23 was broadly in line with the picture across England, with a slightly higher proportion of the 45-54 age group.

In Sheffield, there is also a higher proportion of young households owed a duty, with an over-representation of the 16-17 and 18-24 age groups compared to the regional and national picture.

**Age breakdown where duty owed (HRA)**



↑ **Source: Homelessness statistics**  
**Government data, 2020/21-2022/23**

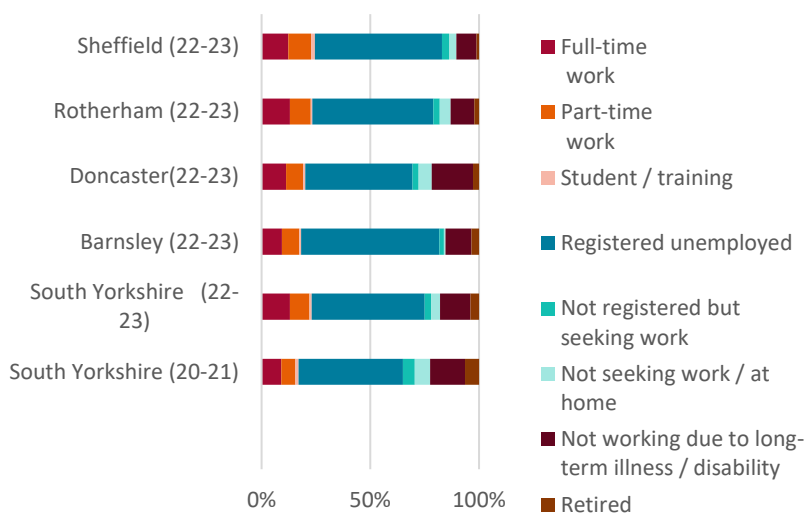
**2.2.4 Economic status**

Households where the main applicant was registered unemployed is the largest group of those owed a prevention or relief duty towards, representing 53% in 2022-23 across the four South Yorkshire local authorities.

Households where the main applicant is not working due to long-term illness or disability represent 14% of all households owed a duty.



### Economic status of households owed a prevention or relief duty (HRA)



↑ **Source: Homelessness statistics**  
**Government data, 2020/21-2022/23**

Households where the main applicant is in employment represent 22% (13% full-time and 9% part-time) of those owed a duty. In 2020/21, households where the main applicant was in employment represented 15.5% of all households owed a duty.

Compared to the national average, the proportion of households in work is also higher. The relatively high and growing number of households in South Yorkshire that are homeless or at risk of homelessness despite being employed highlights that, for some, housing in the city remains unaffordable. This suggests that

employment alone may not be enough to prevent homelessness. Additionally, there has been an increase in residents facing in-work poverty, as reflected by the rising number of in-work Universal Credit claimants.<sup>12</sup>

### 2.2.5 Support needs

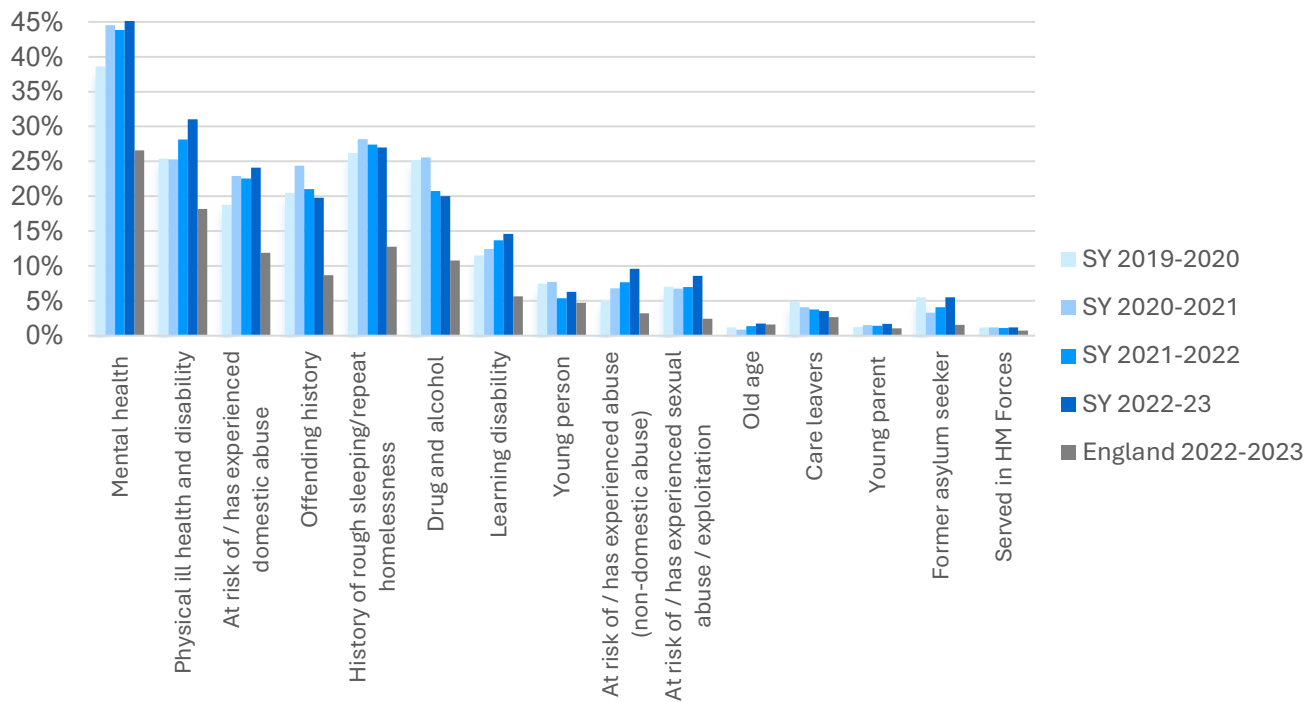
In 2022/23, 46% of households owed a prevention or relief duty in South Yorkshire had one or more identified support needs. This figure is significantly higher than the national average of 26% and represents a 40% increase from the 2020/21 period.

The most common support need registered for households in South Yorkshire in 2022/23 was mental health. There has also been an increase in households identified with support needs in relation to physical ill health and disability, at risk/experienced domestic abuse and other non-domestic abuse. However, many households have multiple support needs, with around half experiencing two or more issues. This aligns with feedback from local authorities, who report a rise in applicants with complex needs, including individuals with dual diagnosis (substance or alcohol abuse combined with mental health issues) and those facing multiple and interwoven challenges.

<sup>12</sup> Sheffield Hallam University, Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (2023). Inclusion Plan Evidence Base for SYMCA. [https://www.southyorkshire-ca.gov.uk/getmedia/7ff49ddc-4b63-4dac-8c71-4bcb09bc4f62/Inclusion-plan-evidence-base-report\\_final\\_20-09-23.pdf](https://www.southyorkshire-ca.gov.uk/getmedia/7ff49ddc-4b63-4dac-8c71-4bcb09bc4f62/Inclusion-plan-evidence-base-report_final_20-09-23.pdf)



### Support needs of households owed a prevention or relief duty (HRA)



Looking at the priority need categories for households owed a homelessness main duty in 2022/23, we also see that the proportion of households in priority need due to physical or mental health/disability has increased in recent years, but the largest proportion of households owed a main duty continues to be those with dependent children (which is a reason for priority need).

#### Zoom-ins: South Yorkshire Housing First Programmes

Housing First is an approach to addressing homelessness by providing immediate, permanent housing coupled with personalised support services. This model targets individuals facing multiple disadvantages and complex needs, prioritising stable housing and offering tailored, open-ended, wraparound support to promote choice and control for the residents. There are three Housing First programmes in South Yorkshire:

- Housing First Sheffield (Sheffield CC)
- Housing First Rotherham (Rotherham MBC, SYHA and Target Housing)
- Housing First Doncaster (Doncaster MBC, SYHA)

Altogether, the Housing First programmes have supported approximately 150 people, with 45% of these individuals being women from 2018 to 2022. The outcomes have been largely positive, demonstrating significant improvements in several key areas:

- Tenancy sustainment with an average of 82% success rate in maintaining tenancy across the programme.
- Improvements in clients' health and wellbeing, alongside a reduction in unplanned use of accident and emergency services (-20%) and decreased use of alcohol and substances (-6%).

The programmes are, however, facing several challenges. One significant issue is the difficulty in securing sufficient and appropriate accommodation for participants. Additionally, the services remain predominantly housing-led, lacking full integration with health services and other essential partners such as the police and probation services at a regional level. Another challenge is the lack of capacity and collaboration mechanisms for sharing best practices, resources, and learning across the different programmes.

## 2.3 What are the reasons for homelessness in South Yorkshire?

### Headline findings

Homelessness is hardly attributable to a single cause, as it typically arises from a complex interplay of structural and individual factors. However, discernible patterns emerge from the data, shedding light on the primary drivers behind homelessness in the region. Housing affordability and availability, health disparities, and socio-economic deprivation stand out as prominent factors amplifying the risk of homelessness.

The private rented sector is clearly the most important source of homelessness. Other significant drivers of homelessness include eviction from family and friend provided accommodation, domestic abuse, leaving an institution without any accommodation to go to, and eviction from supported accommodation.

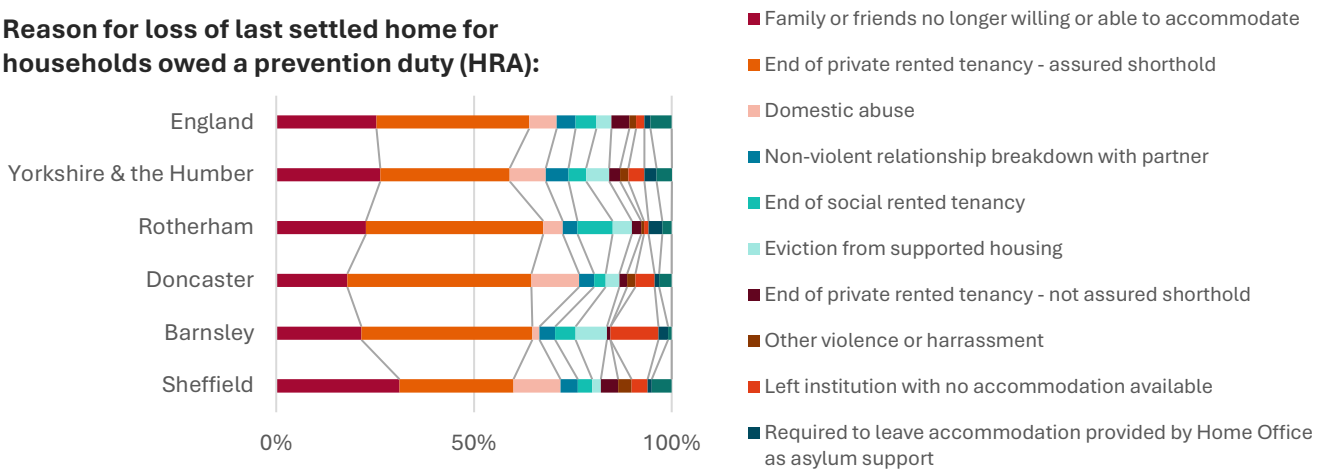
- **Structural factors that contribute to homelessness in South Yorkshire.** While South Yorkshire shows relatively more affordable house prices compared to broader regions, surging private sector rental prices since 2021 pose significant challenges for lower-income households. And despite recent increases, LHA rates in South Yorkshire fall short of covering lower quartile rental prices.
- **A lack of affordable housing:** The official housing need (as per Local Authority SHMAs and Local Plans) to meet demand is 5,000 new homes per annum across South Yorkshire, which includes 2,000 affordable homes (902 in Sheffield).
- **A relatively high proportion of substandard housing conditions (18%),** prevalent in the private rented sector, contribute to mental and physical health issues, evictions, and increased competition for quality housing, exacerbating homelessness risks in South Yorkshire.
- **Loss of PRS accommodation and leaving friends and family as primary causes of homelessness:** The Council's data on the causes of statutory homelessness shows the ending of private rented tenancies being the most significant cause in South Yorkshire. Eviction from the homes of family and friends is the second biggest factor.
- **Increasing proportion of people homeless due to domestic abuse and leaving prisons:** Compared to national figures, South Yorkshire also sees a higher proportion of homelessness due to domestic abuse and leaving an institution (in particular prison) increasing by 40% and 80% respectively since 2020/2021.
- **A decrease in homelessness due to end social rented tenancies, likely due to good preventative practices implemented sector:** Over the past three years, there has been a notable 35% decrease in people presenting to services due to the end of social rented tenancies, possibly partly attributable to enhanced preventative measures by Housing Associations in South Yorkshire.
- **Poor health is both a cause and a consequence of homelessness.** Homeless individuals in South Yorkshire face substantial health challenges. Whilst granular data on the health needs of the homeless population is lacking, available data and insights from sector stakeholders report the important mental and physical health needs of the population and a rise in their complexity.
- **A recent rise in homeless refugees:** The region has witnessed a rise in homelessness among refugees following changes in asylum policies, with significant increases in homelessness approaches observed in Sheffield, Rotherham, and Doncaster, indicating the vulnerability of migrant populations to housing insecurity and rough sleeping.

### 2.3.1 What is causing statutory homelessness in South Yorkshire?

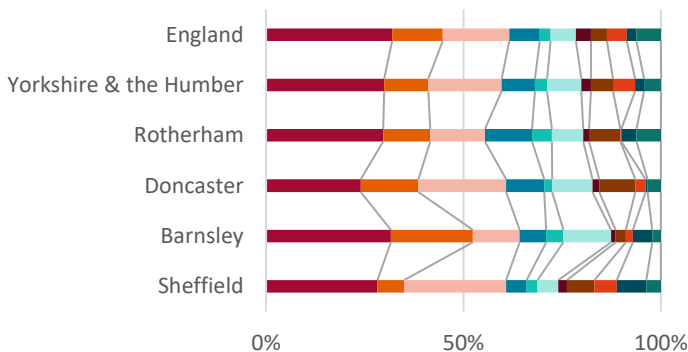
The data collected for those owed a statutory duty helps in finding out why a household either lost or nearly lost their homes.

#### Reasons for loss of last settled home

**Reason for loss of last settled home for households owed a prevention duty (HRA):**



**Reasons for loss of last settled home for households owed a relief duty (HRA)**



Looking at information related to those households owed a prevention duty in 2022/23, the most common reasons for being at risk of losing their last settled home were that their private rented tenancy ended (38.5%) or that their friends or family were no longer willing or able to accommodate them (25%).

For households owed a relief duty, the most common reasons were that their friends or family were no longer willing or able to accommodate them (29%) followed by domestic abuse (22%).

↑ **Source: Homelessness statistics Government data, 2020/21-2022/23**

Compared to national figures, more households in South Yorkshire are at risk of homelessness due to having to leave friends and family or due to domestic abuse. These two reasons have also increased significantly as key reasons for being at risk or homeless since 2021/22, rising by 25% and 40% respectively. Additionally, there has been an increasing number of households owed a relief duty due to having left an institution (e.g., prison, hospital) with no accommodation available, which has increased by 80% since 2021/22, representing 4% of all duties owed in 2022/23.

Looking more deeply into why private tenancies end, the data show that the main reason people lose their PRS tenancies across South Yorkshire is due to landlords wishing to sell or re-let their properties. This has been the reason for over 60% of PRS tenancies ending for those owed a prevention duty in 2022/23. The picture for those owed a relief duty is a bit more mixed. Landlords

selling or re-letting their properties and rent arrears were the two main reasons for loss of tenancy. Tenancy abandonment is also a key reason for people losing their tenancy (13%), which is much higher than the national figure of 2%. This data should, however, be taken with a note of caution, as it is suspected the 'landlord willing to sell or re-let their property' reason is over-reported on homeless applications to avoid questions on arrears and property upkeep that could jeopardise future rehousing, and therefore may be hiding the real issues of unaffordability and rent arrears. Plus, it may be in a landlord's interest to declare this reason, in order to get the local authority to support moving their tenant, even if selling isn't the intention. When considering why South Yorkshire sees greater amounts of homelessness due to the end of private rented tenancies, it certainly does not seem plausible that the reason for this is that there are a greater number of landlords simply seeking to sell or re-let properties, and instead it is more likely this is being driven by high rents and unaffordability, masked by misreporting. Further research into this area may prove valuable.

Over the past three years, there has been a significant 35% decrease in the proportion of people presenting to services due to the end of social rented tenancy. This positive trend can likely be attributed to the enhanced preventative work undertaken by key Housing Associations in South Yorkshire.

**Zoom-in:** The role of South Yorkshire housing associations in preventing evictions and homelessness

South Yorkshire's key housing associations have worked over the years to develop more prevention activities. Homelessness prevention consists of developing general strategies and specific activities to stop people from becoming or remaining homeless. As part of the South Yorkshire Homelessness Prevention Group, the housing associations regularly demonstrate their commitment to supporting residents experiencing hardship by reducing evictions and not evicting anyone who is working with their landlord to get back on track.

#### **South Yorkshire Housing Association (SYHA)**

SYHA owns and manages around 5,500 social rented homes in South Yorkshire. It is a Home for Cathy Association. In 2022/23, 23% of SYHA overall lettings were to homeless people, which was an increase of over 8% from the previous year.

SYHA delivers a range of homeless services in South Yorkshire annually supporting 100+ people who have experienced homelessness and rough sleeping including two Housing First projects in Rotherham and Doncaster, a family service in Sheffield supporting 38 households at any one time, including 7 for NRPF families. SYHA also delivers specialist support services for people with mental health and learning disabilities, a hospital discharge service, and a floating support service in Sheffield for older people over the age of 55 (Live Well at Home). They also run an Individual Placement and Support (IPS) service to support people with health conditions and disabilities into employment (Good Work).

SYHA has seen a decrease in evictions from 26 to 8 in the last 10 years, with the number of tenants with arrears reducing from 4% to 2% in the same period. In 2019-20, SYHA began offering furnished tenancies in response to the number of customers finding it difficult to carpet and furnish their new homes.

**Yorkshire Housing**

Yorkshire Housing owns and manages around 20,000 homes across Yorkshire and the Humber region. In the past few years, Yorkshire Housing developed a money and tenancy coaching service to reduce evictions and prevent and relieve homelessness for their customers. In 2023-2024, Yorkshire Housing helped over 260 customers in South Yorkshire through tenancy coaching and money coaching. Support includes money advice (budgeting, getting benefits, and sorting out debts), employment advice (writing CVs, preparing for interviews), and tenancy advice (home maintenance, rent payments, furnishing/decorating). Since the creation of the service, 875 customers were referred for coaching, and these customers ended up being over £1,500,000 better off financially. In addition, over 300 customers improved their wellbeing after receiving coaching, while over 250 increased their money management skills.

**Together Housing**

Together Housing owns and manages around 35,000 properties across the north of England, including a good proportion in South Yorkshire. They have seen a significant increase in the number of customers receiving Universal Credit in recent years (7% of customers in 2017 against 40% today).

In order to prevent tenancy failures, Together Housing has recently developed 'Thrive tenancies,' a predictive data system allowing them to identify potential at-risk tenancies based on previous tenancy failures. Based on this analysis, cases are reviewed to further assess the risk and establish a support plan with the customer to help mitigate the risk. Together Housing has also established a welfare benefits team, a tenancy sustainability team, and a support fund used for food, fuel, furniture, and rent debt in certain circumstances. In 2023/24, there were 4,490 welfare benefit and 1,545 tenancy sustainability cases, with estimated gains for customers totalling £7.2m.

Together Housing has reduced evictions by 90% since 2017, with 15 evictions in 2023/24 on 35,000 stock.

**Great Places**

Great Places owns and manages around 25,000 homes across the Northwest and Yorkshire. In order to prevent tenancy failures and homelessness, Great Places has a tenancy coach service aimed at empowering customers to sustain their tenancy and become more independent. They also offer an employability coach service to support customers into employment and a financial resilience service to support those with financial difficulties.

Great Places has built a network of resources and organizations that provide specialist services, including Sheffield Credit Union, Citizen Advice Bureaux, food banks, furniture recycling, and specialist charities.

**2.3.2 Housing affordability and quality**

The affordability of housing is a critical factor influencing homelessness rates, particularly for lower-income households. In South Yorkshire, while house prices relative to annual earnings in 2024 indicate that housing is generally more affordable compared to the broader regions of England and

Yorkshire and the Humber, there are significant challenges in the rental market. Since the start of 2021, private sector rental prices have surged, making it increasingly difficult for many residents to afford market prices for buying or renting homes. This trend is contributing to poverty, displacement of established communities, and rising homelessness.

### LHA

The Local Housing Allowance (LHA) sets the maximum amount of housing support a household can claim through Housing Benefit or Universal Credit. Despite the recent increase in LHA rates from April 2024 after four years of being frozen, the rates still fall short of covering the lower quartile of rental prices in South Yorkshire, as shown in the table below:

	Studio		1 bedroom		2 bedrooms		3 bedrooms	
	LHA rates	Lower quartile	LHA rates	Lower quartile	LHA rates	Lower quartile	LHA rates	Lower quartile
<b>Barnsley</b>	£316.33	£338.00	£415.00	£400.00	£450.00	£444.00	£550.00	£500.00
<b>Doncaster</b>	£350.00	£455.00	£415.00	£410.00	£620.00	£495.00	£680.00	£530.00
<b>Rotherham</b>	£304.17	£355.00	£425.00	£425.00	£500.00	£490.00	£550.00	£518.00
<b>Sheffield</b>	£304.17	£420.00	£425.00	£550.00	£500.00	£600.00	£550.00	£650.00

↑ **Source: DWP 2024–25 LHA rates and ONS Private rental market statistics 2022–23**

This means that even with maximum housing support, many lower-income households face a shortfall in their rental payments, making it difficult to secure affordable housing. Households are forced to make up the difference between the LHA and actual rent from their limited incomes, leading to financial strain. The gap between LHA rates and rental prices limits the housing options available to lower-income households. They are often confined to substandard or overcrowded housing conditions or are pushed into less desirable areas with fewer resources and opportunities.

### Discretionary Housing Payment

In addition to the data available in relation to statutory homelessness that gives us some information about why people are homeless or become threatened with homelessness, we can also see that households in South Yorkshire are under financial pressure through other work local authorities deliver. Households can apply to the Council for a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) if they cannot afford to pay their rent, with payments made in order to temporarily sustain a tenancy while a long-term solution is sought to avoid homelessness. Local authorities receive funding from the Government every year to fund DHP payments made to households.

Local Authority	Number of claims paid		Total spend		Government Contribution Original Allocation		Percentage of Allocation Spent (%)	Average payment per claim	
	22-23	change since 20-21	22-23	change since 20-21	22-23	change since 20-21		22-23	20-21
Barnsley	1019	-14.73%	534,777	-16.73%	£389,289	-46%	137%	£524.81	£537.45
Doncaster	783	-38.00%	986,244	-3.39%	£497,602	-45%	198%	£1,259.5	£417.28
Rotherham	1098	32.29%	763,260	-3.91%	£427,584	-44%	179%	£695.14	£957.03



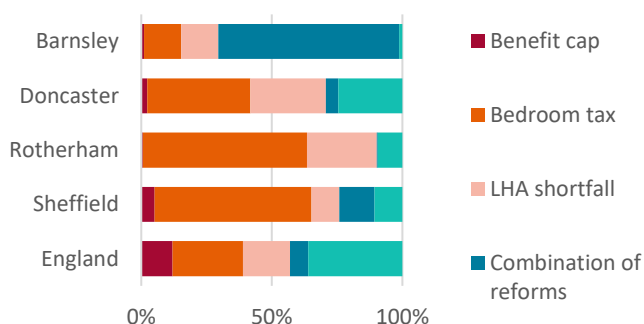
Sheffield	2657	10.71%	743,597	-45.01%	£743,428	-45%	100%	£	279.86	£468.00
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↑ **Source: DWP statistics – use of DHP, annual return from local authorities (2020/21–2022/23)**

The table above shows that:

- The number of paid claims in Doncaster and Barnsley has reduced over the past three years, while there has been a slight increase in Rotherham and Sheffield. It is important to note that this does not necessarily relate to the number of claim applications made, as that information is not available.
- All local authorities experienced a decrease in total spending on DHP, ranging from 3.5% to 45%. This reduction is driven by a decrease in government contributions (approximately 45% on average across each local authority) and a decrease in the value of individual claim payments. Overall, recipients are receiving less money.
- Whilst the number of paid claims has decreased in Doncaster, the average payment per claim has significantly increased. This likely implies a more targeted approach to allocating support, providing fewer people with more substantial financial assistance.

**Reason for applications (successful claims):**



The main reasons for successful DHP claims made by households in South Yorkshire are due to the impacts of welfare reforms introduced over the last decade, including the Benefit Cap and Bedroom Tax, as well as the Local Housing Allowance not covering the full rent charged. However, when compared to the reasons for successful DHP claims in England, the Benefit Cap is a less significant factor in South Yorkshire.

↑ **Source: DWP statistics – use of DHP, annual return from local authorities (2020/21–2022/23)**

Discussions with local authorities revealed that there are increasing DHP claims made by PRS tenants.

**Housing conditions**

The quality of housing stock can significantly influence homelessness levels:

- Substandard housing conditions, such as poor insulation, inadequate heating, dampness, mould, and structural disrepair, can lead to a host of mental and physical health issues.<sup>13 14</sup> Poor health can strain household finances and housing stability.
- Substandard housing can also result in increased evictions. Landlords may evict tenants to avoid making necessary repairs, or tenants might choose to leave uninhabitable conditions, thus falling into homelessness.

<sup>13</sup> National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. 2020. NICE Guideline (NG149) Indoor air quality at home

<sup>14</sup> N May and others. Health and Moisture in Buildings: a report from the UK Centre For Moisture In Buildings about the health impact of buildings which are too dry or too damp. UKCMB; 2015 27/10/2019



- The scarcity of quality housing stock increases competition for decent homes, driving up rents and making it harder for low-income households to find affordable housing

Local Authority	Number of non-Decent dwellings	Proportion (%)
Barnsley	16,719	15.5%
Doncaster	20,077	15.0%
Rotherham	15,945	14.0%
Sheffield	41,833	17.3%

In South Yorkshire, around 100,000 dwellings<sup>15</sup> failed to meet the Decent Homes Standard<sup>16</sup> in 2023. This represents 18% of the total housing stock, and poor-quality homes are primarily found in the private rented sector. This rate is higher than the average of 15% for England.

← **Source: English Housing Survey, Decent Homes Standards (June 2023)**

The recent government damp and mould survey also revealed that it is estimated that 10% to 12% of the PRS housing stock in South Yorkshire has damp and mould hazards.

**Housing and health:** Supporting Housing and Health to work together through the South Yorkshire Integrated Care Partnership

The South Yorkshire Integrated Care Partnership Strategy of March 2023<sup>1</sup> looks to improve the health of local communities, tackle deep seated inequalities in health outcomes and access, make the most of available resources, and make sure that health and care services support the wider objectives as a region, making South Yorkshire a healthier, wealthier and happier place.

Building upon the above, SYMCA has commissioned HACT on behalf of the South Yorkshire Housing Partnership to help understand and strengthen the relationship that exist between health providers and the housing sector. A Health and Housing Summit will take place in September to explore what more can be done at policy and practice levels to achieve greater integration and recognition of the impact that can be made.

### 2.3.3 Health and homelessness

The relationship between health and homelessness is deeply intertwined and complex. Experiences of homelessness are both a cause and a result of poor physical and mental health. People experiencing homelessness face significant health inequalities and poorer health outcomes than the rest of the population<sup>17</sup> Mortality, for example, among people experiencing homelessness is around ten times higher than the rest of the population and life expectancy is around 30 years less<sup>18</sup>. In

<sup>15</sup> DLHUC Statistics, English Housing Survey Local Authority Stock, Decent Homes Standard, June 2023.

<sup>16</sup> For a dwelling to be considered 'decent' under the Decent Homes Standard it must:

- meet the statutory minimum standard for housing (the Housing Health and Safety System (HHSRS) since April 2006), homes which contain a Category 1 hazard under the HHSRS are considered non-decent
- provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort
- be in a reasonable state of repair
- have reasonably modern facilities and services

<sup>17</sup> Homeless Link (2022). The Unhealthy State of Homelessness. [https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/Homeless\\_Health\\_Needs\\_Audit\\_Report.pdf](https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/Homeless_Health_Needs_Audit_Report.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> ONS, Deaths of Homeless people in England and Wales, 2021 registrations.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/datasets/deathsofhomelesspeopleinenglandandwales/current>

addition, people experiencing homelessness face barriers in access to timely and appropriate support that is leading them to access emergency services at a substantially higher rate than the general public. Overreliance on ambulances and A&E is not just costly to the health service but it also speaks to concerns that people experiencing homelessness are not able to access healthcare before their needs become an emergency<sup>19</sup>.

Healthcare systems have poorly recorded data on the homeless population, and these individuals are often excluded from local-level health indicators. In South Yorkshire, there is very little up-to-date information on the health needs and healthcare usage of this population.

However, since 2022, Yorkshire Ambulance service has collected data on the accommodation status of patients, including those who are homeless without accommodation and those in night shelters. This data<sup>20</sup> provides valuable insights into the health challenges faced by homeless individuals in the region.

- In 2023, there were 682 ambulance attendances in NHS South Yorkshire recorded as being to homeless patients, with Doncaster and Sheffield having significantly higher rates of homeless attendances than the regional average.
- Over 40% of all ambulance attendances were for the ADS category ‘psych/tox/D&A,’ which combines mental health, toxicology, and drugs and alcohol issues.
- 73% of these ambulance attendances resulted in the patients being conveyed to the hospital.

From the homelessness statutory data, we also know that 46% of those owed a homeless prevention or relief duty suffered from mental health issues in 2022/23. In Sheffield, this figure jumped to 62%, compared to 35% of applicants in England. Additionally, 31% of households owed a prevention or relief duty suffered from physical ill health and disability, which was significantly higher than the national average of 18%.

While these figures provide some insight into the extent of need, the absence of comprehensive data on the health needs and healthcare utilisation among homeless individuals in South Yorkshire exacerbates the challenges in effectively addressing their complex needs. While various initiatives aim to integrate health partners and the homelessness sector in South Yorkshire to improve access to services and health outcomes for this population, discussions with stakeholders reveal inconsistencies in service provision across the region. Additionally, it's recognised that certain groups or demographics remain underserved by the current initiatives.

### 2.3.4 Migration

Homelessness has historically been, to varying degrees, a significant issue among migrant populations. As of early 2024, there were 2,785 asylum seekers in South Yorkshire receiving Home

<sup>19</sup> Homeless Link (2022). The Unhealthy State of Homelessness. [https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/Homeless\\_Health\\_Needs\\_Audit\\_Report.pdf](https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/Homeless_Health_Needs_Audit_Report.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> South Yorkshire Ambulance service, NHS Integrated Care Board. 2023

Office support under statutory provisions<sup>21</sup>. Prevalent nationalities are Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Eritrea, and Syria.

In 2022, a ministerial pledge to ‘clear the asylum backlog’ led to an increase in decisions throughout 2023 and 2024. Following an asylum decision, individuals lose their accommodation and financial support 21 days after a negative decision and 28 days after a positive decision. Local authorities are only mandated to secure accommodation for those with a positive decision who fall into a priority need group.

There has been a significant increase in homelessness approaches for refugees with positive decision in South Yorkshire:

- **Sheffield:** Between August 2022 and July 2023, there were 201 homelessness approaches from refugee individuals and families. This number surged to 358 approaches in just six months between August 2023 and January 2024. In addition, local housing charity Nomad, which is the primary source of accommodation for non-priority need homeless people (a category which most adult refugees fall into), had to close their referral system in March after the number of new referrals jumped from around 20-30 a month to over 140, on top of the already 200+ people already on their waiting list.
- **Rotherham:** Since April 2023, 102 individuals with positive asylum decisions have approached the Council Homelessness Services.
- **Doncaster:** The area has seen a notable increase in people exiting the asylum support system and facing homelessness for the first time, peaking in November 2023 with 34 single males and families.

In December 2023, 10 individuals who had recently left Home Office accommodation were reported sleeping rough in South Yorkshire. However, this data is likely under-reported as it relies on self-disclosure and local authority knowledge.

Additionally, migrants with no recourse to public funds, including those with various types of visas, no visas, and EU migrants, are at high risk of homelessness due to their lack of entitlement to mainstream support. South Yorkshire has a sizeable EU community, including many Roma from Slovakia and the Czech Republic, who are particularly vulnerable to homelessness.

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<sup>21</sup> Migration Yorkshire, Refugee and asylum seeker dashboard,  
<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiYmE5MTY0OWEtYzQ2NS00OGRiLWl2ZDktNGZmZTVmMWI1NDZlZDk1Y2E2QmFmLTU4NmUtNDcwNy1hNzhiLWQ3MTg4ZDYxNDIhNyJ9&pageName=ReportSection866677c8622d93e98ab1>

### 3. Primary research: focus areas

#### 3.1 Prison leavers

##### Headline findings

The current situation surrounding prison leavers facing homelessness in South Yorkshire underscores the need for better prevention at all stages of individuals' journeys.

The research has shown that too many individuals are falling through systemic cracks, leading to homelessness, re-offending, deteriorating health, and other adverse societal impacts. Central to these issues are the severe shortages in housing options, both in terms of quantity and appropriateness, exacerbated by increasing demand and limited capacity within support services.

By focusing on capacity building, embedding preventative practices and lived experience expertise, driving specialist provision, and advocating for systemic changes, SYMCA can significantly contribute to improving outcomes for this vulnerable cohort.

The objectives of this strand of work were to provide a better understanding of homelessness as a result of leaving prison in South Yorkshire and to identify key accommodation needs and gaps in provision. The following activities were undertaken from January to May 2025

##### Quantitative data review

Data was gathered from South Yorkshire local authorities' Housing Options, Yorkshire and the Humber Probation Office, HMP Doncaster (male), and HMP New Hall (female) prisons (the main prisons serving the South Yorkshire population). The data consulted was for the last year (2022/23) and included information on the accommodation needs of South Yorkshire residents entering prisons and accommodation outcomes on release and at three months post-release. It also included information on timescales of referrals and releases, together with some analysis on the return or revolving door cohort.

Probation and prison data cannot be published as these would require verification. However, the findings below build upon the data analysis and review, providing a comprehensive understanding of the issues without citing specific statistics.

##### Interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders

A series of interviews and 2 focus groups were conducted in April 2024, bringing together a range of stakeholders working with the prison leavers cohort in South Yorkshire. This included stakeholders both in frontline and strategic/managerial roles. In total, 33 stakeholders were engaged, including representatives from local authorities' housing options, Probation service, Police and Crime Commissioner, prisons, resettlement services (NACRO), supported housing providers (Target, Action Housing, Mear, Riverside), drug and alcohol services, and public health.

### Lived experience interviews

In collaboration with peer researchers from Changing Futures Sheffield, Homeless Link conducted 25 interviews with individuals who have lived experience of homelessness and the criminal justice system. The interviews were conducted by a Homeless Link researcher and two peer researchers, who also contributed to the development of the topic guide. During the interviews, participants were asked to map out their experiences with the support they received to alleviate their homelessness at different points in their journey through the system.

Interviews took place in three different locations, facilitated by partners on-site:

- 9 Target Housing clients were interviewed from the Broomhall Centre in Sheffield.
- 8 Riverside clients were interviewed from Wharf House in Doncaster.
- 8 Sheffield Activity Hub clients were interviewed from the Activity Hub in Sheffield.

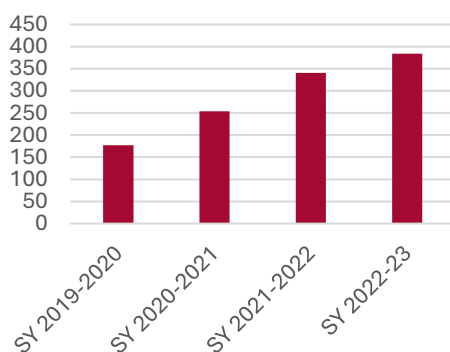
Participants included 10% females and 90% males. All participants had been to prison, experienced homelessness, and were released between 2 months and 2 years prior.

### 3.1.1. The big picture

#### Prison leavers and homelessness

There is a well-evidenced and complex relationship between homelessness and the criminal justice system. A large proportion of the prison population also experience multiple forms of disadvantage: people in prison are more likely to have mental health problems, unemployment, a history of substance use and experience of trauma (e.g., abuse) than the general population.<sup>22</sup> The relationship between these needs and homelessness are complex and we know often contribute to and are inter-related to homelessness.

**Number of Duty to Refer received by SY local authorities from the National Probation Service**



In South Yorkshire, approximately 1,586 people with an offending history accessed statutory homelessness services in 2022/3 (20% of all households). Additionally, local authorities received nearly 400 referrals to their services (under the Duty to Refer) by the National Probation Service on behalf of prison leavers or probation service users threatened with homelessness or already homeless. The number of referrals coming from the National Probation Service has doubled in the last four years and represents more than 20% of the referrals made to local authorities. While this shows an increase in the number of prison leavers and probation service users with housing needs, it is also likely due to better referrals and joint working between prisons, the probation service, and local authorities.

<sup>22</sup> Durcan G., (2023), Prison mental health services in England. Prison & Young Offender Institution Mental Health Needs Analysis. [Prison-mental-health-services-in-England-2023-1.pdf](https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Prison-mental-health-services-in-England-2023-1.pdf) ([centreformentalhealth.org.uk](https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk))

In December 2023, local outreach teams across the four South Yorkshire local authorities recorded 24 individuals rough sleeping following recent release from prison.

Alongside these statutory and rough sleeping figures, research consistently demonstrates that homelessness amongst prison leavers is a significant issue. National evidence suggests that around 15% of prisoners are already homeless when starting a prison sentence<sup>23</sup>. In 2022, the Ministry of Justice also reported that 14% of prison releases were to homelessness.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, evidence also shows that prison leavers without settled accommodation are almost 50% more likely to reoffend than those who have stable accommodation on release<sup>25</sup>.

Data show that this picture is slightly worse for South Yorkshire in 2023, with a higher proportion of people released without stable accommodation. This is particularly the case for individuals serving sentences of less than 3 months. The data also shows that women and individuals from minority ethnic backgrounds were more likely to stay with family and friends upon release, therefore relying more on informal support. The data on housing outcomes at 3 months post-release also indicate ongoing challenges in securing stable housing after release.

### 3.1.2 Accommodating ex-offenders: current and emerging challenges

In South Yorkshire, stakeholders have pinpointed several key challenges in accommodating and supporting ex-offenders, both presently and in the future.

#### **Increasing prison population**

Following the Covid pandemic, the prison population in England and Wales had registered unprecedented growth. In the past year alone (April 23-April 24), the prison population increased by 4% to 87,481<sup>26</sup>. In the medium-term, the prison population is also projected to increase to 105,800 by March 2028<sup>27</sup>. This projected long-term increase is predicated on several factors, including continued growth in police charging and prosecutorial activity and falling Crown Court outstanding caseloads (both of which could increase inflows into the prison system and in turn the prison population), and changes in sentencing policy and behaviour to keep the most serious offenders in prison for longer. This increasing prison population means significant implications in terms of resettlement and support services, including for those prison leavers with housing needs.

In South Yorkshire, stakeholders have voiced concerns over the escalating pressure placed on all services involved in the resettlement of prison leavers. This strain extends to local authorities and homelessness services, where the growing demand is expected to intensify. Staffing shortages exacerbate these challenges, contributing to the difficulty in recruiting and retaining support workers within probation and homelessness services.

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<sup>23</sup>Scott D. (2022), No Place like home: Prisons and homelessness. *Harm and Evidence Research Collaborative*, The Open University

<sup>24</sup> Ministry of Justice. (2022), Community Performance Quarter to March 2022.

<sup>25</sup> Ministry of Justice. (2022), Community Performance Quarter to March 2022.

<sup>26</sup> Ministry of Justice (2024). Prison population statistics. <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/prison-population-statistics>

<sup>27</sup> Ministry of Justice (2024). Prison Population Projections 2023 to 2028, England and Wales. [Prison\\_Population\\_Projections\\_2023\\_to\\_2028.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/123456/Prison_Population_Projections_2023_to_2028.pdf)

### **Capacity and stock**

Stakeholders in South Yorkshire pinpoint the scarcity of available accommodation as the core challenge in accommodating and supporting ex-offenders upon their release. Supported accommodation providers like Target Housing and Action Housing have highlighted the struggle to keep up with the growing demand, exacerbated by an increasing number of referrals. Furthermore, these providers face mounting difficulties in sourcing suitable properties due to a fiercely competitive market, landlords' reluctance to rent to people with multiple disadvantage and poor property conditions.

### **Aging caseload**

Older prisoners are the fastest growing group in the prison population in England and Wales with the number of prisoners aged 60 and over increasing by 82% in the last decade<sup>28</sup>. This rise has primarily been driven by an increase in the number of older adults sentenced for sexual offences. In addition, increases to the length of sentences has meant that more people grow old in prison. Many old prisoners and prison leavers have co-morbidities and therefore greater need for health and social care.

Stakeholders in South Yorkshire reported significant challenges in finding appropriate accommodation for older prisoners. A large proportion of this cohort moves to approved premises after release, often as part of their licence conditions, reflecting the nature of their offences. Stakeholders noted that many local authorities and housing agencies are reluctant to accept individuals convicted of sexual offences, a common issue among older prisoners. Consequently, approved premises, despite being necessary, often fall short in accommodating individuals with disabilities, accessibility needs, or complex health conditions, and these placements are typically temporary. Overall, stakeholders highlighted a shortage of suitable accommodation for older prisoners, in particular those with health and care needs, following their release, which undermines their rehabilitation and hinders successful reintegration into society. Concerns were particularly raised about older individuals being released with no fixed abode and the lack of support for those who have spent a long time in prison and are not equipped to live independently or do not have appropriate living skills.

### **Increasing complexity of needs**

Many prison leavers experience poor mental and physical health and have a range of needs that are often multiple and complex, including high levels of comorbidity (having more than one mental health, physical, social care or substance use related need). They have also often experienced traumatic experiences in their lives<sup>29</sup>.

Stakeholders in South Yorkshire involved in resettlement planning and delivery talked about the increasing number of complex needs prison leavers and the increasingly limited options for

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<sup>28</sup> House of Commons Justice Committee, (2019-21). Ageing prison population.

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/2149/documents/19996/default/#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20prisoners%20aged,people%20grow%20old%20in%20prison.>

<sup>29</sup> House of Commons Justice Committee (2021-2022). Mental health in prison.

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5802/cmselect/cmjust/1117/report.html>



accommodating and supporting these. This includes people with dual diagnosis of mental health and substance misuse, as well as people with health, care and social needs.

### **Women**

While women remain a minority in the prison population, they often have multiple and complex needs.<sup>30</sup> 60% of women in custody have experienced domestic violence and those with an assessment are twice as likely to have a mental health need than men<sup>31</sup>. The lack of provision for women with complex needs was particularly noted.

### **Revolving door**

People in the revolving door are typically characterised by repeated low-level, non-violent offences, such as theft and minor drug offences, driven by multiple unmet needs, including mental ill health, problematic substance use, homelessness and domestic abuse. Their health, care and offending related needs often go hand in hand with trauma, persistent poverty, long-term unemployment and social exclusion<sup>32</sup>. Once released, they are returned to prison because they either reoffend or are breached/recalled due to their risk being un-manageable in the community.

This cohort is particularly challenging to support as they are typically in custody long enough to disrupt support in the community, but not long enough for meaningful intervention to be delivered in custody. Individuals are also more likely to be discharged from prison as homeless as the time in custody is typically not long enough to secure an accommodation for them.

### **Remand and early release**

Remand prisoners can be released with little notice, making it particularly difficult to plan for housing upon their release. Stakeholders have raised concerns about the challenge of providing accommodation support to this group due to the uncertainty surrounding their release dates.

The End of Custody Supervised Licence (ECSL) scheme, announced in October 2023, allows men and women to be sent home 18 days before their scheduled release date. This period was extended to up to 60 days in March 2024 and further to up to 70 days in May 2024. Similarly to remand prisoners, this means individuals can be released ahead of their planned date with very little notice, hindering resettlement work.

### **3.1.3 Preventing homelessness**

The interviews and focus groups undertaken asked sector stakeholders to reflect on the support provided to individuals at different stages of their journey through prison and resettlement. In parallel, the interviews with people with lived experience explored individuals' stories and

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<sup>30</sup> House of Commons Justice Committee (2022-23) Women in prison <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5803/cmselect/cmjust/265/report.html>

<sup>31</sup> Ministry of Justice (2018) Women in the criminal justice system. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/719768/info-graphic-for-the-female-offender-strategy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/719768/info-graphic-for-the-female-offender-strategy.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> Revolving door (2020), Young adults in the revolving door. [https://t2a.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/RDA\\_NGP\\_Young-adults-in-the-revolving-door\\_For-screen-002\\_0.pdf](https://t2a.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/RDA_NGP_Young-adults-in-the-revolving-door_For-screen-002_0.pdf)



experiences of the support received. Below are presented the findings in relation to the support pathway at the reception, pre-release and release of a prisoner's journey into and out of custody.

## Reception stage

### **The process**

Reception is the point at which a person enters prison and begins a custodial sentence. At this stage, an initial housing needs assessment is conducted (Basic Custody Screening Tool 2). This assessment is crucial for identifying the individual's current housing situation so that appropriate steps can be taken to avoid the loss of any accommodation and the build-up of arrears if the sentence is short. For those serving longer sentences, it can help in releasing existing accommodation. Additionally, the assessment should identify whether the individual is at risk of being homeless upon release, so that efforts to secure accommodation for the individual can begin no later than 12 weeks before the release.

Stakeholders interviewed and those who took part in the focus group discussions were all in agreement that this is a crucial step that is often missed or rushed, which can have a significant impact on an individual's journey and risk of homelessness. Prison-based stakeholders typically mentioned the lack of capacity and support to complete these assessments effectively and the reliance on self-disclosure from individuals who haven't built any connection with the staff. For example, concerns were raised about women not disclosing information about their situation at entry and consequently issues relating to their safety on release may not be identified. A prison-based stakeholder reflected: *'We have seen many women not willing or not prepared to disclose information about their personal situation. and so, issues related to their safety on release may not be identified'*

As a result, individuals may end up with unsuitable accommodation upon release, important arrears, or their accommodation needs may be identified too late or not identified at all. The number of individuals coming out of prison with arrears was reported as significant by a couple of local authorities, mentioning that this is a clear barrier to accessing social housing.

Not all prison leavers interviewed were clear about their housing circumstances on reception and most struggled to recall what issues has been discussed with them and by whom on reception into prison. Most, however, suggested they had been asked about their accommodation and receiving support to deal with Housing Benefits. A couple of participants also mentioned how they have been able to maintain their supported accommodation whilst serving their sentence.

*'Someone came to speak to me about my Housing Benefits so I could pay for my flat. I was unsure about the process, but my sentence was only 10 weeks, so it was easy, and they helped me to keep my flat whilst I was there'*

There were very few references to prison-based staff engaging in more varied preventative practices such as mediation with families, private landlords or accommodation providers about maintaining tenancies or accessing discretionary payments where a housing benefit shortfall might occur. A number of prison leavers also reported housing difficulties that seemed related to matters which, dealt at reception, might have improved their accommodation prospect.

Joe was released from prison after serving a 2-year sentence. Currently in supported accommodation with Target Housing, Joe explained how he has been paying back rent arrears he accrued with the council since his release. He detailed that no one supported him in terminating his council flat tenancy once he entered prison, leading him to accumulate a debt of £15,000 with the council. His appeal was rejected. As a result of his debt, he is unable to be on the social housing register.

Overall, there is no accessible data on the extent, range and outcome of prevention activities undertaken at this stage and stakeholders felt that more work could be done in police custody suites and/or prison reception – when a person first enters prison – to support people with the maintenance of existing tenancies. A local authority stakeholder mentioned *‘we don’t know what is happening before we receive the Duty to Refer, and this is usually received just before release. So we not have visibility whatsoever on the number of tenancies saved as a result of prevention work happening in prison, if any! It would be helpful to know.. and also who has housing needs well in advance. Even if we can’t do much in term of securing an accommodation much in advance, we could have a bit more foresight and be better prepared’*

### **Resettlement planning**

Guidelines say that resettlement planning should start 12 weeks before the expected release date. Efforts to secure an accommodation and to prevent homelessness should be carried out in a spirit of partnership and cooperation and all offenders at risk of homelessness within 56 days should be referred to the appropriate local housing authority as early as possible in line with the Duty to Refer legislation in the Homeless Reduction Act. Local housing authorities should respond to all such referrals in a timely fashion and agree a Personal Housing Plan between the offender, the relevant agencies and the local authority.

Evidence, including release and Duty to Refer data, shows clearly that the large majority of resettlement planning, and referrals do not take place 12 weeks before the expected release date, but rather a few weeks before. Probation and resettlement stakeholders face large caseloads, restricting the extent to which they can support people in preparing for prison release well in advance. The staff highlighted that they often need to concentrate their efforts on supporting the most vulnerable or higher-risk clients and those who are to be released imminently. This ultimately reduces the likelihood that people are linked up with all the services they will need upon release.

Local authority-based stakeholders reported that a number of people are presenting to the council office on the day of their release and that Duty to Refer notifications are sometimes received less than a week before the planned release. This delay in assessment can lead to individuals being released without secure accommodation, increasing the risk of homelessness and instability. Stakeholders also reported that prisoners and their key workers often receive short notice of release dates, and sometimes the date is brought forward, making planning and preparation challenging. Changes to release dates, particularly at the last minute, can add further disruption and mean rearranging any appointments that have been set up.

It is particularly difficult to coordinate a resettlement plan and secure accommodation for individuals serving short sentences. For those serving sentences of less than 3 months, resettlement planning

should start as soon as they enter prison. However, the limited time and resources available often make it challenging to address their housing and support needs effectively before their release. This short timeframe exacerbates the difficulties in ensuring these individuals have the necessary support and accommodation to prevent homelessness and facilitate successful reintegration into society. A probation representative said: *'Those with longer and more serious sentences tend to receive a more pro-active service than others which then leaves some offenders with ...more frequent offending patterns sometimes left with late/limited referrals'*

Local authorities also reported the poor quality of referrals received, hindering them for making timely decision. The lack of information around risks was particularly raised as concerning: *'We receive the referral quite late, and on top of this there is often no information at all in the referral. Nothing around risk for example! Nothing can really start in terms of finding an accommodation before we have this basic information... so we are wasting a lot of time having to go back to the probation with enquiries and having to wait the assessment to make any move'*

On the other hand, prison-based stakeholders and supported accommodation providers expressed concerns about the lack of capacity within some local authorities to deal with the referrals. A supported accommodation provider said: *'We can be quite reactive if we have a bed available and we accept an individual. But because all referrals have to go through local authorities and due to their capacity issues, sometimes that short window we have to act and avoid someone to be release in the street is missed'*

Stakeholders also raised that the situation is worsening and that the lack of resources for resettlement planning is becoming more critical. But even though stakeholders acknowledge that more upstream resettlement would be beneficial, the lack of accommodation options means that even if this were done, it would be hard to secure accommodation much in advance of the release. This shortage of suitable housing exacerbates the challenge of ensuring stable and secure accommodation for prison leavers, regardless of how early the planning begins. One stakeholder noted, *'I don't think accommodation support has anywhere near the profile across the prison as it used to... However, that lack of available housing probably means that this reduction in resources doesn't have a huge impact on what they end up achieving.'*

A recent prison leaver interviewed also recalled: *'I had a number of meetings with support workers in prison to discuss accommodation options before my release. I did an assessment with a supported accommodation provider, and they accepted me, but unfortunately, they didn't have a space for me. So, I spent a few days on the street after my release before getting into shared accommodation.'*

This was echoed by various supported accommodation providers working with prison leavers in the region. They reported an increasing number of referrals and a lack of vacancies, highlighting capacity issues in meeting the growing demand despite ongoing efforts to increase their stock.

Even where plans are in place, the prisoner is not always aware of this. Most prison leavers identified as No Fixed Abode on release reported that they did not know prior to or even on the day of their release whether they had somewhere to stay that evening. All described the experience of approaching release without a fixed address as anxiety-provoking and stressful.

A couple of individuals having been to prisons multiple times for short sentences also articulated how the lack of stable housing solution has led to them relapsing into criminal behaviour.

One recalled: *"I had nowhere to go last year when I left prison. No one helped me for a few days, and I could not see what else I could do, so in this situation, you get back to your old habits".*

### **Support on release**

Upon release, individuals often find themselves without dedicated support staff at the prison gate, exacerbating the already challenging transition back into society. Stakeholders have emphasised the importance of gate support or navigators to help people on release, recognising that having someone to guide them through the initial steps could significantly improve outcomes. Individuals will often have a long list of appointments and tasks to complete on the day of their release, and the lack of support provided then was described by a prison-based stakeholder as *'setting them up to fail'*.

Most of the supported accommodation and floating support services for individuals released from prison or subject to probation supervision are subsumed into homelessness services outside of the Sheffield Activity Hub (The Growth Company), which provides a safe space for individuals on probation to engage in a range of activities and training opportunities. Some accommodation projects working specifically with this cohort have tailored support in place, but others have limited support available.

### **The accommodation pathways**

The research also looked to map out and gather details on the different accommodation options for homeless prison leavers.

### **CAS-3**

Launched in 2021, the Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 (CAS-3) scheme was established to ensure that all prison leavers who would otherwise be homeless have access to temporary accommodation for up to 84 days upon release or when moving from Approved Premises and CAS2 provision. While the initiative is welcomed, the outcomes data review and the stakeholders' consultation highlighted a number of challenges in relation to CAS-3.

For those able to access CAS-3 accommodation, securing longer-term housing remains a significant issue. The lack of move-on options means that many people still face homelessness after the 84-day period. This issue is corroborated by data on CAS-3 outcomes.

An individual interviewed recalled being asked to leave even though he had nowhere to go: *'They could not find me anything after my 84 days in CAS-3, so I just bought myself a tent.'*

Stakeholders identified the lack of move-on options as a key issue hindering resettlement work, alongside the insufficient resources and capacity of probation and resettlement services to deliver effective support. Consultations and data also revealed high recall rates for individuals in CAS-3. This is also attributed to the lack of support, with individuals often being left on their own, not

connected to necessary services, and living in shared accommodations that could negatively influence them.

Accessing CAS-3 is also particularly challenging for women, with stakeholders reporting a lack of temporary accommodation options for women leaving prison. Additionally, the general availability of temporary accommodation is often unsuitable for some individuals. Temporary accommodations are not always safe for those who have experienced trauma and abuse.

Two prison leavers interviewed explained that they did not feel safe in their temporary accommodation, which led to their recall as they refused to stay there.

*One explained 'I was living with people taking a lot of substance and I was trying to be clean myself. It was really having a negative impact on me. No one wanted to move me to another accommodation. There is no support there. They say there is but there is not. They just come to check on you but not to support you. I had to leave'*

### **Supported housing**

Many people in contact with the criminal justice system are likely to experience additional needs, including substance misuse and mental health problems, which means that accommodation with support is often more appropriate than an independent tenancy. All local authorities in South Yorkshire take a gateway approach to supported and temporary accommodation, meaning that they act as a single point of referral.

Supported accommodation providers reported an increasing number of referrals, alongside a rise in individuals with complex needs and higher risks being referred to their services due to a lack of other options elsewhere. Target Housing, which runs several supported accommodation projects for ex-offenders across South Yorkshire, highlighted that they are working with a higher-need and higher-risk cohort than what the services are often designed for. In Sheffield, Target Housing managed 116 bed spaces for ex-offenders, including 25 for higher-risk clients. They currently have 36 higher-risk clients and have had to refuse additional referrals for this reason. In 2023, more than 120 referrals were refused due to clients being too high risk or having complex health needs beyond the service's capacity.

Providers also reported the challenges they face in increasing their stock and securing new properties. Many available properties where landlords are willing to rent are not suitable or are in poor condition, further limiting options for those with significant health and care needs. Moreover, there has been a reduction in the number of providers, including non-commissioned ones, exacerbating the issue of limited capacity and resources.

Discussions with prison leavers revealed that some hostels and supported accommodations present additional challenges, especially when the accommodation is shared. This is particularly true for individuals with substance misuse issues who have begun to detox in prison, as they may be placed with other clients actively using substances. Women also face unique challenges due to the scarcity of women-only services in the region that provide gender-specific support.

Some good practices were highlighted. Providers offering specialist services to ex-offenders, such as Target Housing, have implemented non-eviction policies, strive to maintain individuals' accommodation even when they are recalled to prison, and work closely with their clients to

accommodate their needs. They also maintain contact with those who have moved on from their services.

Most supported accommodation providers working with this cohort in the region support clients for a period of one to two years. All described the increasing challenge of moving people on, especially outside of social housing. The lack of suitable move-on options means that even when initial resettlement support is available, the pathway to stable, long-term accommodation remains fraught with difficulties.

### **Private rented sector (PRS)**

While accessing private rented sector (PRS) accommodation is an option for some prison leavers, they face challenges similar to those experienced by other vulnerably housed individuals. The barriers to accessing PRS accommodation include:

- Some landlords are unwilling to accept tenants on housing benefits and are reluctant to rent to individuals with a history of offending.
- Local Housing Allowance (LHA) levels often do not match the cost of good-quality accommodation in the local market.
- The time required to secure accommodation and the practical difficulties of arranging it from within prison.
- Difficulties in accessing shared accommodation for those under 35, whose LHA only covers a room in shared housing, coupled with the reluctance of some older individuals within this age group to share with strangers.

Sheffield City Council has implemented a dedicated PRS access scheme for prison leavers called Re-Start, aiming to mitigate these barriers and provide better support for individuals transitioning from prison to stable housing.

### **Living with friends and family**

A large proportion of prison leavers arrange to live with friends and family upon release. If such arrangements are agreed upon at the resettlement planning stage, individuals are not considered to have housing needs. However, even when prisoners move in with family and friends, this arrangement is not always suitable. Many individuals interviewed shared their experiences of homelessness following a short stay with their friends and families after release from prison.

Several factors contribute to the unsuitability of these living arrangements. Family members or friends may not be prepared for the complexities and challenges associated with accommodating someone recently released from prison, especially if the individual has specific needs related to mental health, substance abuse, or other personal issues. Furthermore, overcrowded living conditions, strained relationships, and a lack of privacy can create tension and instability, often leading to the breakdown of these arrangements.

Jim spent 9 months in prison and arranged to live with his brother upon release. Jim described how their relationship deteriorated quickly due to his brother's negative influences, which he didn't want to be affiliated with. Consequently, Jim presented to the council as homeless a few weeks later.



Stakeholders raised concerns that prisons and resettlement services typically do not take into account whether initial arrangements for living with a family member or friend on release are sustainable. They noted that there is often a lack of assessment regarding the long-term viability of these arrangements and the support that might be needed to make them successful.

*A local authority-based stakeholder said "We see a lot of cases where the initial plan is for someone to stay with family, but within weeks they're on the street because the arrangement just wasn't feasible long-term. More thorough assessments and ongoing support could help prevent these situations."*

Manuel was released after a 12-year sentence and arranged to go back to his family home where his wife lives. He described how their relationship quickly deteriorated, and his wife asked him to leave. *'I think someone asked her if she was fine for me to go back to the family home, but that's it really.'* Manuel then rented a small bedroom in a shared house in Sheffield until the landlord increased his rent, and he could no longer afford it. He went to the council and presented as homeless a few months later.

In addition, the lack of follow-up and support for both the prison leaver and the host family can exacerbate issues. Stakeholders emphasised the need for resettlement services to engage more deeply with families and friends, providing them with resources, education, and support to better handle the challenges of reintegration.

### Case study

Liam was released from prison four months ago after serving a 7.5-year sentence. He shared that he has been diagnosed with autism and does not deal well with changes, relying heavily on very strict routines and regimes.

He recalled having an initial conversation with a resettlement officer approximately two weeks before his release day, but he never heard back from them and didn't know where he was going to go until the day of his release. He described being told to go to the Sheffield Probation Office on the morning of his release. On his way to Sheffield, Liam received a phone call from the probation office informing him that he actually needed to go to a hostel in Rotherham and that he should have been there 30 minutes ago.

Liam didn't know the area and didn't have a smartphone to help him navigate to Rotherham. He described the situation as very distressing. Liam asked someone in the street to help him find his way to the station and the hostel. He managed to get on the train and then took a taxi. The taxi driver, seeing that Liam was not in the right place, did not charge him. When Liam finally arrived at the hostel, he broke down into tears. Six days later, he received another phone call from probation, informing him that he needed to move to CAS 3 on the very same day. Liam stayed in CAS 3 in a shared house for three months, describing his time there as very challenging. 'People were trying to rob me, there were lots of people taking substances. Liam didn't feel supported at all. Thankfully, he was signposted to the Activity Hub in Sheffield (Growth Company) where he described having been supported in finding meaning and routine.

After the 84 days in CAS 3, Liam was released onto the street and was told that he had to go to Sheffield City Council to report as homeless. The Council was aware of his case and told him that he would receive a text on the same day. Liam received a text in the afternoon, which told



him to go to a B&B where he has been for around two weeks. He described how this is difficult – ‘I can’t cook, I can’t get a grip on my own life. He receives support from the council to find accommodation in the PRS. However, he struggles to find something suitable that could be covered by LHA rates.

### **Case study**

Sam was rough sleeping before he entered prison on remand. He was released a few months later after his trial, without having engaged with anyone about his housing needs. He left prison at 4:30 pm, so he could not seek any support as it was too late in the day, and he hadn’t been given a discharge grant.

Sam slept on the street for four days before presenting himself to Wharf House (Riverside) in Doncaster, following the advice of someone he met on the street. (Wharf House is a 30-bed supported accommodation for single homeless people with complex needs.) Wharf House directed him to the council to report as homeless and offered him an emergency bed for that night. He was offered a room the next day.

He described his situation as "lucky": "I was only four days on the street, so I didn’t re-offend."

At the time of the interview, Sam had been at Wharf House for six weeks. He receives support from the drug and alcohol service. He has been trying to find a job and received an offer to work in a warehouse but realised he was going to lose his benefits and wouldn’t be able to pay for the supported accommodation if he accepted.

### **Case study**

Alex was living with his uncle who kicked him out. He lived in the street for around 2 months before entering prisons for 2 years. He recalled having an initial conversation about his housing needs in prison 2 weeks before his release. *‘I was worried then as two weeks to sort something out was very little’*. He was put on a bail hostel for 3 months before securing temporary accommodation in CAS-3 for 2 months. He described himself as not needing much support and felt that the support provided was sufficient for his need. During his time in CAS-3, he was referred to Target Housing who accepted him and offered him a room. Alex is satisfied with his accommodation and the level of support he received from the Target team.

## **Partnership working**

Stakeholders have recognised recent improvements in partnership-working, noting better coordination of release cases and enhanced communication. Despite ongoing challenges related to capacity and information sharing, joint working in departure lounges involving probation, local authorities’ housing options, prison resettlement workers, and supported accommodation providers has proven effective. Moreover, regular local area meetings between probation, local authorities and drug and alcohol services to discuss recent releases facilitated proactive planning and problem-solving. These meetings enable stakeholders to share information and devise tailored solutions for each individual’s resettlement.

However, challenges persist regarding information-sharing processes, particularly for repeat offenders serving short but frequent sentences, as coordination and communication between the services supporting individuals in prison appear to be lacking.

*'You have all the services you need in prison: resettlement, drug and alcohol, welfare – but completely working separately so there is no joint system, no multi-agency meetings happening then'* prison-based stakeholder

As well as a lack of coordination within prison support, there can often be a disconnect between prison services and external services. Needs identified on entry into prison do not always convert to a support plan on discharge. This can mean referrals are not followed up and there is a lack of continuity of care.

*'It's really disheartening when someone has mental health issues, they're being referred to a mental health service in the area, but [the service] haven't accepted the referral, but as far as the prison is concerned the referral has been done.'* Drug and alcohol service stakeholder

### 3.1.4 How can we better prevent homelessness?

The current situation surrounding prison leavers facing homelessness underscores the need for better prevention at all stages of individuals' journey. From inadequate housing assessments upon entry to prison to the lack of timely support and accommodation planning prior to release, individuals often fall through the cracks of the system, leading to homelessness, re-offending, deteriorating health outcomes and other adverse societal outcomes. The lack of housing options (both in terms of supply and type) is also driving this crisis.

Overall, engagement with stakeholders, ex-offenders together with the review of existing provision in South Yorkshire shows that there is a need to:

- **Exploring better preventative practices**
  - Preventative practices at key stages of the journey (from prison entry to long term accommodation) should be reviewed and protocols or process guidance could be developed to support agencies in delivering prevention.
- **Identify and develop a shared specialist provision:**
  - Addressing the housing needs of prison leavers and preventing homelessness for prison leavers across South Yorkshire requires a comprehensive approach that acknowledges the specific challenges faced by different demographics and groups. Coordinating and delivering shared specialist provision (rather than dispersing efforts at local authority level) presents an opportunity to maximise resources.
  - The focus should be on addressing the specific needs of old prisoners and those with complex health and social care needs (and an offending history), increasing provision for women with complex needs including specialised support services, and exploring targeted interventions for the revolving door cohort and those wanting to work.
- **Harness the value of lived experience through peer mentors / navigators:**

- Evidence has shown the effectiveness of peer support schemes within prisons<sup>33</sup>. Peer mentors who are ex-offenders can provide additional support to people being released from prison, create trusting relationships and act as a strength-based inspirational role model.
- The support should start in prison and continue post release to support prison-leavers in navigating their way back into the community.

**Good practices to build upon:**

- **Manchester and Bolton CAS 3** – Manchester and Bolton CAS 3 hires people who have recently been in prison to provide practical and emotional support to CAS 3 service users. The provider works alongside probation staff to offer holistic support including one to one support in accessing move-on accommodation. Multi-agency resettlement panels bringing together CAS 3 providers, local councils and probation are also working efficiently.
- **NHS RECONNECT** - a care after custody service that seeks to improve the continuity of care of people leaving prison or an immigration removal centre with an identified health need. The → South Yorkshire RECONNECT service was launch in 2024. It is delivered by South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust  
<https://www.england.nhs.uk/commissioning/health-just/reconnect/>
- **GROWTH, Target Housing** – a new high intensity low caseload specialist provision for women who have had their children removed in South Yorkshire.

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<sup>33</sup> 5. HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2016) Life in prison: Peer support. A findings paper. [www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprisons/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2016/01/Peer-support-findings-paper-final-draft.pdf](http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprisons/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2016/01/Peer-support-findings-paper-final-draft.pdf)

## 3.2 Domestic abuse

### Headline findings

Domestic abuse is a major contributor of homelessness in South Yorkshire and presentations to homelessness services due to domestic abuse has greatly increased in recently years. While much progress has been made in enhancing domestic abuse accommodation since the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act (2021), challenges persist.

Current provisions include refuges, safe accommodations, and community support services, but issues remain, such as a lack of move-on options for those who have fled their homes, insufficient provision for certain groups, and an overall lack of resources for community-based services. Yet these are essential to reach all community groups and to prevent domestic abuse from occurring in the first place.

The objectives of this strand of work were to provide a better understanding of homelessness as a result of domestic abuse in South Yorkshire and to identify existing gaps in provision. The following activities were undertaken from January to May 2025

### Quantitative data review

Data was gathered from South Yorkshire local authorities and key service providers. Local authorities' supported needs assessments were also reviewed and used to build a picture of the profile and prevalence of domestic abuse in South Yorkshire.

### Interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders

A series of interviews and 1 focus group was conducted in April 2024, bringing together a range of stakeholders working with people experiencing domestic abuse and homelessness, including stakeholders both in frontline and strategic/managerial roles. In total, 9 stakeholders were engaged, including representatives from local authorities' housing options and domestic abuse teams, Police and Crime Commissioner and community-based services.

### 3.2.1. The big picture

#### Domestic abuse and homelessness

There is a large body of evidence which positions domestic abuse as a major contributory factor to homelessness<sup>34 35</sup>. Domestic abuse is inextricably linked with housing, as abuse most often occurs at home. Housing is a key barrier to people escaping domestic abuse. While such abuse can be perpetrated against men, women are far more likely to be victims and to report the associated loss of housing. Historically, support has focused on assisting victims fleeing domestic abuse rather than addressing the needs of the perpetrators.

<sup>34</sup> Bimpson E., (2021) Women, Homelessness and Domestic Violence: what works? Centre for Homelessness Impact. [women-homelessness-violence.pdf \(shu.ac.uk\)](https://www.homelessness-impact.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/women-homelessness-violence.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> Crisis (2019) Breaking the link between homelessness and domestic abuse. <https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/249186/2019-domestic-abuse.pdf>

Domestic abuse is often linked with various forms of social and economic disadvantages, such as poverty, substance abuse, mental health issues, and lack of education or employment opportunities. Domestic abuse both contributes to and is exacerbated by these factors, creating a vicious cycle that is difficult to break<sup>36</sup>. Domestic abuse can have lifelong impacts (mental, physical, social and financial) on the individual survivor and their family and children. Evidence also shows children who witness domestic violence or are victims of abuse themselves are at serious risk for long-term physical and mental health problems and that they may also be at greater risk of being violent in their future relationships<sup>37</sup>.

Building an accurate quantitative picture of homelessness resulting from domestic abuse presents several challenges, primarily due to the hidden nature of both issues and limitations in statistical data collection and reporting<sup>38</sup>. Many individuals experiencing domestic abuse do not report their situations to authorities due to fear, shame, stigma or lack of trust; many victims also rely on informal forms of support or do not engage with services. Sometimes, domestic abuse may not be considered as the direct causes of homelessness but is still present. Consequently, the true extent of domestic abuse and its role in homelessness is likely underrepresented in statistics.

### **Domestic abuse and homelessness in South Yorkshire**

Data from 2022/23 reveals that there were 39,016 domestic abuse-related incidents reported by South Yorkshire police, translating to a rate of 28 incidents per 1,000 population, higher than the national rate of 24 per 1,000<sup>39</sup>. Doncaster shows higher rates of domestic abuse per population compared to other districts in South Yorkshire, although all four districts exhibit a similar increasing trend.

Local authorities' Housing Options teams in South Yorkshire are approached by an average of 22 people for support in relation to homelessness and domestic abuse every week<sup>40</sup>. Approximately 1,400 individuals were owed a prevention or relief duty due to domestic abuse in 2022/23, marking a 40% increase since 2020/21. Domestic abuse was the primary reason for homelessness for 9.5% of those owed a prevention duty and 22% of those owed a relief duty in 2022/23.

### **Who are the victims of domestic abuse in South Yorkshire?**

A review of local data and intelligence<sup>41</sup> on individuals accessing or referred to local domestic abuse services in South Yorkshire reveals several key trends and insights across various demographics:

#### Gender

- Overall, female victims make up the vast majority of referrals to domestic abuse support services (between 80 and 90%) in South Yorkshire. Evidence shows that male

<sup>36</sup> DLUHC (2024). Understanding domestic abuse interventions for women experiencing multiple disadvantages, A rapid evidence assessment.

<sup>37</sup> NSPCC (2019) Domestic abuse: an overview. <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/domestic-abuse/>

<sup>38</sup> Safes Lives (2018). Safe at home: Homelessness and domestic abuse. <https://safelives.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Safe-at-home-Spotlight-on-homelessness.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> South Yorkshire Police statistics (2023)

<sup>40</sup> Statutory homelessness statistics, government data (2022/23)

<sup>41</sup> Sheffield domestic abuse and safe accommodation needs assessment (2021); Barnsley Domestic Abuse strategy (2022-2027); Rotherham Domestic Abuse Strategy (2022-2027); Doncaster Domestic Abuse Evidence Base (2021)

victims/survivors disclosing and presenting to services is less prevalent for female victims<sup>42</sup>. Whilst representing a small proportion of referrals, transgender individuals are also represented in the data.

### Age

- The 26-30 age group is the most prevalent among those accessing domestic abuse services in South Yorkshire. Generally, the number of reported cases decreases uniformly with increasing age from this group. However, there is also a notable prevalence of domestic abuse among younger age groups, particularly those aged 16-25, in Sheffield and Doncaster.

### Ethnicity

- In Doncaster, Barnsley, and Rotherham, the majority of individuals accessing services and accommodation are White, reflecting the demographic makeup of the population. However, this data should be approached with caution, as evidence indicates additional barriers and challenges faced by non-White individuals in accessing support. In Sheffield, a higher proportion of BAME victims access accommodation and floating support services than would be expected based on the local population. Overall, there is a lack of comprehensive data around ethnicity, hindering a complete understanding of the issue.

### Sexual orientation and gender identity

- National data indicates that the prevalence of domestic abuse in homosexual relationships is as high as in heterosexual relationships, and transgender individuals are more likely to be victims of domestic abuse than cisgender individuals. However, very little data was found on sexual orientation and gender identity collected across South Yorkshire, limiting the understanding of these aspects in the local context.

### Disability and support needs

There is a high prevalence of disability, both physical and mental, among individuals referred to domestic abuse services. Mental health needs are also significantly represented in this demographic.

## 3.2.2. Meeting the needs of those experiencing domestic abuse and homelessness in South Yorkshire

### **Local authorities' duty**

Local authorities in England have a statutory duty to provide accommodation to anyone escaping their home due to violence (Domestic Act, 2021). Homelessness prevention approaches in England (Homelessness Reduction Act, 2017) also place duties to local authorities to prevent homelessness in all circumstances, with services designed to 'meet the needs of persons in the authority's district including, in particular, the needs of...' several groups, including 'victims of domestic abuse'.

In all South Yorkshire local authorities, there is a single route of access to accommodation support for victims of domestic abuse with councils working closely with domestic abuse support services.

<sup>42</sup> ManKind (2021). Making Invisible Men, Visible. <https://www.mankind.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Making-Invisible-Men-Visible-Guide-Final.pdf>

Where risk is high and immediate action is required, support workers and other professionals can however work directly with refuges and provide safe accommodation.

## Local provision

### Accommodation-based support

Barnsley	Doncaster	Rotherham	Sheffield
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Women-only refuge (8 self-contained units, IDAS)</li> <li>Safe accommodation (4 dispersed properties, Target Housing/IDAS)</li> <li>Safe Housing (4 units for female offenders with experience of domestic abuse, IDAS/HumanKind)</li> <li>Emergency housing within social housing stock</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refuge and dispersed accommodation (Riverside)</li> <li>Refuge (Phoenix Women's Aid)</li> <li><i>UNDERWAY</i> – safe accommodation (10 dispersed properties)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refuge (Rotherham Rise)</li> <li>Safe accommodation (8 dispersed properties)</li> <li>13 councils' properties for TA use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 refuges which include crash pad provision (Sheffield Women's Aid and IDAS)</li> <li>Safe Zones accommodation (62 units across refuge and safe zones / Sheffield Women's Aid and IDAS)</li> <li>Sanctuary schemes (around 50 tenancies)</li> <li>Young women refuge (20 units, YWHP)</li> </ul>

### Community-based support

Barnsley	Doncaster	Rotherham	Sheffield
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Independent Domestic Abuse Services (IDAS) is the commissioned provider of community support for domestic abuse. IDAS provide a range of services including support for children victims of domestic abuse.</li> <li>Cranstoun Inspire to Change is a programme for men and women who have been abusive, controlling, or violent towards their partner.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Doncaster Domestic Abuse Hub acts as a 'one stop shop'. Partners in the Hub include Doncaster Council, Doncaster Children's Services Trust, Riverside and Phoenix WoMen's Aid.</li> <li>Cranstoun Inspire to Change is a programme for men and women who have been abusive, controlling, or violent towards their partner.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rotherham Rise is the commissioned provider of community support for domestic abuse. It provides a range of services for men and women, including an advice phoneline, , support for children, young people and families and counselling.</li> <li>Cranstoun Inspire to Change is a programme for men and women who have been abusive, controlling, or violent towards their partner.</li> <li>Rothacs is a counselling service, which specialises in working with survivors of sexual, physical or emotional abuse and domestic violence</li> <li>Apna Haq is a survivor-led organisation supporting BME women.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Independent Domestic Abuse Services (IDAS) is the commissioned provider of community support for domestic abuse.</li> <li>Ashiana Sheffield is a specialist service for Black and Minority Ethnic victims.</li> <li>Hackenthorpe Lodge is the Sexual Assault Referral Centre for Sheffield.</li> <li>Cranstoun Inspire to Change is a programme for men and women who have been abusive, controlling, or violent towards their partner.</li> <li>Haven – Support for children affected by Domestic Abuse</li> <li>VIDA – Counselling / therapy services for women.</li> </ul>



### 3.2.3 Challenges and gaps in provision

#### **Accommodation provision**

Since the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act in 2021, the provision of specialist accommodation, such as refuges and safe accommodations, has increased across the four local authorities. However, a significant issue arises from the lack of move-on options, making it challenging to free up spaces within these accommodations and take on new clients. As a result, some local authorities have had to rely on hotel stock or temporary accommodations as alternatives due to the unavailability or unsuitability of specialised provision. This approach fails to meet the needs of victims for several reasons. Temporary accommodations often do not provide the necessary safety measures to protect victims from perpetrators. These accommodations can also be mixed gender and can lack support services.

Traditional models of refuge and safe accommodation often fail to adequately serve certain groups, leaving significant gaps in support. These models (typically shared accommodation) can lack the flexibility to accommodate the unique needs of older people, individuals with disabilities or physical health issues, large families, families with older male children, males or transgender individuals. Individuals who work are also underserved. Another critically under-served group includes women with multiple disadvantages, such as severe mental illness, problematic substance use, and criminal histories. For these women, experiences of domestic abuse are often intertwined with other forms of trauma, creating a complex web of needs that traditional services are ill-equipped to address. Their compounded disadvantages make it particularly difficult for them to navigate and benefit from existing services, exacerbating their vulnerability and perpetuating a cycle of neglect and abuse.

To address some of these issues, local authorities are increasingly providing dispersed, self-contained accommodation as a form of safe housing. This approach aims to ensure that more individuals can benefit from domestic abuse provisions. However, challenges remain in delivering person-centred and targeted support alongside these accommodations. Additionally, issues related to move-on support persist, making it difficult for individuals to transition smoothly from safe accommodation to long-term housing solutions.

#### **Alternative to moving**

For a number of victims and survivors, moving home is not feasible or what they want. Relocating can disrupt essential support networks, including family, friends, and community connections, which are crucial for emotional and practical support. The challenge of adapting to a new environment can also be overwhelming, particularly for those already dealing with the trauma of abuse. These disruptions can hinder the recovery process and lead to further isolation.

Sheffield Sanctuary Scheme is a multi-agency initiative providing support enabling households at risk of violence to remain in their own homes and reduce repeat victimisation through the provision of enhanced security measures and domestic abuse support. Stakeholders reported that the scheme has successfully assisted more people than initially anticipated. Similar initiatives exist in other local authorities, and stakeholders highlighted their benefits in preventing homelessness and creating a stable environment for recovery for victims and their children.

### Alternative to moving – other models

- **London Early Intervention and Accommodation project** - The London Early Intervention and Accommodation pilot is managed by Respect, SafeLives and Social Finance in partnership with 10 London Boroughs and has been funded for 1 year by MOPAC under their Covid-19 Emergency Accommodation programme. The intervention offers temporary hotel accommodation and intensive behaviour change support for those identified by Children's Social Care as being at risk of, or already, perpetrating abuse. Evidence demonstrated that removing the perpetrator from the family home led to a reduction in abuse and provides emotional space for them to engage in the intervention and begin to understand and address the issues underlying their abuse.
- **North Yorkshire Making Safe Scheme** - Making Safe was a multi-agency service based in North Yorkshire, providing perpetrators with accommodation for up to two years alongside behavioural change intervention as well as advocacy support for victims and families. Findings from the research study highlighted themes around increased perpetrator accountability, the changing balance of power in abusive relationships and the increased opportunities for victims and their families to engage in recovery work whilst remaining in the family home.
- **Managed Reciprocal:** A Managed Reciprocal scheme is a voluntary collaboration between local authorities and housing associations, coordinated by an independent agency. The aim is to enable social tenants who are at risk of abuse or violence to move to a safe area without losing their social tenancy. The coordinating agency keeps track of moves to ensure that the system is fair for all housing providers involved and works closely with domestic abuse specialist services to ensure that victims/survivors are supported through their relocation. The model implemented as part of this project is based on the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal, coordinated by Safer London.

### Community-based services

Stakeholders have raised concerns regarding the lack of resources and funding for community-based services. The Domestic Abuse Act created a new statutory duty for local authorities to commission accommodation-based services. While this has been welcomed and has led to increased funding and longer contract lengths, community-based services have not received the same focus, investment, or protection.

Accommodation-based services are essential but often focus on downstream crisis intervention rather than preventative measures. They do not necessarily address the needs of individuals currently at risk of violence or those living with the trauma of past abuse, which can manifest in poor mental health or substance use, further undermining housing stability. These services primarily tackle immediate or impending housing problems, which may do little to support recovery from trauma.

Research by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner found that most survivors prefer support from community-based rather than accommodation-based services, seeking both practical advice and emotional support<sup>43</sup>. Stakeholders expressed concerns about the lack of resources and capacity dedicated to community-based services which play a crucial role in identifying and supporting individuals at risk of domestic abuse and homelessness. These services can offer practical advice,

<sup>43</sup> Domestic Abuse Commissioner (2023) A patchwork of provision. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-patchwork-of-provision-mapping-report>

emotional support and early intervention can prevent situations from deteriorating to the point of homelessness. Specialist community-based services are particularly important for migrants and those with No Recourse to Public Fund, BAME populations, and people with protected characteristics (e.g., LGBTQIA+), who are less likely to report to the police or statutory services.

Like for homelessness frontline services, staff shortages were reported within community-based services, increasing pressure on frontline workers who are already at overcapacity.

### **Children support and inter-family prevention**

Stakeholders have also highlighted a significant gap in support for children. The Domestic Abuse Act recognises children as victims of domestic abuse in their own right. While there is some support for children in safe accommodation, such as access to support workers and therapeutic interventions, this is often short-term and insufficient. Children exposed to domestic abuse are at high risk of experiencing trauma and adverse childhood experiences, which can lead to long-term psychological, emotional, and behavioural issues.

One stakeholder emphasised the importance of true prevention, asking: *'We always talked about being trauma informed. What about thousands of children with adverse childhood experiences? They are our victims and perpetrators of the future. Where's the funding? Where's the support?'*

Stakeholders also talked about the opportunity to introduce a suite of prevention and whole-family approach support services to support relating to inter-family dynamics as well as perpetrators.

**Positive Choices (+Choices), LB Croydon** - The programme is available for anyone aged 16 years or above, regardless of gender or sexuality, who are engaged in abusive behaviour towards their current or former intimate partners, or immediate family members, providing the opportunity to recognise, acknowledge and change that behaviour. +Choices provides support to a person causing harm, at all risk levels, offering different pathways of support including disrupt, triage and short-term support, one to one or group interventions, with the opportunity to then become a peer mentor.

**Engage, Cheshire** - The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) and My Cheshire Without Abuse (My CWA) wanted to improve domestic abuse services across Cheshire with an emphasis on challenging perpetrators. The Engage programme is a short practical intervention that aims to engage perpetrators and seeks to address the lack of support and confidence of professionals to work with perpetrators leading to their continued abuse of current and future adult and child victims.

**Growing Futures, Doncaster** - Research with families in Doncaster in 2015 showed a widespread culture of acceptance of DVA in some communities, in addition to considerable antipathy toward local services. The Growing Futures programme combined targeted, whole-family support from Domestic Abuse Navigators with outreach work to challenge community attitudes. Domestic Abuse Navigators worked with family members including perpetrators delivering therapeutic interventions, creating trusting relationships and acting as enablers to effect a whole family joint working across relevant agencies. This was supported by partnerships between the Children Services, Doncaster Council, police, probation, housing, third sector providers, NHS Trust and drug and alcohol services. The programme demonstrated

decreases in repeat MARAC referrals in its first year and a reduction in cases of looked-after children that feature DVA.

### **Preventing domestic abuse in the community**

In a similar way as the lack of funding for community-based services, stakeholders reported the lack of resources, funding and capacity to focus on universal prevention. They highlighted the need for a comprehensive approach to preventing domestic abuse that includes school programmes, community initiatives and awareness campaigns to address the issue as its roots.

### **3.2.4 Towards better prevention**

The current situation surrounding domestic abuse and homelessness underscores the need for better prevention and the development of long-term housing solutions to break the cycle of abuse and foster a safer environment for all. The following recommendations are relevant for regional responses / interventions:

#### **Longer-term housing solutions**

- The focus should be to diversify existing accommodation for those victims of domestic abuse and making sure provision is accessible to those with additional needs and protected characteristics.
- A number of actions could be considered to improve access to housing, including for those needing to move-on from the refuge. These measures should also be seen as resources to support a more ‘housing-led’ approach in which people are re-housed directly wherever possible and desirable, drawing in a range of supports as necessary.
  - A flexible funding pot which could be used to offer loans to cover PRS deposits and requirements for 6 months rent upfront (which would be re-paid when UC payments are received), and to cover other expenses – household items, storage, costs of moving,
  - A stronger Private Rented Sector (PRS) procurement/ lease offer for survivors and their families, linking into the existing expertise and relationships within Housing Options.
  - Building relationships with South Yorkshire’s key social landlords to open up additional sources of properties across the region.

#### **New standards and guidelines for social landlords**

- Social landlords play a critical role in safeguarding residents and preventing homelessness and could develop and implement a shared domestic abuse protocol. This protocol would establish a set of standards and guidelines designed to protect domestic abuse victims and prevent them from becoming homeless. It should include practical actions such as changing locks, installing video doorbells, and breaking joint tenancy agreements with abusers to ensure the safety and security of victims. → [Hackney Council introduced the first social landlords domestic abuse protocols in 2024.](#)

### **Regional training and early prevention programme**

- Coordinating delivering shared prevention programme / materials, rather than dispersing efforts at the local authority level, presents an opportunity to maximise resources across the four local authorities in South Yorkshire:
  - Shared resources could be used for youth engagement programmes and to strengthen education in schools around healthy relationships.
  - Implementation of community and public service training of housing officers, social workers, healthcare providers, and law enforcement personnel, to enhance their ability to respond effectively to domestic abuse. This training should equip them with the necessary skills to identify signs of abuse, communicate sensitively with survivors, and provide appropriate support and referrals.
  - A South Yorkshire public awareness campaign designed to raise awareness about domestic abuse, promote available resources, and encourage community members to take action against abuse could be sought. By coordinating these efforts at a regional level, the campaign can achieve greater reach and impact, ensuring that the message is consistently reinforced across South Yorkshire.

## 4. What is next for the region?

### 4.1 The challenges

South Yorkshire faces unique and significant challenges in addressing homelessness. The indicators for homelessness are concerning, highlighting a significant rise in homelessness and demand for services. However, the effectiveness of support in preventing and relieving homelessness has evidently decreased. Last year, only half of those presenting to local authorities at risk of homelessness and a third presenting as homeless secured accommodation. This has led to an increasing number of households in temporary accommodation, placing a substantial financial burden on council finances (£4,725m in 2022/2023) and having the known detrimental effects on individuals and families.

The homelessness challenges in South Yorkshire reflect national trends but evidence gathered also highlight some clear specificities, including:

- A disproportionate impact of homelessness on certain groups, including young people and ethnic minorities. These groups often experience hidden forms of homelessness such as sofa-surfing or temporary stays with family, which frequently escalate to formal homelessness. These hidden forms of homelessness, although often overlooked in official statistics, represent a significant portion of housing instability in the region.
- An increasing number of families with children presenting to services. In 2023/24, this concerned 950 households.
- A notable increase in the number of female rough sleepers (+30% since 2020) reflecting unique vulnerabilities and complex needs of women experiencing multiple disadvantages in the region.
- A sharp rise in households presenting to services with support needs, surpassing the national average by 20%.
- An important increase in households facing the threat of homelessness despite being employed (22% of all owed a prevention duty) compared to national figures, indicating rising in-work poverty and housing affordability issues. Domestic abuse continues to be a major factor driving homelessness in South Yorkshire, above national trends. Around 1,500 households required housing assistance from the councils due to risk of or homelessness in 2023/24.
- Local prisons are at capacity and release into homelessness are higher in South Yorkshire than elsewhere in the UK. Evidence also indicates ongoing challenges in securing stable housing after release.

In relation to housing:

- Historically, South Yorkshire had more council housing available than other regions and relied heavily on social housing to relieve homelessness. Consequently, prevention work was not prioritised. However, effective prevention work is essential now relieving homelessness through social housing alone cannot be the sole solution.
- There is a significant shortage of affordable housing and heightened competition for available stock. Relatively low house prices in the region attract various parties, including the Home Office, making it difficult for stakeholders in the region to access affordable and suitable stock, including Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO).
- Local councils in South Yorkshire heavily rely on social housing and B&Bs to provide emergency accommodation, resulting in substantial expenditure and placing increased pressure on council finances.

- A significant proportion (18%) of substandard housing conditions in the private rented sector contributing of mental and physical health issues, evictions, and heightened competition for quality housing, exacerbating the risk of homelessness.

It is clear that housing quality, affordability and availability, health disparities, and socio-economic deprivation stand out as prominent factors amplifying the risk of homelessness. Long standing issues of poverty have been exacerbated by austerity, welfare reforms and the cost-of-living crisis causing increased hardship and confusion for people and services. Funding mechanisms have also been short-term in nature and the localism agenda has meant that more responsibility has been shifted to local authorities at a time of reduced funding and increasing demand.

While there is no quick fix for the structural issues underlying the broader social and economic challenges that the region and its population is facing, there are a number of key areas in which the region can improve its response. This includes mitigating the impact of structural issues and embedding a culture of homelessness prevention into systems and processes, supporting those that are multiply excluded, victims of domestic abuse or leaving institutions. This also means supporting those households, including families with children, before they become homelessness. Crucially, this also includes ensuring the right supply of affordable and suitable homes which respond to the needs and circumstances of each household.

### **Identified priority and areas for action**

The region is well-placed to address these challenges due to its dynamic and diverse community sector, a willing social housing and supported accommodation sector, and dedicated partners across housing, health, criminal justice system, skills and employment who care deeply about these issues and actively work in partnership. The region also benefits from strong local leadership, innovative practices in service delivery, and a commitment to multi-agency collaboration. The Sheffield [Homewards](#) programme, for example, is a promising example of how cross-sector partners can be brought together behind the single cause of preventing and ending homelessness. However, while the foundational elements are in place, the system is not functioning as it should. By enhancing coordination, improving communication, and ensuring that the dots are appropriately joined between homelessness and the other strategic agendas (health, housing, skills and employment, communities) the region can better leverage these strengths. A concerted effort to break down the silos that too often isolate homelessness can drive meaningful changes, ensuring that the system works more effectively to prevent homelessness and support those in need.

### **Strategic priority: Ensuring all residents have access to suitable and accessible homes**

In its manifesto, the newly re-elected Mayor highlighted his ambition for a *"right to safe, secure, warm housing for everyone."* This is essential, and SYMCA and partners have a significant role to play. It is estimated that 5,000 new homes per annum are needed to meet the current housing demand in South Yorkshire, including 2,000 affordable homes. The [SYMCA Housing Framework](#) sets out how it will increase social housing stock, provide more specialist support housing, and work to improve quality standards. The development of a pipeline through the newly formed [Strategic Place Partnership](#) with Homes England is a step in the right direction, but there is a need to further define the housing need of those at risk of and homeless in the region and create **a dedicated housing pipeline that responds to homeless households**. This means ensuring the right type of housing, with the right design, in the right place. There is a risk that homelessness housing needs, once again, are addressed in silos, leading to fragmented efforts and suboptimal outcomes.



Provision of new homes does not always have to involve new builds; acquisition of existing properties can also play a vital role. And whether this is intentionally recognised or not, the PRS serves also as a solution, despite being at the same time a key cause of homelessness. The ongoing [Let Zero](#) project is an example of efforts to improve conditions in the PRS. This 18-month pilot project will focus on 200 homes in South Yorkshire, providing landlords with a 'trusted path' for upgrades tailored to the specific needs of their tenants. Homewards Sheffield's Innovative Housing Project is focusing on exploring innovative ways to work with landlords, tenants and community organisations to support families to access the PRS and sustain tenancies. Work by Homewards is also underway to explore best practice in homeless prevention and tenancy sustainment in the PRS, involving a range of partners across the public, private and philanthropic sector. The newly formed SYMCA PRS Steering Group is also looking at improving conditions in the PRS. However, there is a need for a more strategic vision around the PRS, recognising its dual role as both a solution to and a cause of homelessness and establishing a foundation **for improved quality, security, and availability of PRS** housing for vulnerable households.

Supported housing plays a crucial role in both preventing and alleviating homelessness, providing essential day-to-day support for households with specific needs and those facing multiple disadvantages. The sector has grappled with short-term funding challenges, making stable accommodation a persistent issue. However, recent regulatory changes present a timely opportunity for local authorities in South Yorkshire to integrate their supported housing assessments with strategic planning, ensuring targeted and adequate provision. However, **increasing local supply of quality supported housing can only go so far without a strategic, partnership-led approach.** To achieve this, it is crucial that different partners of the system embrace the philosophy that housing is everyone's business, developing a shared understanding of each agency's respective responsibilities. Housing and Health roundtables organised in South Yorkshire in 2024 have provided valuable platforms to explore how relationships between health providers and the housing sector can be strengthened. Whilst health has a key role to play, it is also crucial for relationships with social care to evolve to ensure cohesive support for vulnerable populations. By **joining the dots between housing, health and social care sectors**, South Yorkshire can enhance its ability to provide holistic and effective support, ultimately improving outcomes for individuals facing homelessness and multiple disadvantages.

### Areas for action

The research identified the following areas for action for SYMCA and its partners.

#### Prevention-focused policies and interventions

*Early support measures and targeted programme to prevent households from becoming homeless*

#### A new regional workstream: PRS access, prevention and health

- Develop a strategic vision for the PRS bringing together PRS access, prevention and health (compliance) workstream.
- Consider a range of PRS tools and incentives as a region, drive a PRS campaign targeting landlords to maximise supply, and explore opportunities for setting up a social letting agency.
- Ensure that the PRS access work takes a compliance approach.

**Alignment:** *Ongoing Homewards work around PRS access and prevention (Innovative Housing Project, work looking at reducing the number of empty homes in Sheffield, identification of best practices); SYMCA Housing and Health roundtable; SYMCA PRS Steering Group work around PRS conditions; Let Zero project.*

**Who:** SYMCA, Local authorities Housing, Homewards, National Landlord Association, South Yorkshire Landlord Forum.

### Regional whole-family programme

— Explore what a whole-family programme to prevent family breakdown, domestic abuse and family and youth homelessness could look like in the region. This should focus on upstream prevention activities such as schools programme, mediation, parenting support and the provision of intensive family support for those with higher needs. The approach should aim to reduce youth and family homelessness, prevent domestic abuse, and ultimately reduce the need to move families and costs of temporary accommodation.

**Alignment:** *Homewards Sheffield pilot projects including The Upstream Survey ( a universal homelessness prevention model in secondary schools), working with people with lived experience to raise awareness and share knowledge and skills in schools; exploring ways to support and scale existing upstream and targeted prevention activity for young people and families.*

**Who:** SYMCA, Local authorities' Housing, Domestic Abuse, Children and Social Services; Homewards, VCS sector, PCC, Domestic abuse; social landlords.

### Specialist support and provision

*Combining resources, providing specialist provision and encouraging innovation in service delivery*

#### SYMCA specialist provision pipeline

- Development of pipeline investment projects addressing the need for specialist accommodation and support services of groups which are currently failed by the current provision. This includes:
- Women with multiple disadvantages / complex needs, including those with children or who have had their children removed.
  - Older prison leavers with health and care (and sometimes social) needs.
  - Revolving door cohort – combining complex issues such as drug and alcohol addictions, homelessness and repeated low-level non-violent offending. Their health, care and offending related needs go hand in hand with trauma, persistent poverty, long-term unemployment and social exclusion.
  - Individuals with housing needs willing to work – those needing financial support to take on employment due to wage not being sufficient to cover the cost of independent or supported living.
  - Families at risk of breakdown
- Opportunity for local authorities to better strategic plan for their supported accommodation provision with the new regulation and the requirement for new needs assessment.

**Alignment:** *Target Housing GROW project (new pilot provision for women with complex needs who have had their children removed); Housing First programmes; Local authorities' requirement for new Supported Accommodation Needs Assessment.*

**Who:** SYMCA; local authorities' Housing and Adult social care; social landlords and supported accommodation providers (incl. SYHA and Target Housing), ICB, Probation.

### Regional Housing First

- Expansion of and improvements to the fidelity of Housing First provision in the city for those with complex needs, exploring national devolution opportunities and inter-agency working. Opportunity to develop more consistency, collaboration opportunities (joint-bidding, sharing of best practice/ resources/learnings) and need to embed health and wider partners (e.g., police, probation).

**Alignment:** *Existing Housing First programmes in Sheffield, Doncaster and Rotherham.*

**Who:** SYMCA; local authorities' Housing and Adult Social Care, SYHA, Target Housing, NHS ICB, Probation, PCC.

### Pro-active engagement at key transition points

*Establish robust frameworks that ensure no one slips through the cracks of support services*

#### Transition protocols and systems guidance

- Development of protocols and system guidance (e.g. prison release, hospital release) to ensure early identification of needs and continuity of engagement at key transition points in the system. This should involve the review of all key accommodation support pathways and the identification of reasonable adjustments to be made for different groups / profiles. See *section 3.1 for specific recommendations around the homeless prison leavers cohort.*
- Review of existing information sharing system and scoping of potential investment to ensure better continuity of care.
- Review efficacy of multi-agency resettlement support panels (and how these follow-up individual pre- and post- release)
- Explore the opportunity to embed more peer-navigators at key transition points / scale up existing initiatives. Look to develop commissioning framework.

**Alignment:** *NHS Reconnect, A&E Navigators..*

**Who:** Local authorities' Housing and Adult Social Care, Probation, PCC, local prisons, NHS ICB, VCS sector, social landlords and supported housing providers.

### Employment and skills support

*Develop employment and skills opportunities to raise equality of skills of vulnerable households, champion lived experiences and build a more resilient sector*

#### Work and skills development pathways

- Develop work and training opportunities for those experiencing multiple disadvantages and those transitioning out of homelessness. This should include different pathways, including a peer-support pathways linked to job placement and opportunities to create a pool of peer-support workers for the region.
- Ensure that work and training opportunities developed in the region are accessible to those at risk of homelessness or homeless.
- Support frontline workers: explore better training and career progression opportunities for frontline workers.

**Alignment:** *Changing Futures Sheffield peer-worker programme; Homewards Sheffield looking to map out skills gaps in the region and to facilitate new employment opportunities and pathways via partners; SYHA Good Work project.*

**Who:** SYMCA, Local authorities' Employment and Skills, Homewards Sheffield, SYHA, skills and employment providers, NHS ICB, VCS sector, Careers Hubs.

**Working together***Achieving collective and sustainable outcomes***Evidence-driven and collaborative partnerships and decision-making**

- Identify KPIs and measures to align understanding of homelessness and key issues across the region. These should be used to track progress against collective objectives and cross-cutting projects.
- Explore how health can be better integrated in ongoing homelessness work across the region.
- Explore ways to better identify households at risk of homelessness in more 'hidden' situations (those in the PRS, sofa/surfing and staying with friends and family etc.
- Develop a lived experience pledge to ensure lived experiences are involved in the design and delivery of services across South Yorkshire.
- SYMCA to create capacity to steer and coordinate the delivery of regional homelessness workstreams.

**Alignment:** *NHS ICB Health Inclusion Strategy; Homewards ongoing work on data and analytics; Changing Futures.*