

JSNA Health and Wellbeing Profile 2020/21

Homelessness

Summary points

- Homelessness is associated with severe poverty and adverse health. Recent ONS statistics indicate the mean age of death for identified homeless cases was 45 years for males and 43 for females. The ONS data highlights that the Bristol local authority area has one of the highest numbers of deaths among people identified as homeless.
- Bristol's figure (per thousand households) for people identified as being owed the main homelessness duty but not considered priority need is a quarter of the national average and one of the lowest rates among the core cities
- Bristol's figure (per thousand households) for those households currently in temporary accommodation is the third highest in the core cities, indicating the pressure on providing suitable move on accommodation for homeless households.
- In late 2019, Bristol City Council reported 98 rough sleepers in the National Rough Sleeper Count, the fifth highest number nationally.

Homelessness findings

Homelessness is associated with severe poverty and adverse health, education and social outcomes. Households who have become homeless through no fault of their own and are in priority need (such as families, victims of domestic abuse and people with significant health conditions) are some of the most vulnerable and needy members of the community. Although there are many different types of homeless households, rough sleeping is the most visible manifestation of homelessness. Many people who sleep rough will suffer from multiple health problems, such as mental health problems and they are also in greater danger of violence than in the general population. Other health impacts associated with rough sleeping include higher rates of communicable diseases such as TB, HIV and hepatitis. National research from 2012 indicated that the average life expectancy of a homeless person is 47 years old and even lower for homeless women (43 years), compared with 77 for the general public¹. More recent ONS experimental statistics of the number of deaths of homeless people in England and Wales, registered between 2013 and 2018, indicated that mean age at death for identified homeless cases was 45 years for males and 43 years for females².

The ONS research noted that deaths of homeless people were identified in 191 of 339 local authorities (LAs) in England and Wales. The LAs with the highest number of estimated deaths included:

- Birmingham (23 deaths)
- Newcastle upon Tyne (20 deaths)
- Manchester (19 deaths)
- Bristol (17 deaths)
- Westminster (17 deaths)
- Liverpool (16 deaths)

¹ Bethan Thomas, Homelessness Kills, University of Sheffield and Crisis, 2012

² Office for National Statistics (ONS), Deaths of homeless people in England and Wales: 2018, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/deathsofhomelesspeopleinenglandandwales/2018>

Households who are owed duties under the homelessness legislation (Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended)) tend to have greater public health needs than the population as a whole.

On 3rd April 2018, the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 came into force. This significantly amended the Housing Act 1996 to introduce new duties designed to help those households who are not in priority need (such as single people without significant health issues) or who have become homeless intentionally. These new duties are the 'prevention' duty, which is owed to all eligible households who are likely to become homeless within 56 days, and the 'relief' duty, which is owed to all eligible households who are actually homeless. Despite the introduction of these duties, 134 applicants were still found not to be in priority need during 2019/20 as the Council was unable to assist them into alternative accommodation under the new duties. However, this figure is still slightly lower than the corresponding figure of 152 in 2015/16. Bristol now has one of the lowest rates amongst the English core cities and other comparable cities (fig 1).

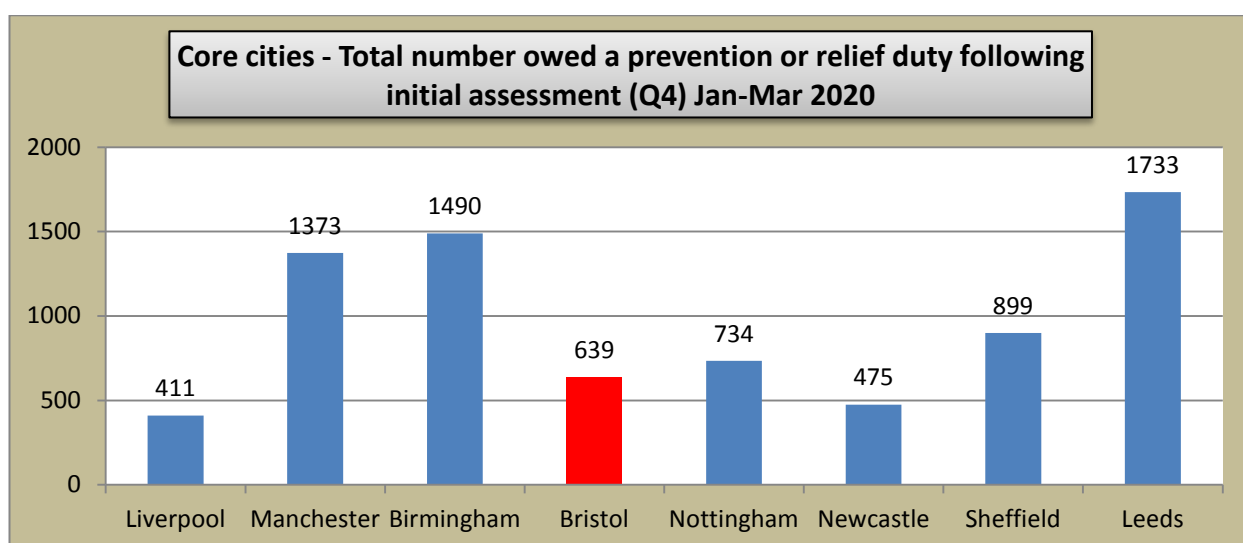


Fig 1: Prevention or relief duty owed following initial assessment – Core Cities. Source: Public Health Profiles Data

The number of applicants towards whom the main homelessness duty was accepted reached its peak in 2015/16 at 1,006 (5.30 per 1,000 households), a rise from 324 (1.76 per 1,000 households) in 2012/13. However, this figure had fallen to 721 in 2017/18. Partly due to the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act, which led to many homeless applicants being assisted at an earlier stage in the process, the number of main duties accepted fell further to just 408 in 2018/19. However, it is likely that this was an artificially low figure. Due to the fact that a main duty cannot normally be accepted within the first 56 days of an application because of the existence of the relief duty, there was a significant period at the start of this year during which virtually no main duties were accepted. By 2019/20, the number of main duty acceptances had increased again to 704, which is a similar level to that which existed prior to the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act.

It is difficult to pinpoint a single reason for the rise and fall in the number of homelessness acceptances. However, the single biggest contributory factor behind the rise had been private landlords seeking possession of their properties (i.e. Section 21 notices) for financial reasons, often due to concerns over changes to the housing benefit system affecting payments (e.g.

benefits cap). It is likely that the number of landlords taking possession of their properties in this way simply reached a peak then tailed off.

Predicting future numbers of main duty acceptances is difficult. It is likely that prevention and relief work undertaken through the new duties in the Homelessness Reduction Act will keep the number main duty acceptances below 2015/16 levels for the foreseeable future. However, future welfare benefit changes (i.e. universal credit) could result in more landlords seeking possession once again. The impact of COVID-19 upon homelessness figures also remains to be seen.

727 households were in temporary accommodation under the homelessness legislation in Bristol at the end of March 2020, continuing a general trend upwards since 2012/13, albeit with some quarterly fluctuations. This figure did include some households who were being accommodated outside the homelessness legislation in line with Government instructions relating to COVID-19. This number is believed to be around 120. The March 2020 figure per 1,000 households was 3.99 (Fig 3). This places Bristol with the 3rd highest of English Core Cities and it is now greater the national average of 3.4 per 1,000³ and has continued to increase into 2020-21 (fig 2)

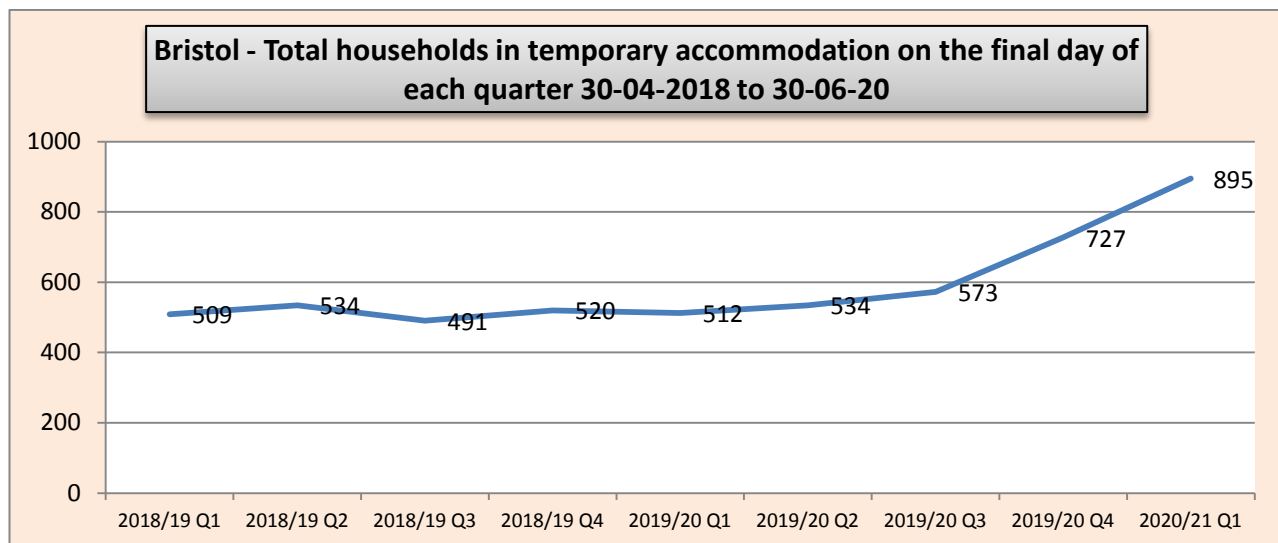


Fig 2: Households in temporary accommodation on the final day of each quarter. Source: BCC internally reported figures

³ 'Public Health England. Public Health Profiles. [05/11/19] <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk> © Crown copyright [2019]'

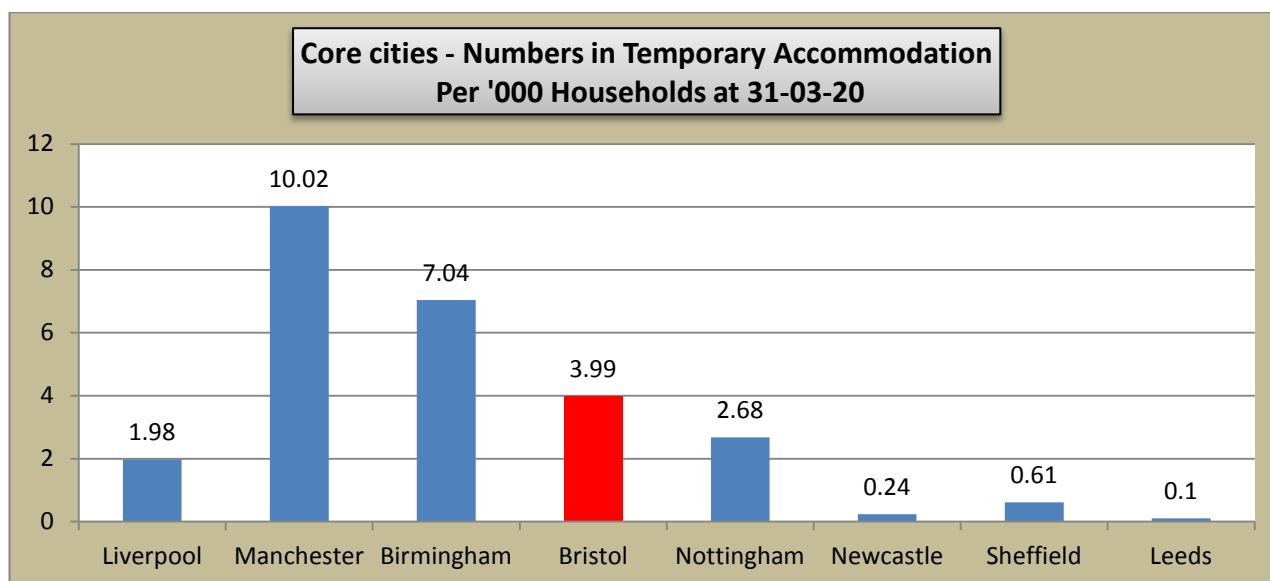


Fig 3: Households in temporary accommodation per 1,000 households – Core Cities. Source: Public Health Profiles Data

Rough Sleepers

In late 2019, Bristol City Council reported 98 rough sleepers in the National Rough Sleeper Count⁴, the fifth highest number nationally. This was a rise on the 82 recorded as sleeping rough in 2018, and 41 in 2014. How Bristol's rough sleeper count compares to other core cities is illustrated in Figure 3.

A count is a single night snapshot of the number of rough sleepers in a local authority area. Each Local Authority either conducts a street count or provides an estimate. Counts are independently verified by Homeless Link.

Equalities data: Of the 98 rough sleepers reported in 2019:

- 61 were UK or Irish nationals, 15 were other EU nationals, 7 were from outside the EU and 15 were of unknown nationality.
- 3 were aged 25 or under, 30 were between 26 and 35 years old, 38 were between 36 and 50 years old, 11 were between 51 and 60 years old, one was between 61 and 70 years old, and 15 were of unknown age.
- 76 were male, 13 were female and 9 were of unknown gender.

⁴ Rough sleeping in England: autumn 2018 (released Jan 2019) <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/rough-sleeping-in-england-autumn-2018>

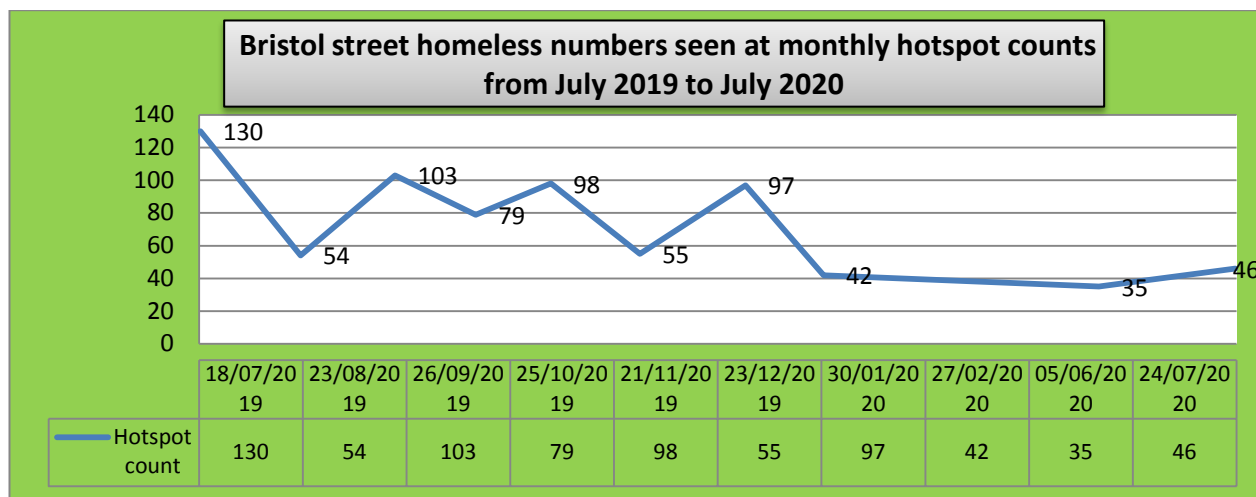


Fig 4: Monthly rough sleeping figures Source: BCC internally reported figures

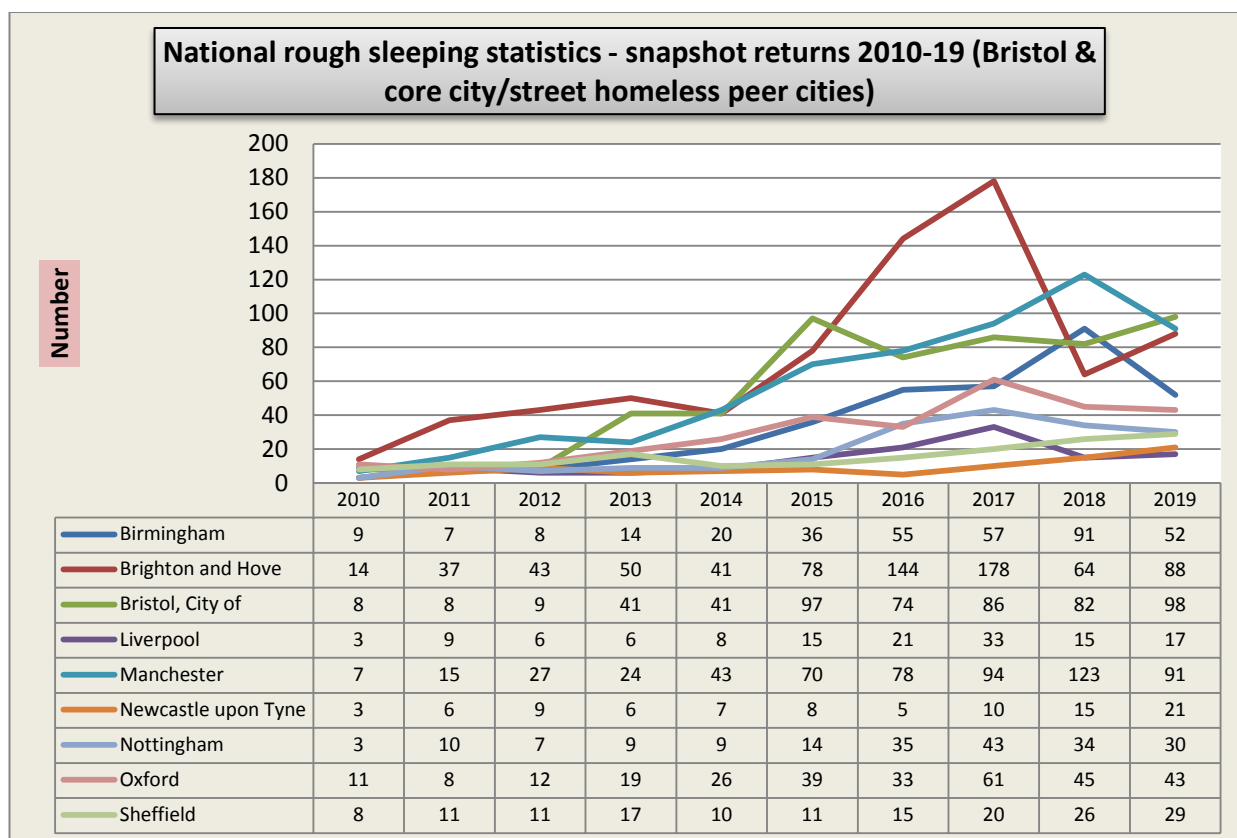


Fig 5: Number of rough sleepers – Core Cities. Source: Rough sleeping in England

Further data / links:

- Public Health Profiles - <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/>
- Office for National Statistics (ONS), Deaths of homeless people (England and Wales 2013-18) <https://www.ons.gov.uk/deathsofhomelesspeopleinenglandandwales/2018>
- National Rough Sleeping Strategy - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-rough-sleeping-strategy>

Date updated: September 2020