

# Tackling Rough Sleeping in Belfast:

## Key facts and figures

March 2016

Findings from the Belfast Street Needs Audit carried out by the Housing Executive in partnership with Welcome Centre, Depaul and Belfast City Centre Management.

### Background

The Housing Executive has statutory responsibility for responding to homelessness in Northern Ireland and funds a range of services through voluntary sector partners to tackle the issue. Currently the Housing Executive provides £13m to homeless services in Belfast which funds in excess of 900 temporary accommodation units and a range of support services.

Services that the Housing Executive offers or funds within Belfast to tackle homelessness include:

- The provision of day-time and night-time street outreach services;
- A day centre that can provide support services for up to 100 vulnerable people;
- The provision of 20 crash beds and a night time reception service;
- A wet hostel for up to 22 people;
- 70 units of intensively managed emergency accommodation;
- The provision of 11 direct access hostels comprising 337 units;
- 10 hostels of family accommodation with 201 units;
- 270 private let properties.

### Belfast Street Needs Audit

In the past the Housing Executive and partner organisations regularly monitored rough sleeping in Belfast and found that the number of people sleeping in the streets on any given night was in single figures. In recent years, however, there has been a growing visibility of people on the streets of Belfast City Centre.

Whilst anecdotal evidence from those who work in the homeless sector indicated that much of this is related to street drinking and begging, the Housing Executive wanted to establish a clear and factual picture of this population in order to ensure that services targeted at rough sleepers are operating effectively.

Last year the Housing Executive therefore commissioned a Street Needs Audit which was delivered in partnership with the Welcome Centre, Depaul and Belfast City Centre Management to understand the reality of street homelessness and rough sleeping in Belfast. This piece of work will form the basis of comparative analysis in the future.

The Street Audit represents a unique approach in that it was carried out over an extensive 12 week period, which has enabled us to identify and target specific interventions toward a group of very complex individuals. Practice in establishing the number of rough sleepers across Europe and UK has tended to involve a snapshot at a single point in time and so is less extensive than the Belfast analysis.

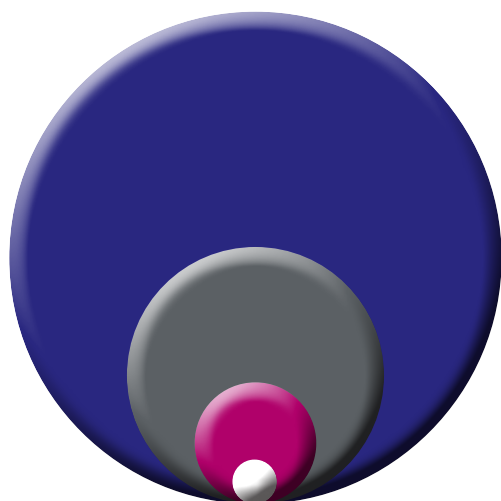
The purpose of the Street Audit was to:

- Establish how many people were sleeping rough in Belfast City Centre;
- Engage with individuals to assess their accommodation needs;
- Assist individuals to return to their accommodation including referral to the most appropriate support services;
- Identify any barriers to service entry;
- Inform the future reconfiguration of homelessness services including assessing the adequacy of crisis and outreach services and informing commissioning priorities.

## Street Audit Findings

The audit has highlighted that, in addition to an entrenched group who require case management from a housing perspective, there was a larger group observed that were engaged primarily in begging and also street drinking activities less frequently during the audit period, and there are concerns at the visibility of this group. A multi-agency approach is required to address this issue.

During the 12 week period of the Street Audit, 361 different individuals were observed engaging in some sort of street activity on one or more occasions. 166 were assessed on two or more occasions and 42 of these were observed an average of once per week. Of these 42 individuals 7 were assessed multiple times each week.



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Individuals encountered during the Street Audit received an assessment to establish whether they had a support plan in place, with the most entrenched 7 individuals being prioritised.

This active case management approach involves the development of relationships with a range of community, outreach and accommodation based support services and frontline statutory services to share intelligence and agree interventions to meet the needs of individuals.


At the end of each day the Street Audit Team recorded the number of individuals who had actually been sleeping rough. This number ranged from 0 to 19. The average number of rough sleepers per night was 6. In all cases clients were offered advice and assistance to access accommodation and support.

# 6

**average number of  
rough sleepers per night**



The three main types of street activity of the entire sample of 361 individuals observed were rough sleeping (35%), street drinking (39%) and begging (14%). The majority of those found begging were also observed engaged in street drinking activity. The Street Audit Team was unable to determine the activity on a number of occasions (12%).



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**14%** begging

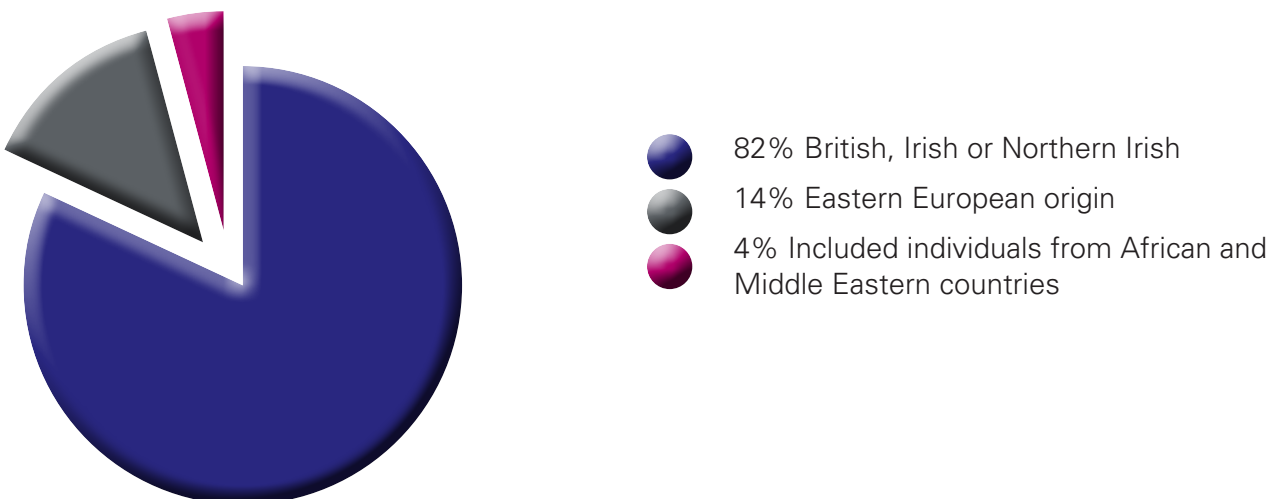
In terms of the age profile, of the 361 individuals encountered during the audit, 211 were willing to divulge their age: 42 were 25 or under; 69 were aged from 26-35; 53 were aged from 36-45; 32 were aged from 46-55; 13 were aged from 56-65; 2 were over 65.



The vast majority of people met during the audit were male: 85% of individuals were male and 15% were female.



The majority (82%) described themselves as either British, Irish or Northern Irish. 14% were of Eastern European origin. Those in the 'Other' category (4%) included individuals from African and Middle Eastern countries.



## Conclusions

Many of the people identified in street activity by the Street Needs Audit team were characterised by chaotic lifestyles and poor health and well-being, and proved difficult to engage with and were resistant to offers of assistance. For example, one of this entrenched group had recorded contacts with the Street Needs Audit team in excess of 35 times during the course of the audit and persistently refused to accept offers of help or assistance. These entrenched individuals were more likely to require an emergency services response than to try to access crisis beds or other services.

Over the period of the audit and subsequent engagement, the Housing Executive and partner organisations have confirmed that all the individuals had access to services, accommodation and support in the City. We will be using this audit to look at how services and support can be further improved, particularly for those with complex needs. A key priority will be to find out why some individuals choose not to avail of the service on offer and to encourage them to leave the streets and move to a place of safety.

It is clear from the audit that these individuals face many challenges and that they require intense packages of support alongside access to accommodation. All the statutory and voluntary agencies involved in dealing with homelessness in Belfast are committed to continue to work together to ensure support is coordinated and further improved.

For further information and advice or to view the full report visit our website **[www.nihe.gov.uk](http://www.nihe.gov.uk)**