

# HOMELESSNESS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE: A HIDDEN CRISIS

Executive Summary March 2023

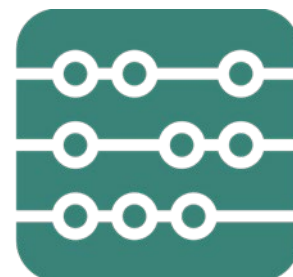
Dr Carin Tunaker, Professor Helen Carr and Dr Laura Burke with Dr Guillermo Reyes-Pascal



**Centre for  
Homelessness Impact**

Greg Hurst , Head of Communications and Public Affairs

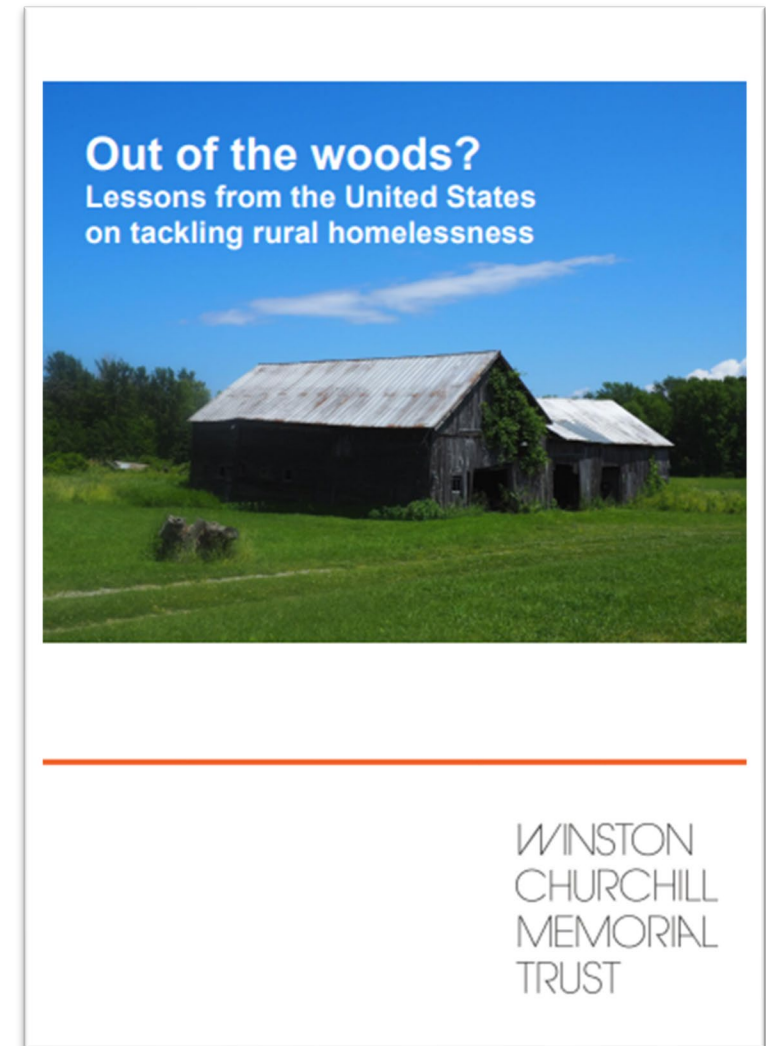
Martin Collett, Chief Executive, English Rural Housing Association



**RURAL  
HOMELESSNESS  
COUNTS**

# What's the problem? Background

- Rough sleeping had been rising for almost a decade going into the pandemic.
- The government's rough sleeping strategies contained no references to rural or targeting interventions.
- Signs that policy wasn't working in rural areas – while overall rough sleeping fell for the first time in a decade between 2018 and 2019 (9% reduction in England) in rural areas numbers increased.
- Signs that regions such as the South West had been particularly hard hit by cuts to homelessness services.
- Lack of attention from policymakers and insufficient funding for support services leave people facing isolation and danger. But international evidence showed change was possible.





## What we did

- Convened a group of rural and homelessness organisations and housing associations, including Centre for Homelessness Impact, National Housing Federation, CPRE, Homeless Link to identifying research and evidence gaps.
- Commissioned Universities of Kent and Southampton to conduct research, including survey of providers and local authorities and interviews with individuals who experienced homelessness and support workers.
- Field sites: South Cambridgeshire, Kent, Herefordshire, North Yorkshire.
- Examined the impact of austerity and welfare reforms on rural homelessness.



# What we found

- **The rising levels of homelessness in rural areas:** rough sleeping numbers has risen by 24% in one year.
- **Insufficient resources to tackle the problem:** 83% of survey respondents in rural areas reported their job has become more difficult in the past 5 years. 65% funding gap between per capita spending on the homelessness prevention grant in rural areas compared to urban areas.
- **Shame and stigma in rural communities acting as a barrier to support:** particularly in more prosperous rural areas.
- **Physical isolation increases risk:** limited transportation options and greater distances to support services create unique challenges,
- **Informal support networks can play a key role in rural areas:** positive examples of farmers, communities providing support, but not helped by local authority often enough.
- **The challenges in rural areas push people into urban centres, at which point needs are higher:** the above problems mean that many people experiencing homelessness in rural areas leave for urban areas against their wishes, to seek out support services.



# Policy asks

We unified a broad coalition of organisations behind a set of local and national recommendations:

- Central government needs to commit to ending homelessness and rural-proof future strategies.
- Pilot one-stop-shop homelessness services in rural areas.
- DLUHC needs to improve processes for better counting and support for local authority efforts to use data to tackle rural homelessness.
- Funding must be provided to build more social housing and raise Local Housing Allowance (LHA) to cover the cost of rent in rural areas.



# Aims for coalition

- ✓ To **bring together a range of stakeholders**, with a breadth of expertise and interests that collectively will inform future outcomes and mission.
- ✓ To **raise awareness** of the existence **of rural homelessness** in the media, in local communities, and among key decision makers.
- ✓ To **develop** and **advocate** for **solutions** to tackling rural homelessness and encouraging the adoption of **evidence-based best practice** in rural communities.
- ✓ To encourage and **support member organisations** to **better reflect rural realities** and needs in their own service deliver and advocacy work. Also, for member organisations to benefit from open discussion and idea sharing that happens within the coalition.
- ✓ To develop a **unity of voice** on the issue of rural homelessness across member organisations
- ✓ To champion **preventative action** to tackle homelessness across all parts of England.
- ✓ To **challenge unhelpful stereotypical** conceptions of homelessness and build recognition of the **diversity** of experiences of homelessness.





## **THE CHALLENGE**

We don't know nearly enough about what works to end homelessness, especially in rural contexts.



## **THE OPPORTUNITY**

There is an opportunity to put data and evidence to even better use and kick-start a conversation about an **evidence-led end to rural homelessness.**



# What next?

## **Data, systems and strategies:**

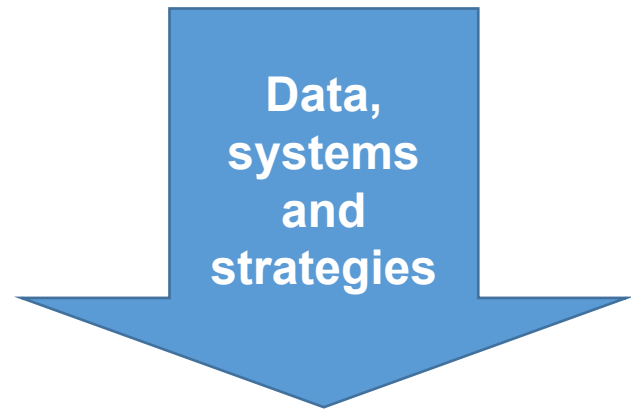
Co-producing briefing on data-led best practice with local leaders, Centre for Homelessness Impact and LGA on data, systems and strategies (launched at party conferences 2023)

## **Integrated rural services:**

Undertaking a feasibility study of 'one stop shop' homelessness service in rural areas and other potential innovative solutions, piloting and evaluating model (by summer 2024).

## **Rural awareness raising:**

NHF Rural Housing Week 'rural homelessness counts' pledge – raising awareness of coalition among housing associations and local leaders (summer 2023)



*To ensure that rural perspectives are included in all major government initiatives around rough sleeping and homelessness*

*To increase the number of local authorities in rural areas utilising best practice to deliver effective services and systems*

*To expose the 'hidden' nature of rural homelessness by effectively counting and responding to every instance*

# "I STAND FOR CHANGE. I'M ALL-IN FOR PREVENTION, INCLUSION, COMMUNITY ACTION, TAILORED SOLUTIONS, AND VISIBILITY. TOGETHER, WE CAN END RURAL HOMELESSNESS."



"I pledge to prioritise prevention-first strategies, investing in rural communities to pre-empt homelessness before it occurs."



"I pledge to foster inclusion, fighting against the stigma of homelessness and promoting practices that recognise and respect diverse experiences."



"I pledge to champion community, channelling the close-knit nature of rural communities into a network of support for those facing homelessness."



"I pledge to advocate for place-based solutions, addressing the unique challenges of rural homelessness through tailored, integrated support."



"I pledge to increase the visibility of rural homelessness, by shining a spotlight on its realities so it can end through evidence-based policy and practice."

