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The Causes of Homelessness

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"The most important driver of homelessness in all its forms is poverty… Other drivers include, availability and affordability of accommodation, the extent to which prevention measures are used and the demographics of people experiencing homelessness.". [emphasis in original]

Glen Bramley, *Homelessness Projections,* Crisis, 10 August 2017

"Homelessness in all its forms has significantly increased in recent years, driven by several factors. Despite this, government has not evaluated the impact of its [welfare] reforms on this issue, and there remain gaps in its approach. It is difficult to understand why [DCLG] persisted with its light touch approach in the face of such a visibly growing problem. Its recent performance in reducing homelessness therefore cannot be considered value for money".

Amyas Morse, head of the National Audit Office, 13 September 2017

Since 2010…

- Radical welfare and housing reform agenda
- Homelessness has escalated as a direct result of policy decisions and weakening of welfare safety net
  - Tight housing markets + Housing Benefit/LHA restrictions
  - 93% (London) v 49% (North) of LAs said benefit cuts had increased homelessness
  - 86% of LAs surveyed think that Universal Credit will worsen homelessness in their area

An overview…

Summary of Homelessness Statistics	2009/10	2014/15	2015/16	% change 2014/15-2015/16	% change 2009/10-2015/16
Rough sleeping in England – snapshot (1)	1,768	3,569	4,134	16	134
Rough sleeping in London – annual (2)	3,673	7,581	8,096	7	120
Local authority statutory homelessness cases – annual (3)	89,120	112,350	114,780	2	29
Local authority statutory homelessness acceptances – annual (4)	40,020	54,430	57,740	6	44
Local authority homelessness prevention and relief cases (5)	165,200	220,800	213,300	-3	29
Total local authority homelessness case actions (6)	205,220	275,230	271,050	-2	32

Sources: (1)-(6) Department for Communities and Local Government; (2) Greater London Authority.

Highly contrasting regional trends …

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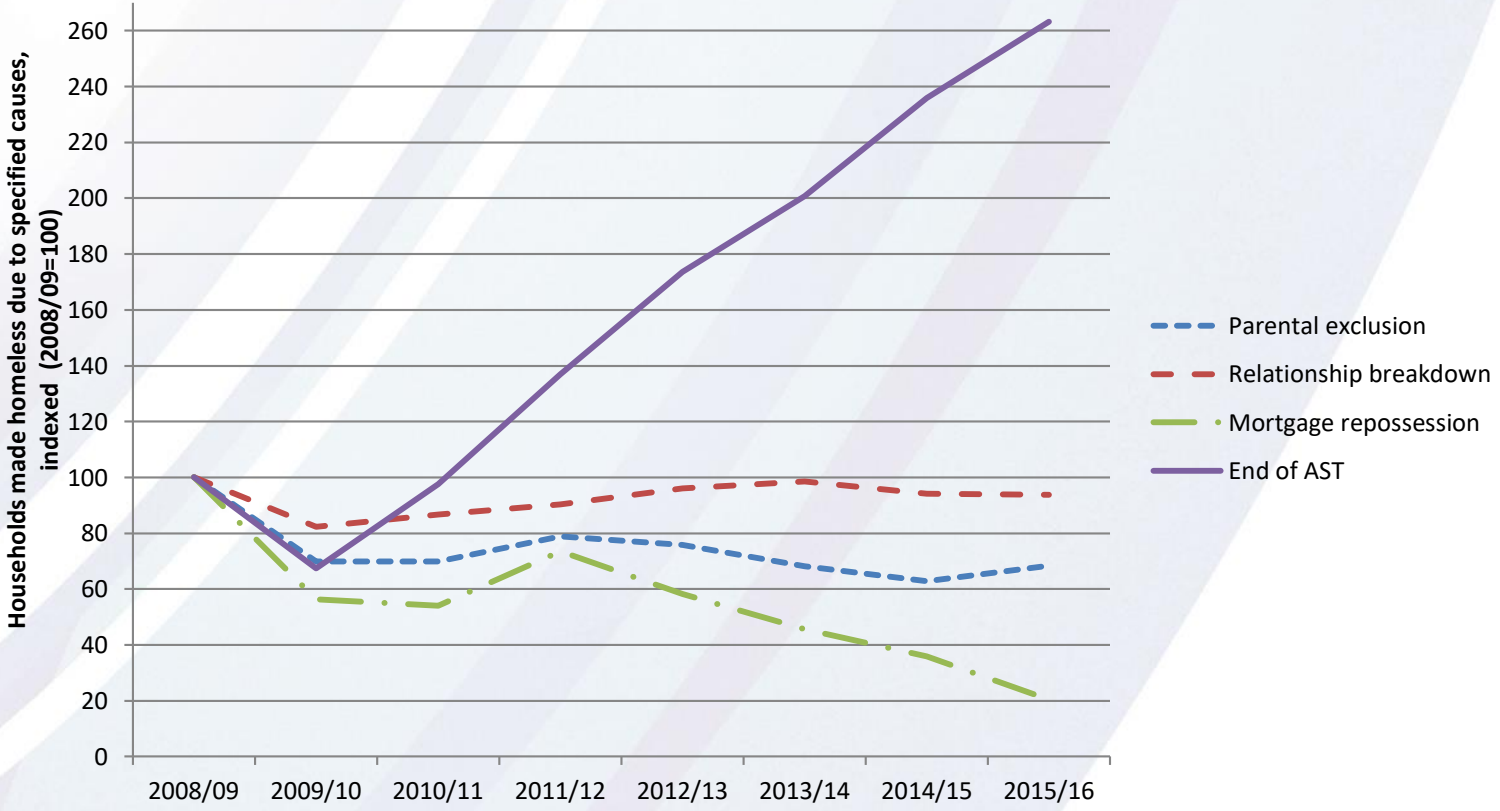
The immediate causes have shifted dramatically…



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Pressures on local authorities

- Two-thirds of LAs (67%) reported that ‘footfall’ had increased over past year; one quarter that this increase had been ‘significant’
- Ongoing austerity programme disproportionately impacts on deprived urban LAs: spending on homelessness may have risen by 13% since 2010, but there has been a 67% cut in ‘Supporting People’ programmes
- Contraction in supported accommodation since 2010 (especially for mental health and substance misuse); LHA limits and rent reduction

Pressures on housing access

- Tenure: half of all LAs (94% in London) find it 'very difficult' to assist applicants into the PRS; two-thirds (64%) (84% in London) report difficulties in securing social tenancies
- Particular groups: 'very difficult' to find accommodation for families with 3+ children (60%) and single people under 35 (42-49%)
- Overwhelming majority (over 90%) anticipate even greater difficulties accommodating singles aged 18-34 over next 2-3 years, and likewise with larger families (87%)

Welfare reform is central

"*LHA is staggeringly out of step with actual market rents, to the extent that there are virtually no properties... let at LHA rates. Coupled with landlords increasing reluctance to accept people on benefits… it is now all but impossible to place people into the private sector.*" (LA respondent, the South)

"The impact of welfare reform will make accommodation unaffordable for many households, and in some cases households won't even be able to afford to live in social housing. RPs are already talking about restricting access to those over 35." (LA respondent, the North, 2016)

Structural inequality drives risk

- British Cohort Study – everyone born in one week in 1970.
- Chances of experiencing homelessness by age 30 predicted by:

➢ childhood poverty (by far most powerful influence)

➢ geography (less likely in rural areas, in Northern English regions, and in Scotland; housing market pressures)

➢ adverse experiences as teenager (especially being excluded from school, serious drug use, being in care)

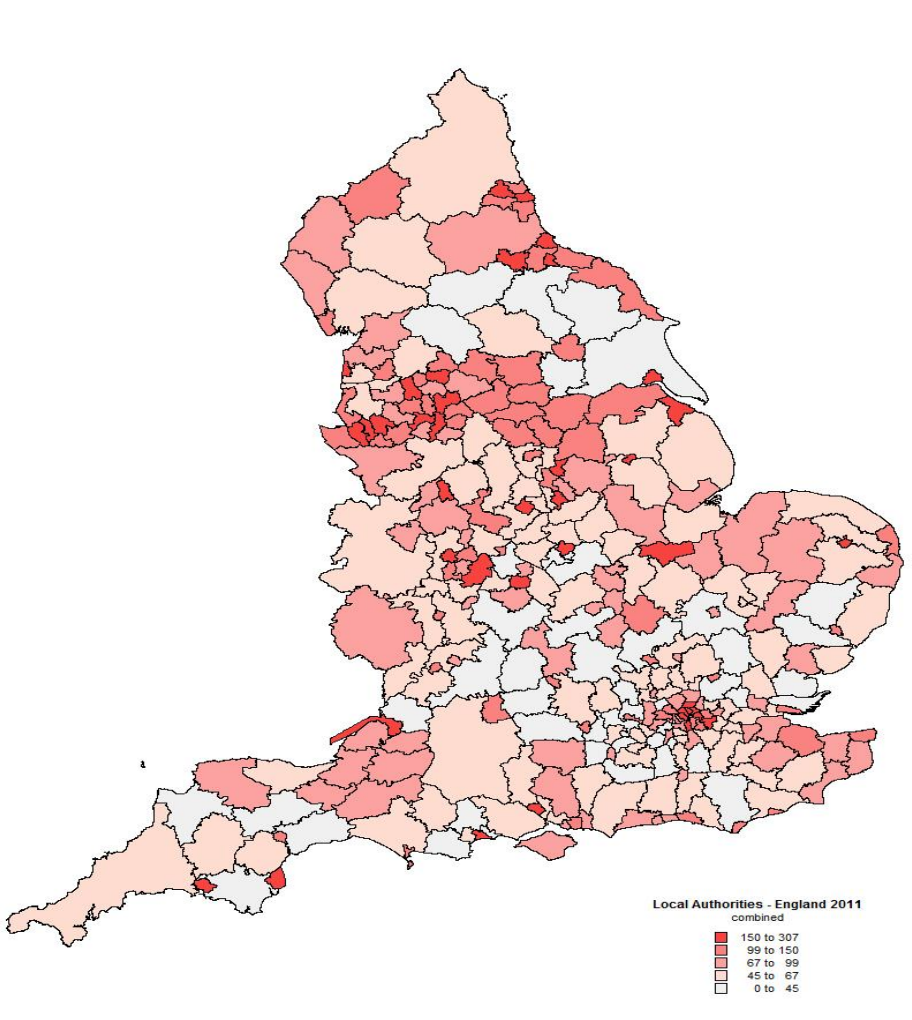
➢ early adult experiences (leaving education early, experiencing unemployment, renting, illness/disability, social relationships (with parents/partner/children))

Just how unequal are the risks?

- Vignette 1: White male, with relatively affluent childhood in the rural south of England, graduated from university, living with his parents at age 26, with no partner and no children. Predicted probability of having experienced homelessness by age 30 = **0.6%.**

- Vignette 2: Mixed ethnicity female, experienced poverty as a child, brought up by a lone parent, left school or college at 16, had spells of unemployment, and living as a renter with no partner but with her own children at age 26. Predicted probability of having experienced homelessness by age 30 = **71.2%.**

Homelessness and complex needs



Concentrated in
- core northern cities
- declining industrial towns and ports
- seaside resorts
- some central London boroughs

Low in affluent rural and suburban areas

Difference in of 10x from lowest to highest (in prevalence)

Conclusions: policy priorities

- *Structural prevention* - housing supply *and* access (welfare reform). Will NAO report have an impact? Possible PAC Inquiry?
- *Upstream prevention* – childhood poverty; adverse teenage experiences; supportive social relationships
- *Systemic prevention* – Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (earlier, more flexible, more comprehensive responses to those in crisis or at risk of entering crisis); appropriate support for those with complex needs (Housing First!)

Weblinks

- Fitzpatrick et al (2017) *Homelessness Monitor*https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/homelessness-monitor/
- Bramley, B. & Fitzpatrick, S. *(2017) "Homelessness in the UK: Who is Most at Risk", Housing Studies*http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02673037.2017.1344957
- NAO (2017) *Homelessness* https://www.nao.org.uk/report/homelessness/
- Bramley, G (2017) *Homelessness Projections* https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/types-of-homelessness/homelessness-projections-core-homelessness-in-great-britain-2017/