

Church and Homelessness Survey Report

January 2017

Introduction

At the end of 2016, Church Housing Trust¹, Housing Justice² and Word on the Streets³ promoted research in the UK on how churches are responding to the needs of homeless people.

Churches across the UK are involved with individuals on their journey out of homelessness. This is not just trying to help them find accommodation but involves other social actions such as improving life skills such as literacy, night shelters, addiction groups, etc. This is because homelessness is a complex problem that often has multiple causes which play out on an individual level. Many people who experience homelessness face a number of complex and overlapping issues, such as drug and alcohol addiction, mental health problems, childhood trauma, poverty and destitution. And this is the visible part of homelessness, let alone people who are in emergency accommodation, 'sofa surfing', etc

The purpose of the survey was to find out what churches are doing for homeless people and the challenges they face in meeting the seemingly increasing demand. This information will be used to inform church leaders and policy makers about the role the church community is playing, and the support and resources needed.

To answer these questions, a survey was created and this was promoted to contacts of all denominations and church streams across the UK from November 2016 - January 2017. There were 39 responses which are analysed below.

If you have any questions about the information, please contact us through the Word on the Streets website.



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¹ www.churchhousingtrust.org.uk

² www.housingjustice.org.uk

³ www.wordonthestreets.net

Promoted by



Executive Summary

Churches who responded to the survey have seen increases in various aspects of homelessness in the last 12 months.

The top aspects that have increased visibility are:

- Visible rough sleeping on the streets 74.4%
- Individuals and families staying on friend's sofas 69.2%
- An increasing number of privately rented properties 61.5%
- Begging and anti-social behaviour from rough sleepers 59.0%
- Young adults unable to leave home 53.8%

73.7% of churches have callers who are experiencing homelessness come to their church for help either once or twice a week (42.1%) or every day (31.6%).

Churches are helping 18 (mean) people per week. This involves 20 (mean) volunteers per week. Smaller churches seem to be punching above their weight given their membership.

Churches are seeing a challenging level of demand regardless of the level of deprivation in the area.

The categories of people who are experiencing homelessness come to churches for support are mainly:

- People suffering from addiction 89.7%
- Single men 89.7%
- People primarily with mental health issues 82.1%
- Ex-offenders 74.4%
- Victims of domestic violence 48.7%
- Migrants from the European Economic Area (EEA) 41.0%
- Refugees / asylum seekers 35.9%
- Veterans 33.3%

Churches do not turn people away but help those experiencing homelessness mainly as follows:

- Put them in contact with statutory services 81.6%
- Our church runs social actions which involve homeless people 78.9%
- Give them food, clothes or other items 78.9%
- Direct them to a local service run by another church 42.1%
- Allow them to shelter in the church 31.6%

The top 10 social actions run by churches for people who are experiencing homelessness are:

- Food distribution 79.50%
- Meals for needy 71.80%
- Clothes/goods distribution 64.10%
- Helping homeless get settled 56.40%
- Night Shelter 51.30%
- Addiction (inc. alcohol and drug abuse) 41.00%
- Street patrols 41.00%
- Fundraising for homeless charities 33.30%
- Helping jobless back into work 33.30%
- Washing facilities 30.80%

If churches are involved in supporting the homeless, this involves a set of complementary actions. The primary ones are short-term e.g. food, clothes. Then if churches go further they move to longer-term actions, e.g. housing, addiction, life skills, debt counselling, etc.

Funding for such support comes from:

- Donations from congregation 94.6%
- Church financed 62.2%
- Donations from local businesses, groups and individuals 56.8%
- Grant-giving trusts 40.5%
- Council / Government / Local authority 13.5%

The top challenges for churches helping people experiencing homelessness are:

- Lack of appropriate accommodation and storage
- Lack of understanding or concern for homeless people in the community
- Lack of support from local services
- Lack of funding

Homeless people need and appreciate most:

- Being treated as human beings, respect, being listened to, someone to talk to, friendliness, care.
- Warmth, accommodation, shelter.
- Hot food.

Regarding homelessness, top actions that churches should be doing:

- Working together locally to link facilities, resources, actions, communication, etc.
- More widely - sharing experiences, forums, networking, training, understanding the deeper issues, etc.
- Opening up church facilities as night shelters, soup kitchens, meeting places.
- Encouraging all Christians to stop and talk to the homeless, treat with respect.
- Purchase accommodation.

Regarding homelessness, top things the church community should say to the government are:

- Invest more in prevention, rehab, mental health, care, education. Increase tax on alcohol, decrease access. Have a tax to deal with these issues. Divert spending on civic cosmetics e.g. bowling greens, etc.
- Build/provide housing/accommodation for the vulnerable. Low rent (capped). Gives a solid foundation.
- Calculate real costs to society. Stop short-termism, stop cutting money - see cost effective in long-term to deal with issues. Recognise complexity. Recognise contribution to society many people who experience homelessness have made e.g. veterans. People have stories.

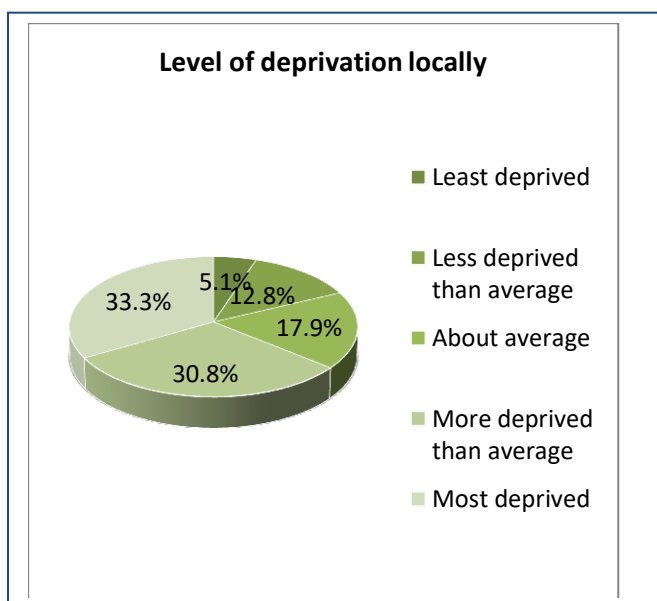
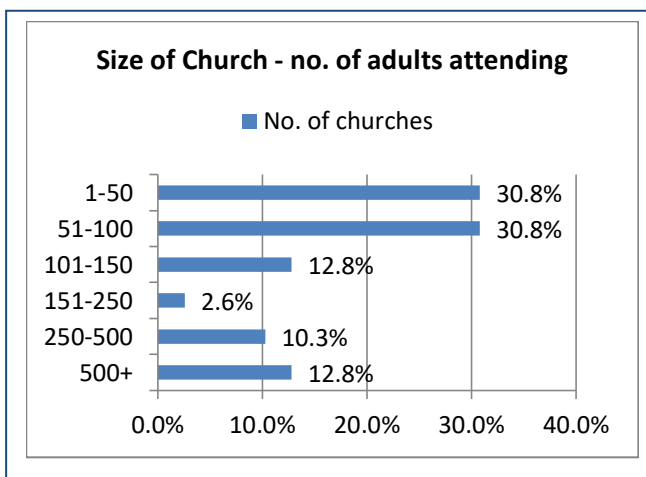
Demographics

Let's look at the sample of 39 responses:

The responding churches are located in **Cities** across England and Wales.

Denomination or Stream
39 responses

CofE	17
Independent	6
Baptist	5
Other	5
Newfrontiers	3
Methodist	3



Homelessness in the local community

Churches in the survey were asked if they had seen any increase in various aspects of homelessness in the previous year. This was their response:

Have you seen an increase in any of the following in your community in the past year (tick all that apply)?

Visible rough sleeping on the streets	74.4%
Individuals and families staying on friend's sofas	69.2%
An increasing number of privately rented properties	61.5%
Begging and anti-social behaviour from rough sleepers	59.0%
Young adults unable to leave home	53.8%
Local people being priced out of the area	48.7%
People living in temporary accommodation eg Bed and Breakfasts	46.2%
An increasing number of homes bought as investments and left empty	17.9%
An increasing number of empty and unwanted homes as there are no jobs in the area	15.4%
An increasingly absent or transient population	12.8%

There were some interesting observations:

"The general public are increasingly keen to help the church address the problem either with money or time."

"There are more criteria that the homeless have to meet before they are considered for provision."

"The number of homeless has increased fourfold in recent years."

"There have been several cases where large buildings or a number of smaller ones have become empty and campaigners have asked the Council if these could become low rent accommodation. However, our Council have simply sold to the highest bidder who builds for the rich."

"More attending Foodbank and presenting at our church door."

"Young women begging."

"We are seeing homelessness reduce by working with other agencies and our Council. Our foodbank use is down one third on a year ago for the same reasons. "

"Landlords who previously ran Houses for Multiple Occupation (HMO's) for the deprived are advertising for professionals instead."

"The local Council have closed Housing schemes and allow properties to remain empty but pay for private security guards to patrol the properties."

"A range of folk rough sleeping and many more women."

Church involvement - demand

How often do homeless callers come to your church for help?

Once or twice a week	42.1%
Every day	31.6%
Once or twice a month	18.4%
Less frequently	7.9%

What types of homeless people come to you for support (tick all that apply)?

People suffering from addiction	89.7%
Single men	89.7%
People primarily with mental health issues	82.1%
Ex-offenders	74.4%
Victims of domestic violence	48.7%
Migrants from the European Economic Area (EEA)	41.0%
Refugees / asylum seekers	35.9%
Veterans	33.3%
Families	28.2%
Migrants outside EEA	5.1%
Rejected by family	2.6%
Long-term unemployed	2.6%
Relationship breakdown	2.6%

If you run an initiative or service, approximately how many homeless people do you help in an average week?

The mean is 18 people per week. The average is 28.

By church size:

Number of adult members in your church?	Average
1-50	18
51-100	23
101-150	48
151-250	45
250-500	7
500+	42

Smaller churches seem to be punching above their weight given their membership.

By level of deprivation in the area:

	Average
Least deprived	35
Less deprived than average	39
About average	39
More deprived than average	23
Most deprived	29

Churches are seeing a challenging level of demand regardless of the level of deprivation in the area.

Church involvement - action

What do you usually do to help homeless callers (tick all that apply)?

Put them in contact with statutory services	81.6%
Our church runs social actions which involve homeless people	78.9%
Give them food, clothes or other items	78.9%
Direct them to a local service run by another church	42.1%
Allow them to shelter in the church	31.6%
Give them money	2.6%
Say you are sorry but you are unable to help them	0.0%

Churches always help in some way.

Churches in the survey were asked to record their involvement in a range of specified social action activities focused on the homeless. The activities are listed by below in order of highest involvement by churches. These are compared with involvement in my National Church and Social Action 2014⁴ (where possible).

Does your church organise or support any initiatives used by homeless people (tick all that apply)?

Answer options	'Church and homelessness'	National Church Survey 2014	Church Homelessness Rank	2014 Rank
Food distribution	79.50%	80.20%	1	1
Meals for needy	71.80%	27.80%	2	13
Clothes/goods distribution	64.10%	23.80%	3	16
Helping homeless get settled	56.40%	18.10%	4	23
Night Shelter	51.30%	-	5	-
Addiction (inc. alcohol and drug abuse)	41.00%	24.70%	6	15
Street patrols	41.00%	27.80%	7	14
Fundraising for homeless charities	33.30%	-	8	-
Helping jobless back into work	33.30%	18.10%	9	24
Washing facilities	30.80%	-	10	-
Debt counselling	28.20%	43.20%	11	7
Helping with literacy	25.60%	5.70%	12	38
Prison ministry and/or ex-offenders	20.50%	19.40%	13	20
Emergency Cold Weather Provision	20.50%	-	14	-
Medical support	7.70%	-	15	-

⁴ See Research www.jubilee-plus.org

If churches are involved in supporting the homeless, this involves a set of complementary actions. The primary ones are short-term e.g. food, clothes. Then if churches go further they move to longer-term actions, e.g. housing, addiction, life skills, debt counselling, etc.

How many individual volunteers are engaged in this work?

The mean is 20 people per week. The average is 29.

By church size:

Number of adult members in your church?	Average
1-50	18
51-100	29
101-150	43
151-250	30
250-500	13
500+	50

Again smaller churches (volunteers as a percentage of members) seem to be punching above their weight.

By level of deprivation in the area:

	Average
Least deprived	50
Less deprived than average	26
About average	37
More deprived than average	29
Most deprived	24

Funding the actions

Do you receive funding for these services? If yes, from where (tick all that apply)?

Donations from congregation	94.6%
Church financed	62.2%
Donations from local businesses, groups and individuals	56.8%
Grant-giving trusts	40.5%
Council / Government / Local authority	13.5%

Churches fund a lot of the services themselves and receive very little from authorities despite saving them what must be considerable sums of money.

Challenges

Respondents were asked to identify their top 4 challenges from a list – ranking them as well. A weighting for each challenge on the list was then calculated depending on number of 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th votes they received.

What are the biggest challenges you face in helping homeless people?

	Weight
Lack of appropriate accommodation and storage	69
Lack of understanding or concern for homeless people in the community	43
Lack of support from local services	42
Lack of funding	40
Too much demand	28
Lack of leaders	25
Nowhere to refer people to for the help they need	23
Lack of volunteers	22
Anti-social behaviour	21
Lack of training for volunteers	11

There was an opportunity to record 'Other' challenges. Prominent among these are:

- More places needed for detox and rehab
- Their own lack of hope that things will ever change
- The complexity of the individuals' own issues and the complexity of the services on offer and the way to access them.

What do the homeless people need and appreciate most?

Respondents were asked, 'What do the homeless people you meet need and appreciate most?'. Responses were free text.

Themes were analysed. A text response could contain more than one theme. The number of mentions of a theme were counted giving an idea of most common thoughts.

These are the themes that emerged in order of mentions:

1. Being treated as human beings, respect, being listened to, someone to talk to, friendliness, care. 29 mentions.
2. Warmth, accommodation, shelter. 17 mentions.
3. Hot food. 13 mentions.
4. Safety, peace. 8 mentions.
5. Guidance, benefit advice, help. 6 mentions.
6. Clothes, shower, laundry. 5 mentions

Apart from trying to change government policy, what should churches be doing about homelessness?

The next question was 'Apart from trying to change government policy, is there anything you think churches locally and/or nationally should be doing about homelessness?' Responses were free text.

Themes were analysed. A text response could contain more than one theme. The number of mentions of a theme were counted giving an idea of most common thoughts.

These are the themes that emerged in order of mentions:

1. Working together locally to link facilities, resources, actions, communication, etc. 11 mentions.
2. More widely - sharing experiences, forums, networking, training, understanding the deeper issues, etc. 8 mentions
3. Opening up church facilities as night shelters, soup kitchens, meeting places. 5 mentions.
4. Encouraging all Christians to stop and talk to the homeless, treat with respect. 4 mentions.
5. Purchase accommodation. 4 mentions.
6. Present homeless with transformational gospel. 2 mentions.

What should church community say to the government about homelessness?

The final question was *'What do you think we as a church community should say to the government about homelessness?'* Responses were free text.

Themes were analysed. A text response could contain more than one theme. The number of mentions of a theme were counted giving an idea of most common thoughts.

These are the themes that emerged in order of mentions:

1. Invest more in prevention, rehab, mental health, care, education. Increase tax on alcohol, decrease access. Have a tax to deal with these issues. Divert spending on civic cosmetics e.g. bowling greens, etc. 13 mentions.
2. Build/provide housing/accommodation for the vulnerable. Low rent (capped). Gives a solid foundation. 12 mentions.
3. Calculate real costs to society. Stop short-termism, stop cutting money - see cost effective in long-term to deal with issues. Recognise complexity. Recognise contribution to society many people who experience homelessness have made e.g. veterans. People have stories. 10 mentions.
4. Back church actions, talk to us re churches' needs. 4 mentions.
5. Speedier benefit system. Stop sanctioning people with complex issues. 4 mentions.
6. Change criteria for homelessness – many are hidden. 2 mentions.