



THE METEOR

MANCHESTER'S INDEPENDENT MEDIA

AT THE LUSH SUMMIT 2018

THE METEOR EXPLORES:
HOMELESSNESS IN MANCHESTER



HOUSING IS A HUMAN RIGHT...

...that is increasingly being abused across the UK. This is obvious to anyone walking through the streets of Manchester where rough sleeping has increased 13-fold since 2010. With support from The Lush Charity Pot, *The Meteor* has investigated this rise in homelessness across our city. This special edition looks at the main causes of homelessness: the austerity-driven economic agenda and failed housing policy of government. It also gives a voice to the homeless and reports on initiatives that could reduce the problem. Also reported on inside are other organisations, present at the Lush Summit 2018, working to alleviate the UK-wide housing and homelessness crisis.

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About us

The Meteor is a not-for-profit, independent media organisation – an alternative, radical, community-based publication for the people of Manchester. By telling stories that are neglected in the mainstream, investigating and challenging local power structures and exploring important issues, from the everyday to the earth-shattering, we aim to promote social justice in our city and beyond.

This publication is part of a wider project entitled ‘The Meteor Explores: Homelessness in Manchester’. Throughout this project, we have commissioned a range of articles on the current state of homelessness in Manchester, as well as carrying out a research project interviewing people who have recently faced homelessness.

The full list of articles, as well as full length versions of those included in this publication, can be found at this link: <https://goo.gl/Wy1J1t>.

In April this year we are holding a comprehensive 12-session community journalism course in Manchester. See the back page for details.

Get in touch to find out more about this project or our other work:

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Domestic abuse led to life on the streets for Julie

An abusive husband forced Julie to flee her family home leaving her homeless on the streets of Manchester. While on the streets she has been attacked and sexually assaulted. Hope is on the horizon for Julie, with an offer of accommodation and the chance to return to work as a chef.

“I didn’t ask to be homeless love. I never thought I’d go from working to nothing. I was learning to drive and everything, I was going to get my own car. Half the house was bought - I had bought half my husband’s house, but I had to leave it so he couldn’t find me. I had to give everything up, but it was worth it so he couldn’t find me.”

Julie is 44 years old and has been living on the streets of Manchester for seven years. Sat at her usual spot with her dog Marley, collecting money for a £25 B&B, Julie appears just the right mix of warm hearted and thick skinned that’s needed to survive on the streets. The odd passerby from the sea of legs that can be seen from her level let on and smile at her. Some stop for a chat, others give her change and food, it is unclear whether they are friends or strangers. Despite the pain she suffers



going to marry, who used to pick her up from work when they first met. But then Julie explained how her career, along with her friends and family, were taken away from her after she got married.

“When I first met my husband he was brilliant, but then he turned on me. As soon as we got married, the next day, he turned around when I woke up and said ‘I own you now. You’ll do as you’re told.’ And that was it - my job went down, he stopped me going out to work, stopped me seeing my family. Beat me. ‘You clean this house, you do as you’re told’. That was it.

“From morning to night, I got up, cleaned

“When I first met my husband he was brilliant, but then he turned on me. As soon as we got married, the next day, he turned around when I woke up and said ‘I own you now. You’ll do as you’re told’.”

from arthritis, Julie seems active and friendly, engaged and attentive, but ultimately, restless.

She begins to talk about her old life as a chef and how all she wants is to return to work:

“I started helping out at a restaurant near Manchester Cathedral. Then after a few years I starting helping out at all the restaurants around town and became a chef. I used to do the nights, getting all my qualifications.”

Most people work to keep a roof over their heads. For Julie, the idea of a home is simply a route back to working at the job she loved, as a chef:

“I miss it so much now. I’m bored, all I want is my job back. But you can’t become a chef if you’re on the streets because you’re dirty, your hands are dirty. And I’ve got to get my teeth done now. Who’s going to employ you when you’ve got no teeth?”

Julie’s future as a chef seemed bright, and whilst pursuing her career she met the man she was

the house, fed him, up, cleaned the house, fed him - that was it. That was my life. He stopped it all ‘cause he didn’t like me having my independence.”

When Julie finally found the strength to leave her husband, she quickly realised that she couldn’t stay in the area she was from. The streets of Manchester city centre ended up being the place where Julie managed to find sanctuary from her husband:

“I left him. I’d been leaving him for a few years but he used to come and find me if I stayed with family and friends. So it took me staying on the streets for him to not find me, and he hasn’t found me yet.”

Julie has asked Manchester City Council for help, but for years they advised that she could only seek help in the borough she was born in, which isn’t an option for Julie. “Manchester’s my home, it’s been my home for more than twenty odd years.

So I want to know why they wouldn't give me a home just because I was born in Tameside."

Though sleeping rough proved an effective measure to escape a violent home, it became clear that Julie had simply traded a one form of abuse for another, when she was sexually assaulted last year by a man she trusted:

"I thought he was my friend, like you do. Cuddled down for the night and then he jumped on me and tried to rape me. Eventually I told the police and they found out that he had record and

not like that."

Despite all of her experiences, Julie still manages to stay upbeat:

"I had a laugh with this guy one day. I went 'you got any spare change?' He went 'no.' I went 'you got any £15 notes then?'. His wife's laughing, and he's going 'ey?' He came back anyway and gave me a fiver and said 'how can you be happy?' I said 'well, I can't get any lower - how much lower can I go? So if I can't laugh what can I do, love?' D'you know what I mean, I still have a laugh. I can't get

"You don't get listened to. Especially if you want to report a crime. And when the important people come into town, all the police come in and move us out."

was known for it. They put him in jail on remand. When I was telling my story I kept throwing up, it took me nearly all day to do the interview. And then when it came to it I said I can't go through it again, I just can't. It made me ill telling it once."

Julie argues that more needs to be done to ensure the safety of women on the streets. "The council need to protect the women. We want to be treated equal, but at the end of the day when it comes to sleeping rough, who's the one that's going

any lower can I, I'm only gonna go up."

Things may be looking up for Julie, as she has recently been offered help with accommodation by Manchester City Council. But as Julie points out, it took a set of truly dire circumstances for her to become enough of a concern to help. "I ended up getting sexually assaulted and robbed before they finally said they'd help me. After seven years."

After such a long time on the streets, Julie has a long road back to her old life and independence.



to get attacked first? The women."

Julie's claim is backed up by studies conducted by both Crisis and Westminster Homeless Action Together, which found a higher proportion of women, than men, reported experiencing violence on the streets in 2016. "I hate being out here at night after everything that's happened to me."

The experience Julie describes of law enforcement has been at best dismissive, and at worst disdainful:

"You don't get listened to. Especially if you want to report a crime. And when the important people come into town, all the police come in and move us out. So that when people come it looks like we don't have homeless and it's all clean - well it's

"They said if I get a home, I can claim benefits - I don't even know how you do that now. I was 18 years old last time I did that." But when Julie spoke about where she sees herself in a year's time, there was just one goal on her mind:

"All I want - I just want my home, so I can go back to work. Get my home, get my furniture, get my teeth done and go back to work."

Alice Toomer-McAlpine

If you would like to find help for people who are homeless in Manchester, and see what you can do to help, check out: www.streetsupport.net

Radical Housing Network says Housing Co-ops are part of the solution

Co-ops are one of the many solutions to the housing crisis that the RHN is supporting across London

London's Radical Housing Network follows in the footsteps of collectivist movements such as the squatters of the 1970s and 1980s, promoting connection and co-operation across groups working on a range of housing justice issues, including private renting, squatting, social housing, access to benefits and co-operative housing. It includes groups like Focus E15, Digs (Hackney Renters) and Grenfell Action Group, as well as housing co-operative groups like Co-ops for London.

Co-ops for London's Emily O'Meara believes the London housing crisis is largely a land crisis, exacerbated by the removal of supports such as the former Housing Association (HA) grants, which allowed groups to access funding for the development of housing and to buy existing council properties. She lives in Heathview Tenants Co-operative in Camden, which was set up 40 years ago with support from Camden Council. Co-ops for

radical housing network



London would like to see the restoration of direct funding for housing co-ops, as well as the creation of a Co-operative Housing Act. O'Meara says:

"We don't really fall neatly into any particular category, and actually that adds its own sort of precariousness about it, they don't seem to understand ... the whole tenant and landlord relationship, the fact that we're both. There's certain legislation to do with landlords, certain legislation to do with tenants [but] specifically for co-operatives, there's nothing really."

Both the Radical Housing Network and Co-ops for London have received funding from Lush to support their activities, and the Radical Housing Network has used this funding to support other affiliated groups.

In 2017, supported by Lush, Co-ops for London published a report titled 'Co-operate, not



Speculate', which promotes housing co-operatives as a partial solution to the issues of the emergence of mega housing associations and the erosion of tenants' rights. O'Meara is keen to point out the difference between co-operatives and HAs:

"They're very different beasts. The housing co-operative is owned and run by its members... a housing association has a board of elected members"

She cites the example of the Peter Bedford HA in Camden, originally established to provide housing for male ex-prisoners. However, it has more recently been the subject of media coverage following whistleblowing by one of its tenants and allegations that the HA and its property guardians harassed a terminally ill tenant in an effort to get him to move to enable redevelopment. O'Meara believes that moving to a co-operative basis would benefit the residents of the Peter Bedford HA:

"They could sell it at social rates or they could part gift it, part sell it [to a co-operative]... There's this kind of sadness in that story as it was set up to help single men [with] precariousness around their housing and unfortunately one of its tenants died feeling the same precariousness as he did when he first entered because of their actions"

Radical Housing Network and Co-ops for London are planning a conference on 24 March 2018 to facilitate discussion of the issues facing groups working for social and housing justice. One aim of the conference will be, "to get co-ops across London together to work out where the movement is heading and also to try and reinvigorate the creation of more new housing co-operatives and therefore create more social housing."

O'Meara remains optimistic that the housing co-operative movement can grow:

"There's plenty of interest, there's plenty of people that still want to live collectively, want to live a different way; they don't want to privately rent; they want to be able to contribute to their community."

Ciara O'Sullivan and Conrad Bower

RHN & Emily are attending the Lush Summit 2018

Andy Burnham describes a 'humanitarian crisis' as 42% rough sleeping increase across Greater Manchester revealed



Burnham denounces government policy that is increasing homelessness in GM and across the UK, & lays out the next phase of his strategy to end rough sleeping

Mayor Andy Burnham described the 42% increase in rough sleeping across Greater Manchester between 2016 to 2017 as a “humanitarian crisis”. The increase was revealed in the official rough sleeping statistics for England released by the Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government, on 24 January. Burnham criticised a number of central government policies, which he blames for the growing homelessness crisis, during a visit to the youth homeless charity Centrepoint in Manchester and also laid out developments in his battle to end rough sleeping in Greater Manchester by 2020.

For those that regularly walk through Manchester City Centre it may come as no surprise that rough sleeping also increased by 21% across the city, from a count of 78 in 2016 to 94 in 2017. Both Manchester and Greater Manchester saw greater percentage increases than the 15% rise recorded across England; where numbers rose from 4,134 in 2016 to 4,751 in 2017.

Burnham said he thought the figures underestimate the problem to a significant degree, and this is a view widely held by organisations dealing with homelessness. The rough sleeping figures are based on a snapshot count of one night in autumn, in specific areas in the local authority where it is known that homeless people bed down.

Data collected in Manchester on the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol, where a local authority is obliged to house rough sleepers due to freezing weather, suggests the actual number of rough sleepers could be around four times higher than the official count.

Balbir Chatrick, Director of Policy and Communication at Centrepoint, also doubts the validity of the rough sleeping count, saying:

“These figures are shocking but they only attempt to count the number of people sleeping on one night. We know there are thousands of more young people who are hidden homeless- sofa-surfing for months on end, sleeping on public transport, or

staying with a stranger just to find a bed for the night.”

Chatrick was delighted to meet with Burnham and discuss their mutual endeavour to reduce homelessness and the worrying rise in rough sleepers. She was particularly pleased that Burnham spent time chatting with young service users at Centrepoint.

One of those Burnham spoke to was Joshua Ennis who described his experience of being a young homeless person in Manchester. Ennis became homeless after a breakdown in family



Joshua Ennis at Centrepoint in Manchester

relationships and falling seriously ill. After his release from hospital, when Ennis was sleeping on the streets, Centrepoint helped him to get accommodation in hostels and eventually his own secure tenancy. Now Joshua is a project worker at Centrepoint in Manchester, using his lived experience to help other young homeless people find a life away from the streets.

After speaking to Ennis, Burnham described the current homeless situation as: “...a humanitarian crisis that is unfolding before our eyes... people are really suffering, even dying on our streets...we are going to do everything we can here, but it is time the whole country woke up to [the fact] that it is not right that young people are in this position. It’s not right that people are leaving care and going straight on to the streets; we can do better than this in 2018.”

Despite the bad news of rising numbers of rough sleepers, the mayor remains confident that his pledge of ending rough sleeping in GM is still achievable, even with the national government policy he says is increasing homelessness: “...my message goes to the government: look at what you have done by taking housing benefit off 18-21 year olds; that is adding to the problem. Look at what you are doing with introducing Universal Credit; that is adding to the problem. It’s time for them to ask some hard questions of themselves, because they can’t leave us here to pick up all the pieces... it’s time for a much bigger national debate about what we as a society are going to do to ensure every person has a roof over their head every night. In my view that is a basic human right...”

Burnham revealed that it is the pulling together by the people and organisations of GM to battle homelessness that gives him the confidence that rough sleeping can be ended by 2020. And he described a unique model of public, private, voluntary and faith organisations working together to enable the next phase of the battle against homelessness. “These new figures show that Manchester, like all cities, is facing a growing challenge. But while the figures are getting worse our response is getting better”

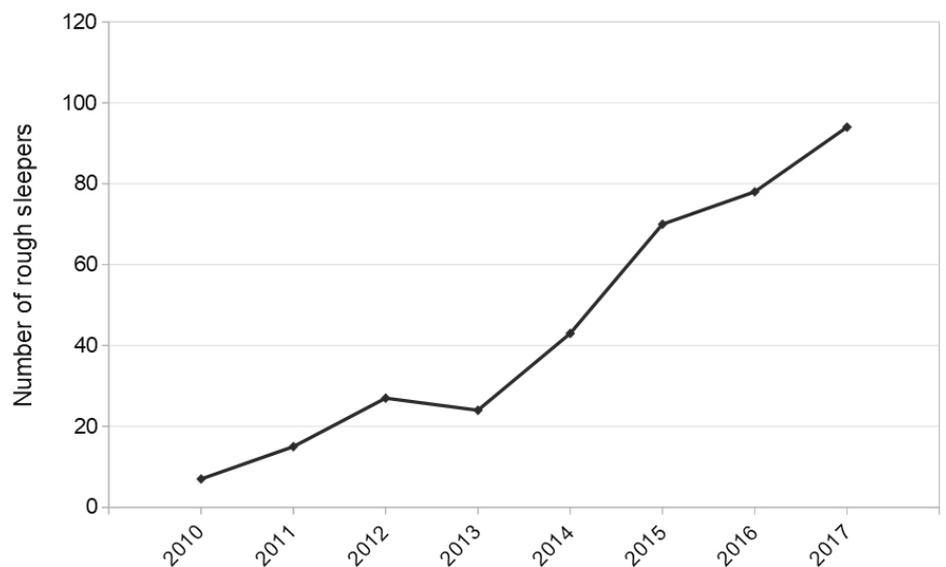
The visit to Centrepoint was also used by Burnham to outline some of the achievements already claimed by the Mayor’s office: a £1.8m Social Impact Bond to help entrenched rough sleepers; over £135,000 raised for the Mayor’s Homelessness Fund; more than 500 people registered with their GPs to access vital medical support; improved Severe Weather Emergency Protocol giving more support during freezing weather.

Also announced was new funding of £7 million over the next three years to extend the Housing First program (where entrenched rough sleepers are given a secure tenancy with wrap-around support, see p12-13) to accommodate up to 500 individuals. The money is Manchester’s share of the £28 million promised during the Autumn Budget 2017 to finance Housing First pilots across the UK, although one Housing First pilot has already been running in Manchester since April 2016.

The Greater Manchester Combined Authority Lead for housing, planning and homelessness, Salford City Mayor Paul Dennet, raised a note of caution about the new funding, saying: “£7 million in new funding from government is a welcome contribution but we need to keep a sense of perspective on the government’s contribution to Greater Manchester’s homelessness problem... Many local councils across GM will [also] likely be cutting £7 million or more worth of services from their budgets this year.”

Centrepoint’s Balbir Chatrick echoed these concerns: “If the Government is serious about breaking the cycle of homelessness it must start by measuring the problem properly and then providing adequate funding to solve it.”

Manchester rough sleeping count

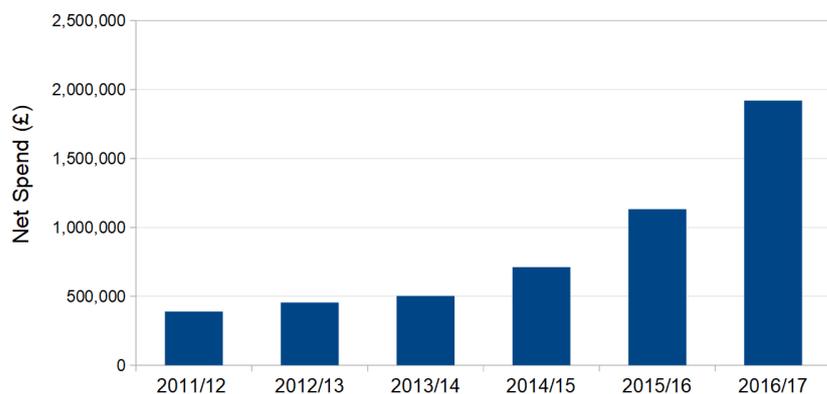


Manchester sees nearly 400% rise in B&B homeless accommodation costs in five years

B&B accommodation for families has seen a steady rise. Number of nights' accommodations for the single homeless has increased dramatically

Manchester City Council spent 392% more on emergency B&B accommodation for the homeless in 2016/17 than it did in 2011/12. The increasing costs are due to a huge rise in the number of nights' accommodation per year paid for by the council

Manchester City Council spend on B&B emergency accommodation



in their attempt to reduce the rising levels of homelessness; a pattern seen in towns and cities across the country.

Rough sleeping across England has more than doubled from 1,768 in 2010, to 4,134 in 2016. In Manchester there has been an even greater 13-fold increase in rough sleepers, from just 7 in 2010 to 94 in 2017. The rough sleepers count is widely acknowledged to underestimate the problem and the real figure has been estimated to be around four times higher. Alongside this increase, households accepted as statutorily homeless in Manchester have risen by 133% from a low point of 533 in 2012-13 to 1242 in 2016-17.

The figures released by the council related to costs associated with all B&B accommodation, which mainly relate to specific individual B&Bs but also include payments to larger providers such as Travelodge, Premier Inn, Holiday Inn, Days Inn and other multi site hotels/motels. In 2011/12 the bill stood at £389,686, which climbed to £1,919,751 in 2016/17, a 392% rise.

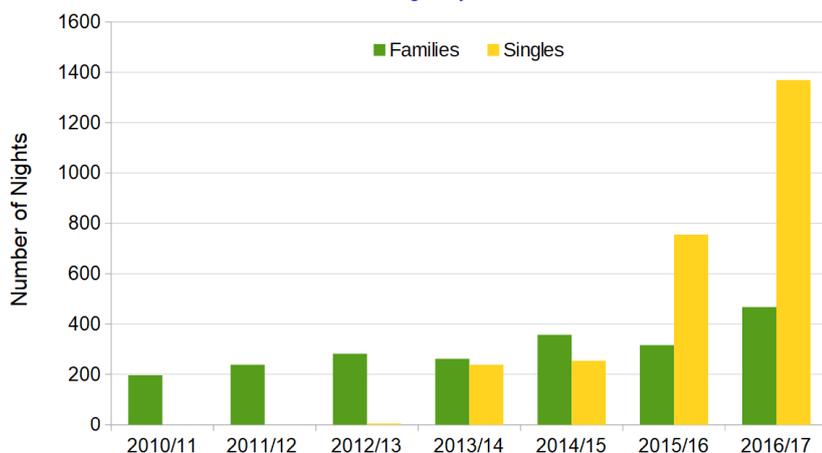
The higher costs are due to the increasing number of nights' accommodation provided per year, which have been rising steadily for homeless

families and have seen a sharp increase for single homeless people. The number of nights' accommodation offered to families has increased from 197 in 2010/11 to 467 in 2016, a 137% rise. The rise in the number of nights' emergency shelter given to single homeless people has risen from 5 in 2012/13 to 1369 in 2016/17, a huge 274-fold increase.

The rising costs come after years of cuts in local authority spending including the Housing Services budget in Manchester, the department that traditionally deals with homelessness. The cuts have been forced on the local authority by central government's austerity-driven policies. But these latest figures show that as savings are made in one area of expenditure concerning homelessness, costs are rising in others, such as providing emergency accommodation. And there are more cuts to come. Local councils will see funding via the Revenue Support Grant fall 77% from £9.9 billion in 2015-16 to £2.2 billion in 2019-20. Councillor Bernard Priest, deputy leader of Manchester City Council, said:

"Together with a wide range of public and voluntary sector partners as part of the Manchester Homeless Partnership, we are working very hard to tackle this challenging issue with a strong emphasis on prevention to stop those at risk of homelessness

B&B Emergency Accommodation



from falling into it in the first place."

Priest says the council are constantly striving to improve the levels of support provided to the homeless.

Conrad Bower

Original article is online: <http://wp.me/p8357e-vp>

Inside the outside: living on the streets of Manchester



Oliver Martin recounts his time sleeping rough on the streets of Manchester, challenging the misconceived stereotypes people often attribute to the homeless.

“Spice victims!” a well dressed woman said as she walked past us in Piccadilly Gardens, Manchester, where we were sat together, wrapped in sleeping bags at the entrance of a bank. It was late in the evening as late winter was turning into early spring. At this time of year it is still cold, yet on a Friday night, punters like this woman wore only one layer of clothing on their way to bars and clubs; those of us on the streets would be wearing no fewer than two. Four of us were sat in the doorway and Jack* and I made remarks back to the woman, expressing our offence at being called “spice victims”.

This small disagreement represents one of the most significantly difficult things to deal with psychologically when homeless (especially street homeless), and that is being lumped in with various negative stereotypes that go hand-in-hand with public perceptions around homeless people. In Manchester, the spice problem seems to be at epidemic levels and the issue has reached national news coverage. Those of us sat at the doorway – Jack, Ben*, Katy* and I – have nothing to do with the drug, a set of chemicals designed as synthetic cannabinoids, which appear to be incredibly addictive and dangerous both psychologically and physically.

At the time of that remark, we took issue with being associated with the negative news

coverage that has come to define Manchester’s homeless community, yet we cannot deny the fact that this drug has had tremendously negative effects on this community. Of the four of us sat in the bank doorway (which was then our place to sleep), only I partook of drugs on a recreational basis, and spice wasn’t one of my drugs of choice, nor will it ever be. Jack and I drank – sometimes too much – as did Katy occasionally and Ben’s only vice was an unhealthy intake of caffeinated energy drinks.

Furthermore, in the circle of approximately ten people I associated with on a personal level on the streets, none of them took spice. And not all people living on the streets are visibly homeless – you may well be sitting in a Starbucks having your

morning coffee before work and I may be sitting across from you. You would have no idea that I was homeless, because I tried my best to not fit the stereotype where possible.

One thing that becomes apparent after spending time on the street, in shelters and in hostels is that the demographics that make up the homeless community are incredibly varied. A close friend of mine ran his own garage for many years before losing it after becoming victim to an extortion racket. Another one worked as a civil servant for

decades before becoming a career for his terminally ill long-term partner – this individual ended up on the streets after his partner’s death due to not being able to claim the tenancy that they shared. I have known several other students and graduates in the homeless community – some of them on the streets and others as “hidden

homeless”, sofa-surfing and crashing with friends whilst not having a home of their own. I lived like this many times whilst at university and knew a large number of other students who did the same.

There are many people who fall into those demographics that don’t seem to fit with the stereotypes that surround homelessness. However, as important as it is to acknowledge that, it is equally important to address some of the more “typical” demographics in this regard. Out of the majority of



homeless people I have known who suffered from addictions (most commonly to heroin but also to alcohol and crack cocaine), these people had been through very traumatic experiences. In many cases, these people had been through the care system and a majority of these recall being abused. One friend in particular stands out to me, as he was sexually abused and raped for many years in a care home – this particular care home had been mentioned in some of the articles that went around in light of the establishment paedophile scandal during the Operation Fernbridge investigation (as well as other, similar investigations at that time).

Street culture is a subculture in itself, with its own hierarchies, cliques, territorial claims and disputes (begging “pitches”) and all kinds of scams. The subculture is a complex one that is misunderstood and can’t be summarized by having a chat with a beggar, getting a story and then running with it as if it’s gospel – if anything, it is almost insulting and undermines the complexity of the subculture.



In Manchester city centre, you will see a beggar every few yards – not all of them homeless, but most of them addicted to something, with spice being the new epidemic. If addicts aren’t begging, they will shoplift. Some may resort to violent crime in order to feed their habit. A criminal defence lawyer told me that the courts are overwhelmed with cases pertaining to petty crimes resulting from drug addiction, with spice being one of the biggest problems.

If data exists on this matter, I would love to see it, but my guess is that the majority of begging is for some kind of addiction. There are exceptions but, from my experience, they are few and far between. You cannot go hungry in Manchester. In fact, you can eat very well from food provided by charitable organisations. People are begging because they are addicted to drugs or alcohol.

The costs of dealing with problems caused by addiction puts a huge extra strain on the criminal justice system that is already being stripped down, just like every other public institution, thanks to this government’s obsession with profit before people.

I believe the squeezed funding and outsourcing of prison services has contributed heavily to the spice epidemic which, in turn, has helped contribute to the rising number of people on the street addicted to this harmful concoction of chemicals. For prisoners who are bored to death, spice is a time killer, which also occasionally cures their boredom permanently. A person doing time and getting hooked on spice is going to come out of Strangeways and look for it – and find it easily. By the nature of the drug and its extremely unpredictable effects, he will probably not engage with probation, seek housing or the like and will end up on the streets, begging in order to feed his habit. I have an idea – a controversial one, shared by many but one that I believe is rational: decriminalise drugs.

Check out Portugal, where crime plummeted on decriminalisation. Check out Norway, focussing on treatment rather than punishment. Check out what they’re doing in Switzerland, where drug deaths have been greatly reduced. One thing has to be understood: drugs are a public health issue; they

are not a criminal issue.

The hypocrisy surrounding drugs and addiction seems to be part of the parcel when it comes to the powers that be. However, we, as citizens and social beings, can educate ourselves and promote harm-reduction. Perhaps that way we can either put more money into housing, healthcare, education and all that good stuff. Or follow the “London model” and build sky-scrapers that amount to little more than phallic showing off: “look at our big city, with big shiny buildings, isn’t it great!”. Its time that we all get realistic about this and stop either ignoring the issue or criminalising it.

Oliver Martin - is currently living in supported accommodation in Manchester and waiting to receive the keys to his own secure tenancy. He is working full time at Street Support Network using his experience of life on the streets to help reduce rough sleeping and homelessness across Greater Manchester.

Longer article online: <http://wp.me/p8357e-xd>
* Participants real names have not been used

Black Activists Rise Against Cuts: supporting those at the sharp end of austerity

BARAC's anti-austerity campaigns are helping those most severely affected by it. Promoting racial equality in the face of rising racism.

Formed in response to the introduction of austerity by the coalition government in 2010, Black Activists Rise Against Cuts (BARAC) have been battling against cuts to public services

that have had a disproportionately adverse effect on members of the BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) communities. Their campaign work covers housing and homelessness issues exacerbated by the austerity agenda in the UK. They also have both a local and global perspective in their activities opposing the rise of the far right, and their work supporting refugees displaced by poverty, persecution and climate change.

Zita Holbourne, co-founder and national chair, explains that the 'Black' in BARAC is used in its broadest political sense, covering the whole spectrum of BME communities. The organisation is UK-wide, including individual members in Bristol, Birmingham and Manchester.

One of BARAC's major projects in 2017, which was partly Lush funded, was helping to form a coalition of race equality organisations called BME Lawyers for Grenfell (Twitter: @bmelaw4grenfell).

Initial promises to provide Grenfell survivors with new homes within three weeks turned out to be false ones, and many were still in temporary accommodation hotel rooms over Christmas. The latest promise is that everyone will be housed within a year. A major obstacle to rehousing them is the lack of suitable social housing available due to years of stock depletion through Right to Buy, and failing to replace it once sold. Holbourne says:

"We have been campaigning for justice for the survivors and families from Grenfell and the local Lancaster West Estate. There is a particular race impact that we are seeing emerge with the public enquiry and the way people were treated before and since the fire."

Austerity stalks "hand in hand" with the rise of racism and the far right, says Holbourne, who has seen the emphasis of BARAC shift from the primarily anti-austerity focus to accommodate this growing threat. Holbourne describes a 2017 project



to oppose this rise in hatred, through which they published a paper called '2025: A Vision for Race Equality in Britain':

"Because racism is so rife and there are so many different aspects of racism and fascism that we are having to respond to all the time. We looked at what we would wish to see for the future, a future vision of race equality, and what we would need to do to achieve that."

Holbourne describes BARAC's work as having long term aims that are not amenable to quick fixes; but while striving to achieve those long term ends there are numerous small wins that keep people going. As with many campaigning organisations, lack of funding is a limiting factor in achieving their aims, but the precariousness and pressure of modern life is also a major factor:

"People are struggling to make ends meet, there are people that are having to hold down two or three jobs just to survive. Juggling that is a big challenge. So really resource, people having the time to come together to campaign" is a constant battle says Holbourne, who went on to say: "The biggest challenge really is just getting people to realise the crisis that we are facing, how important mobilising is, you know and coming out in numbers and how we can have an impact."

Despite these difficulties, in 2018 BARAC plans to continue organising regular convoys of aid and solidarity to refugees in France, a campaign they have been running for nearly 3 years. And their campaigns across the UK supporting those affected by austerity will continue in the hope that in the long run they will help turn the tide of austerity by influencing government policy.

Conrad Bower

BARAC & Zita are attending the Lush Summit 2018

Manchester places Housing First - and the results look good

A bold policy for tackling homelessness is steadily spreading throughout the world and is now being piloted in Manchester, with promising results.



Decadence, procrastination and occasional nudity. It would be tricky to explain some of our private domestic activities to an imagined third-party observer, but anarchic indulgence is for many the wholly necessary backend to the economically functional front which the aforementioned observer would probably wish us to display whilst out and about. Ponder the fragility of your four walls, and the accompanying symbols of respectability which cloak your natural human frailties. Just a membrane of brick and glass, and maybe a paycheck or two, between your comfy nest and the filth and danger and cold of the city at night.

Let's say the barrier falls apart. Those recuperating rituals must now be performed under the vague and judgemental gaze of the world. Stay in sight, for safety, or out of sight, for sanity? Life is heavy when you feel hunted. Hungry. Feel like you want to go home, but there is none. Habits die, replaced by instincts. Easy to grab a moment of blissful release, and wake up three steps back from stability with an unshakeable hangover. Damaged goods. Good luck getting a hostel. Streets, hostel, streets.

The traditional system of housing the chronically homeless on condition of good behaviour inevitably creates a 'revolving door,' through which homeless people pass as they go between the housing system and sleeping rough.

Housing and support without judgement

Enter Housing First (HF), a policy for tackling homelessness by offering housing and support without judgement. Housing First started out in New York in the early 90s, steadily spreading throughout the world, and is now being piloted in Manchester by Shelter's Big Lottery-funded Inspiring Change Manchester programme.

Housing First operates on the principle that everyone has a right to a home regardless of addiction, injury or mental health condition. A true HF programme will offer housing and support to someone in need without demeaning or disempowering them. Flexible support is offered as long as it is needed, but the support is offered independently of the housing, so if the service user ceases to engage with the service provider, they still get to live in the house.

Most users, however, accept the wrap-around support which is so integral to the success of the programme. HF finds its cost-efficient niche in primarily housing the chronically homeless and those with complex needs – the minority of homeless individuals who are most costly to the taxpayer due to their dependence upon A&E services and their frequent interactions with the police.

Housing First eschews the carrot-and-stick approach of the standard 'treatment first' housing schemes, where a home is provided on the condition of commitment to a course of treatment. Instead, participants of a Housing First programme are permitted autonomy and only evicted for the same reasons any other tenant might be.

Encouraging results for Housing First schemes

Shelter's Inspiring Change Manchester programme began in April 2016 with the aim of using the Housing First method to engage with up to 20 people by March 2018. In the project's most recent report, compiled by the Centre for Housing Policy at York University, participants speak in glowing terms about the project so far.

"These people are texting me every day, or phoning me back every second day and saying that there is this on, there is that on, getting involved in all sorts. I think they are a really f***ing good team," said Alex*, who has been using the service.

Charlie*, another participant of the programme, praised the support they'd received in reconnecting with their family:

"I'm in touch with my daughters, my grand-kids, my family now, that is all through these [workers], I wasn't in touch with any of them before... and it makes a big difference to your head,

because before I didn't even know where they was." The numbers are similarly encouraging. As of October last year, 16 people had engaged with the Inspiring Change Manchester pilot and 15 had been housed. Similarly small scale HF projects across the UK have been achieving a 70-90% success rate, whilst larger scale rollouts in other countries have had even more promising results. In Finland, homelessness has been all but eradicated using a plan in which HF featured prominently, inspiring

support. At the same time, we have to tackle the hugely complicated problems that pushed them into homelessness in the first place.

"But no matter what we do, Housing First can't fix the chronic shortage of affordable housing which is one of the biggest obstacles to finding someone a permanent home. That's why the government urgently needs to help councils build more new homes for rent that people can genuinely afford."

"These people are texting me every day, or phoning me back every second day and saying that there is this on, there is that on, getting involved in all sorts. I think they are a really f*ing good team"**

Communities Secretary Sajid Javid to become an advocate for Housing First in the UK.

The preliminary findings of the cost-benefit analysis being run by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority Research Team predict that the pilot will break even in its first year, and go on to save £376,893 if allowed to run for five years. Researchers have calculated:

- an almost 50% reduction in the number of nights that clients spent in prison (potentially saving £42,968)
- a 96% reduction in hospital inpatient episodes (potentially saving £876,744)
- a 35% reduction in street homeless and 92% reduction in people living in temporary accommodation (potentially saving £83,884)
- a 50% reduction in housing evictions (potentially saving £74,458)

"Not a magic bullet"

Housing First clearly has a fiscally compelling argument as well as moral urgency and a growing political will behind it in the UK. Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham recently welcomed £7 million of funding from the Chancellor to extend the Housing First projects which GMCA announced last November. If these programmes bear any similarity to Shelter's Manchester pilot, then the 450 new HF places created will go a long way towards curing this city's housing crisis.

Despite this progress, the big question is whether Housing First can scale up and stay true to its principles in the context of the Great British Housing Crisis. Sarah Walters, development manager at Inspiring Change Manchester, said:

"Our experience so far is that giving a homeless person a new home is not a magic bullet. People with complex needs often require long-term

Housing First's "Psychology-Informed Environment" is commendable, but if the living environment does not contain enough houses, then people can't be housed. Actually, there are enough homes - nearly 200,000 that have been empty for 6 months. There is also enough land, and the capacity to build more houses on it, provided it can be wrestled from property speculators and put to good use. Of course this will be a futile exercise if the houses built go for market rates or what the government deems 'affordable'.



More funding for bold ideas such as Housing First should be celebrated, along with the promising results of pilots such as those being carried out in Manchester, but while the root economic causes of the housing crisis remain, no single policy can save the day. What Housing First has shown so far however, is that starting from the principle that housing is a right rather than a reward for good behaviour yields huge benefits, and this can only be a step in the right direction.

Georges Almond

**Participants' real names have not been used
Keep an eye out for the next Inspiring Change Manchester Housing First report in Spring 2018.*

*The original longer article is online:
<http://wp.me/p8357e-xs>*

Austerity: the false economy increasing homelessness (part one)



Austerity is a discredited economic concept that our government stubbornly clings to, regardless of increasing levels of destitution across Manchester & the UK

Homelessness is often described as a complex problem, usually by those tasked with reducing it, and there are no doubt a multitude of factors that contribute to someone becoming homeless. But there is a common theme to the rise in homelessness apparent on the streets of Manchester and across the UK: the simple lack of resources allocated to keeping citizens securely housed and rehousing them once they become homeless. This lack of funding is driven by the ideology of austerity, embraced by the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government in 2010 and continued by Theresa May's government, despite growing evidence that austerity is a false economy with a huge human cost.

Pre-austerity, it looked like we were winning in the battle against homelessness, at least when looking at the national statistics for households accepted as statutorily homeless by local authorities; a council has a legal obligation to offer housing assistance to accepted households. These figures for England peaked in 2003-04 with 135,420 households accepted as homeless, and then fell to a low of 40,020 in 2009-10. The figures for 2016-17 in England stand at 59,090, a 48% increase from the low point in 2009-10. When the coalition government came into power, the financial crisis began to bite, and the government's austerity agenda was launched.

Households accepted as statutorily homeless in Manchester have risen by 133% from a low point of 533 in 2012-13 to 1242 in 2016-17. The

official statistics for statutorily homeless households could be a lot higher than they are now except for a practice called 'gatekeeping'. This involves councils, or outsourced homeless service providers, refusing to accept a homelessness application and/or provide accommodation to them.

Gatekeeping was facilitated by a piece of legislation passed by the coalition government, the Localism Act 2011. This gave local authorities greater discretion in who to accept as statutorily homeless, and also the ability to discharge their obligation to the homeless by offering them a one year tenancy in private rented accommodation rather than a permanent social housing tenancy. This has led councils to point homeless people to private rented houses or rooms before checking whether they meet the strict criteria to qualify as statutorily homeless, thus reducing the official figures. The Localism Act has also led to more homeless households being offered out-of-borough housing, contributing to the increasing trend of gentrification.

The amount by which the national statistics for statutorily homeless households may seriously underestimate the true scale of homelessness in the UK, is indicated by research carried out by Shelter. This compiled four sets of official statistics on homelessness and provided a "robust lower-end estimate" of homelessness at 254,514 people homeless in 2016, just over four times higher than the official statistics for statutorily homeless households.

Rough Sleeping

Walking around the streets of Manchester it is impossible to miss the homeless tip of the iceberg – the increasing numbers of rough sleepers in the city. Rough sleeping across England has more than doubled from 1,768 in 2010, to 4,134 in 2016. In Manchester there has been an even greater 11 fold increase in rough sleepers, from just 7 in 2010, to 78 in 2016.

The rough sleepers count is widely acknowledged to underestimate the problem. At a Manchester Council meeting in 2015, Councillor Hazel Summers said, "The headcount is set up in a way as to undercount the problem, as a snapshot of one particular night". In the same meeting Jenny Osborne, Senior Strategy Manager of Public Health Manchester, indicated how inaccurate the rough sleepers headcount was likely to be by comparing it to data gathered from the Severe Weather

Emergency Protocol, where the council has an obligation to house rough sleepers in very cold/bad weather. Osborne said:

“Last year [2014] the headcount for rough sleepers was 47; we know that from the severe weather protocol we operated last year that 234 separate individuals accessed that provision during the cold weather period.”

Local authority cuts

The cuts local authorities have been forced to make due to austerity have been savage. One in ten local authorities believe they are in danger of failing to deliver core services they are legally obliged to, and the majority of councils believe they will have to raise council tax to fill the gap.

In 2016-17 the yearly net revenue budget for Manchester stands at £530 million. But from 2011-12 the city council has had to cut a staggering total of £336 from this budget, equivalent to a 39% drop in the 2016-17 budget.

To accommodate these cuts the council has had to slash the proposed budgets for many services, including Housing Services. This division of council service provides support for those who are already homeless, including rough sleepers, and provides housing welfare to prevent vulnerable people becoming homeless.

Rick Henderson, the chief executive of Homeless Link, which represents homelessness charities, said of the cuts to Housing Services:

“These essential services provide a lifeline for some of society’s most vulnerable people, as well as being beneficial for the wider community and the public purse... While we recognise that local authorities are under significant financial pressure, the evidence points to the real danger that cuts today will result in immense long-term damage for vulnerable individuals and communities as a whole. Higher rates of rough sleeping, substance misuse, ill-health and antisocial behaviour are bound to follow...”

For 2009-10 the proposed Housing Services budget for Manchester stood at £67.5 million; this saw a drop of 74% to £17.5 million by 2016-17. The predicted budget for 2017-18 rises slightly to £23 million, but is likely too little too late to make a

significant difference to the rising numbers of homeless including rough sleepers.

The predicted upturn for the Housing Services budget in 2017-18 may be due to the inclusion of transitional funding for the recently passed Homelessness Reduction Bill, which places a legal obligation on local authorities to prevent homelessness occurring. But the transitional funding of £61 million, to be split across all local authorities in England, only lasts for 2 years. Local authorities will then still have the legal obligation to prevent homelessness occurring but will not have the extra funds needed to make that happen.

Due to the high prevalence of substance abuse (39% have drugs problem and 27% alcohol) and poor mental health (~ 80 %) among the homeless, cuts to these services have a greater impact on them than the general public. The Social Care budget for Manchester, which provides support for mental health and substance abuse issues, was at a high

of £307 million in 2011-12 but saw a drop of 22% to £240.6 million in 2015-16. This has increased to a predicted £273.4 million for 2017-18, but still falls way short of the high point with no doubt a higher number of people in need.

Within the Social Care budget, mental health support for adults has seen a 29% cut from £18.6 million in 2010-11 to a predicted £13.3 million in 2017-18. Adult substance misuse support has fallen 80% from £1.4 million in 2014-15 to £282,000 in 2017-18.

False economy

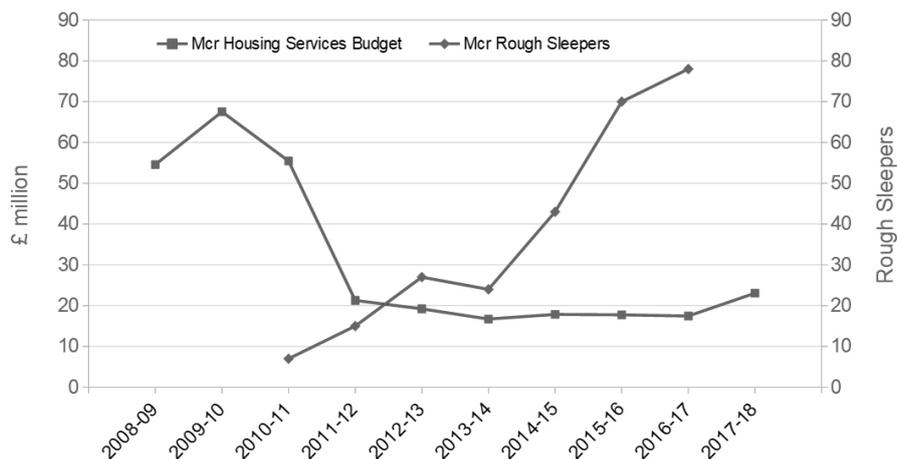
The austerity-driven cuts to local services are part of a failed economic experiment that the Tory government stubbornly refuses to acknowledge.

The longer version of this article can be read online: <http://wp.me/p8357e-rf>

Conrad Bower

Austerity: the false economy increasing homelessness (part two) - which focuses on cuts and changes to social security - can be read here:

<http://wp.me/p8357e-r1>



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Holding power to account, including local government, using Companies House & Freedom of Information Act 2001

This spring The Meteor is teaming up with the Centre for Investigative Journalism to offer a comprehensive twelve session training course in community journalism.

If you have ever been disappointed by media coverage in your area before, this is a chance to set the record straight by producing the news yourself; covering the stories you know are important to your community.

The course will take place in Manchester city centre, starting with an introductory event on Saturday 14 April. Evening workshops will then follow at the Greenfish Resource Centre every Thursday evening from 19 April to 14 June 2018, 6:45 - 9pm.

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