



Tackling Family Homelessness in the UK

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Structure of the Presentation

I) What Is Family Homelessness?

- Define, describe, characterise the problem
- Outline the root causes and consequences
- Explain the multi-dimensionality of problem

II) Toward Policy Solutions

- Map key stakeholders
- Describe and evaluate current policy
- Suggest a two-pronged policy proposal to expand the scope of the current policy



What is Family Homelessness?

Defining homelessness

- Homelessness UK legal definition :

(1) A person is **homeless** if he has no accommodation available for his occupation, in the UK or elsewhere

(2) if he has accommodation but- (a) he **cannot secure entry** to it, or (b) it consists of a **moveable structure**, vehicle or vessel designed or adapted for human habitation and there is no place where he is entitled or permitted both to place it and to reside in it.

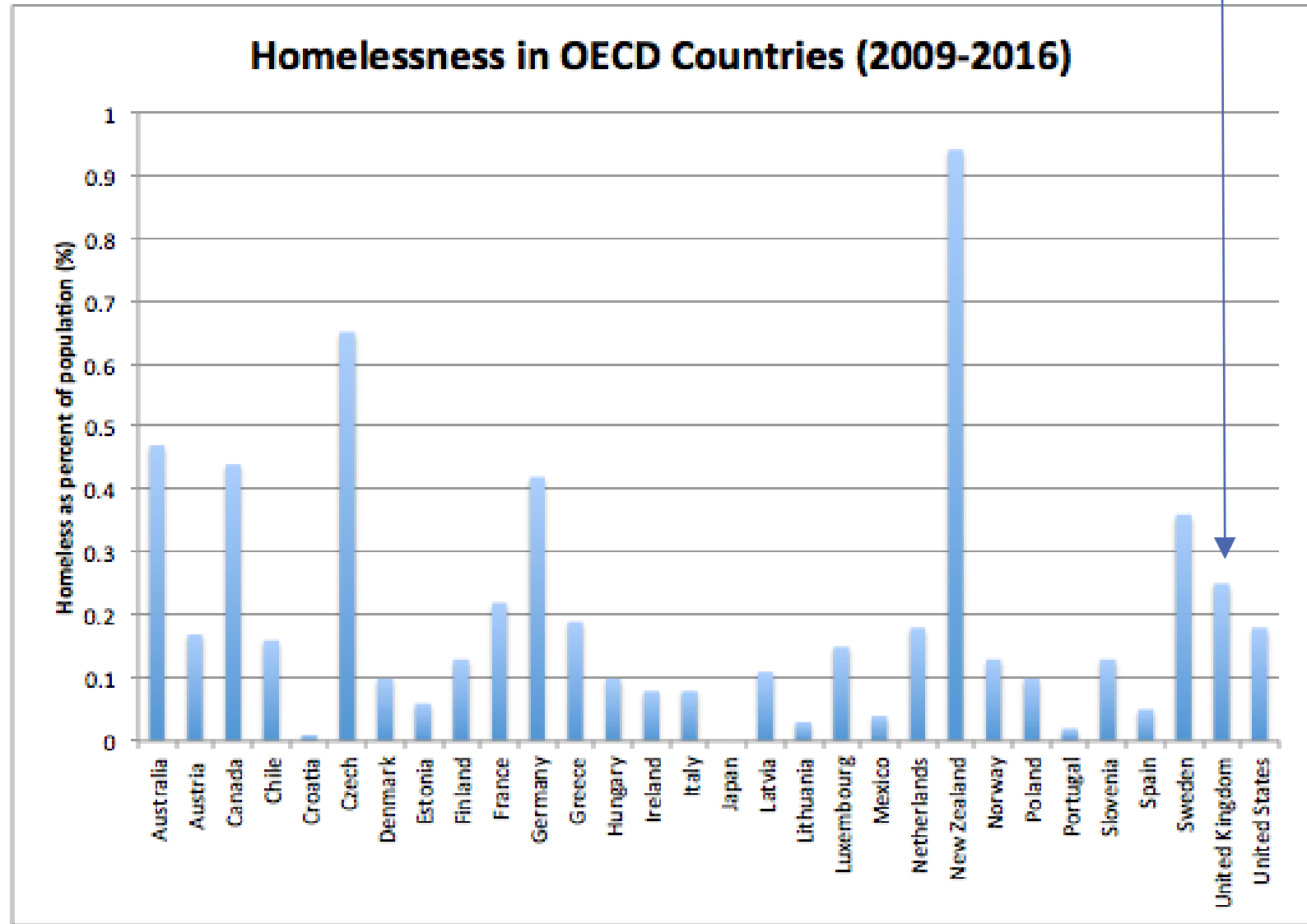
(3) A person shall not be treated as having accommodation unless it is accommodation which it would be **reasonable** for him to continue to occupy."

Source: 1996 Housing Act

- Several ways to define homelessness, however, for the scope of the presentation we will limit ourselves to the UK

Describing the problem

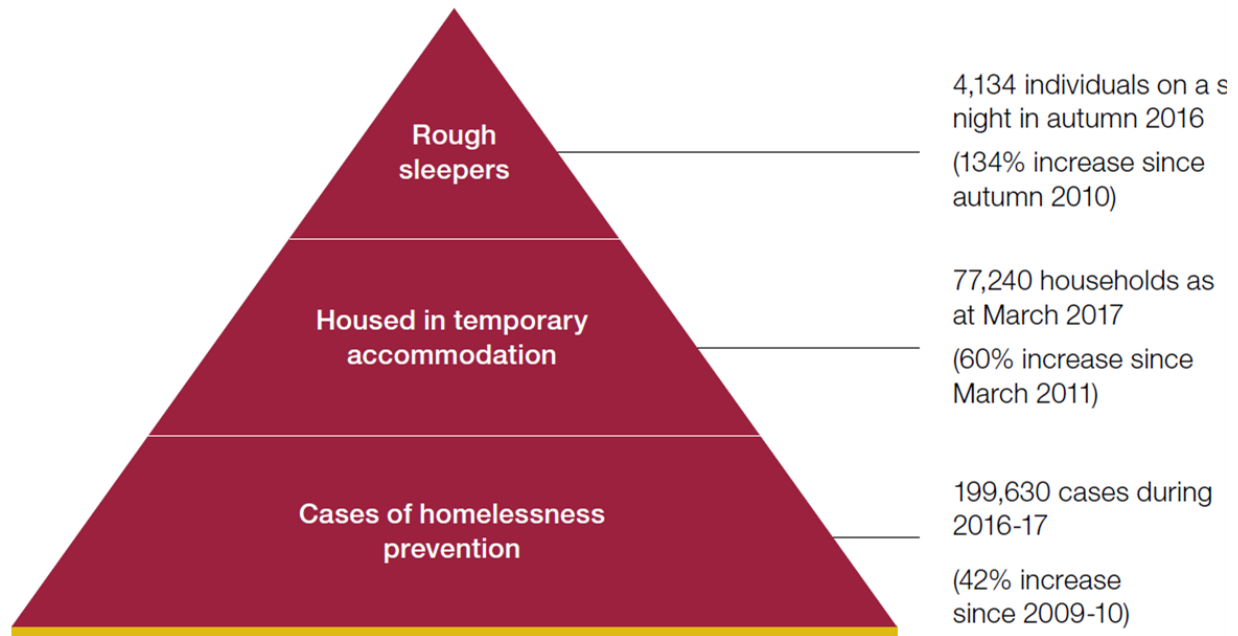
0.25% of population



Source: OECD Affordable Housing Database

Characterizing *family* homelessness

- Family homelessness implies a family unit consisting of at least 1 adult and 1 minor child or 1 pregnant woman.
 - In the UK, 65% of homeless families are headed by a lone mother
- Not including young persons 16-18 living on their own; family characterised by the presence of at least 1 dependent child
- Homelessness does not always imply rooflessness: hidden problem



Source: Department for Communities and Local Government, 2017

Magnitude of the problem



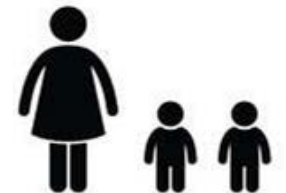
- Number of homeless families in London has **increased by 51%** since 2011 and nationally by **15%** since 2012.

- **1.6 million** homeless children in Britain, over **1 million** live in overcrowded housing, over **70,000** in temporary accommodation

Source: OECD Affordable Housing Database

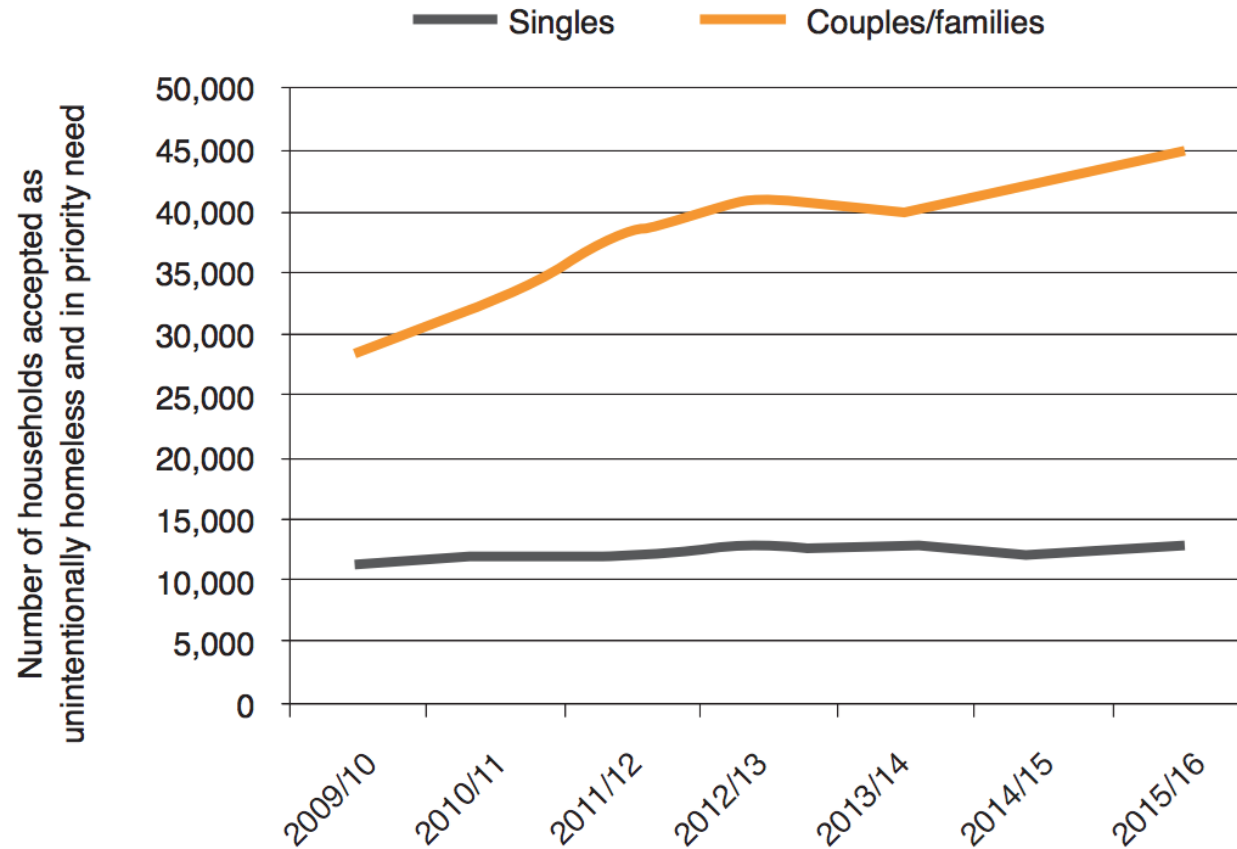
- Within homeless population, the number of **couples** with dependent children has **increased by 73%**, and **lone parents by 50%** (42 000 households).

Source: Gov.uk - Public Health England



Growing magnitude of the problem

Figure 4.4 Trend in single person households accepted as unintentionally homeless and in priority need, 2009/10-2015/16



Source: DCLG statutory homelessness statistics

Source: Crisis England Homelessness Monitor 2017

Root Causes of Family Homelessness

Structural: supply and affordability of housing, national/local land use policy, inequality, structural racism, and other macro level influences

Discrimination

Poverty

Mental health

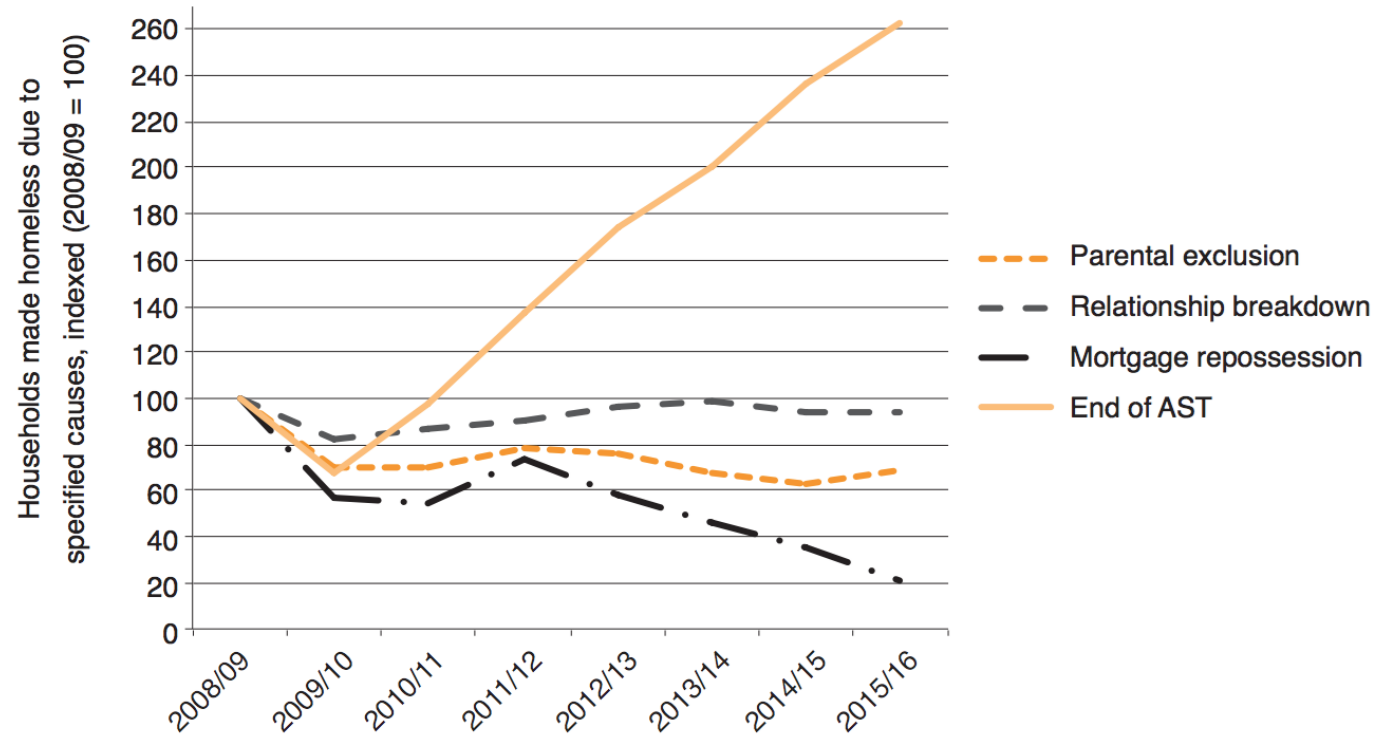
Domestic violence

Individual/Household: mental health, substance abuse, domestic violence, social isolation and lack of support, lone parenthood, and other forms of distress



Root Causes: critical shortage of available and affordable housing

Figure 4.8 Change in number of households made homeless due to selected immediate causes, 2008/09-2015/16 – indexed

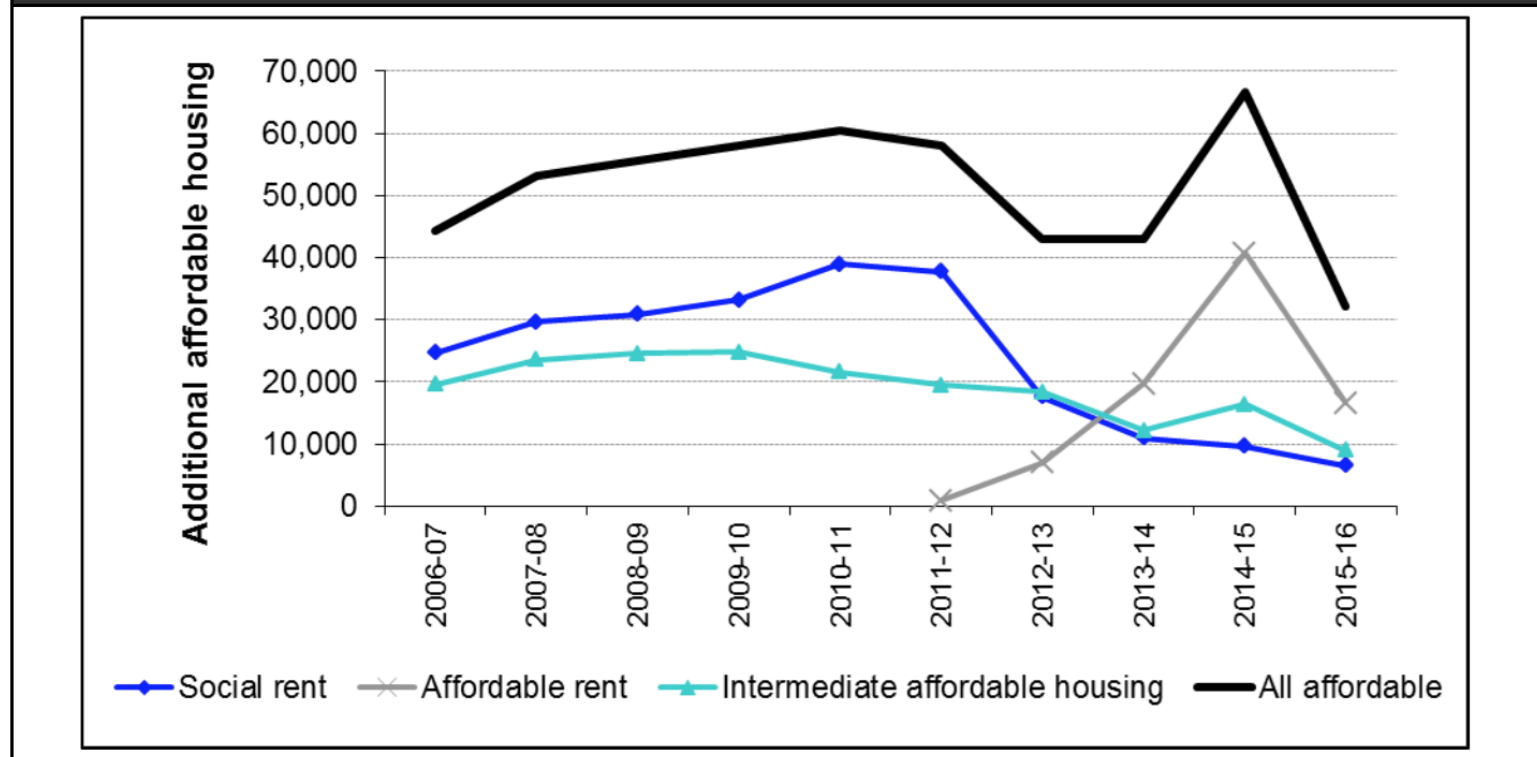


Source: Collated from DCLG statutory homelessness statistics

Source: Crisis UK Homelessness Monitor 2016

Root Causes: critical shortage of *available* housing

Figure 1: Trends in the gross supply of affordable housing by tenure, England, 2006-07 to 2015-16



Source: Department for
Communities and Local Government

Root Causes: critical shortage of affordable housing

News > UK > UK Politics

Government housing benefit cut is making homelessness worse, say local councils

Welfare reforms are main cause of homelessness in England, study finds

Freeze on Local Housing All leaders warn

Number of people facing homelessness rose sharply last year but trend has gone unnoticed by politicians or media, says lead author of Homelessness Monitor

Small families living in a two-bedroom home:

Table 1. Major towns and cities

Local authority	Shortfall between LHA rate and rent (monthly)
Basingstoke	£103.45
Cambridge	£531.17
Bristol	£217.51
Luton UA	£120.10
Milton Keynes	£148.71
Oxford	£126.41
Stevenage	£107.25
York	£107.02
Brighton and Hove	£203.76

Table 2. Top ten biggest shortfalls in London

Local authority	Shortfall between LHA rate and rent (monthly)
Kensington and Chelsea	£1,252.83
Westminster	£914.86
Camden	£612.86
Islington	£460.66
Hounslow	£437.59
Brent	£412.87
Lambeth	£409.32
Tower Hamlets	£398.20
Greenwich	£389.84
Hackney	£383.51

Source: Shelter UK

Consequences of Family Homelessness: Psychosocial, health, developmental, educational

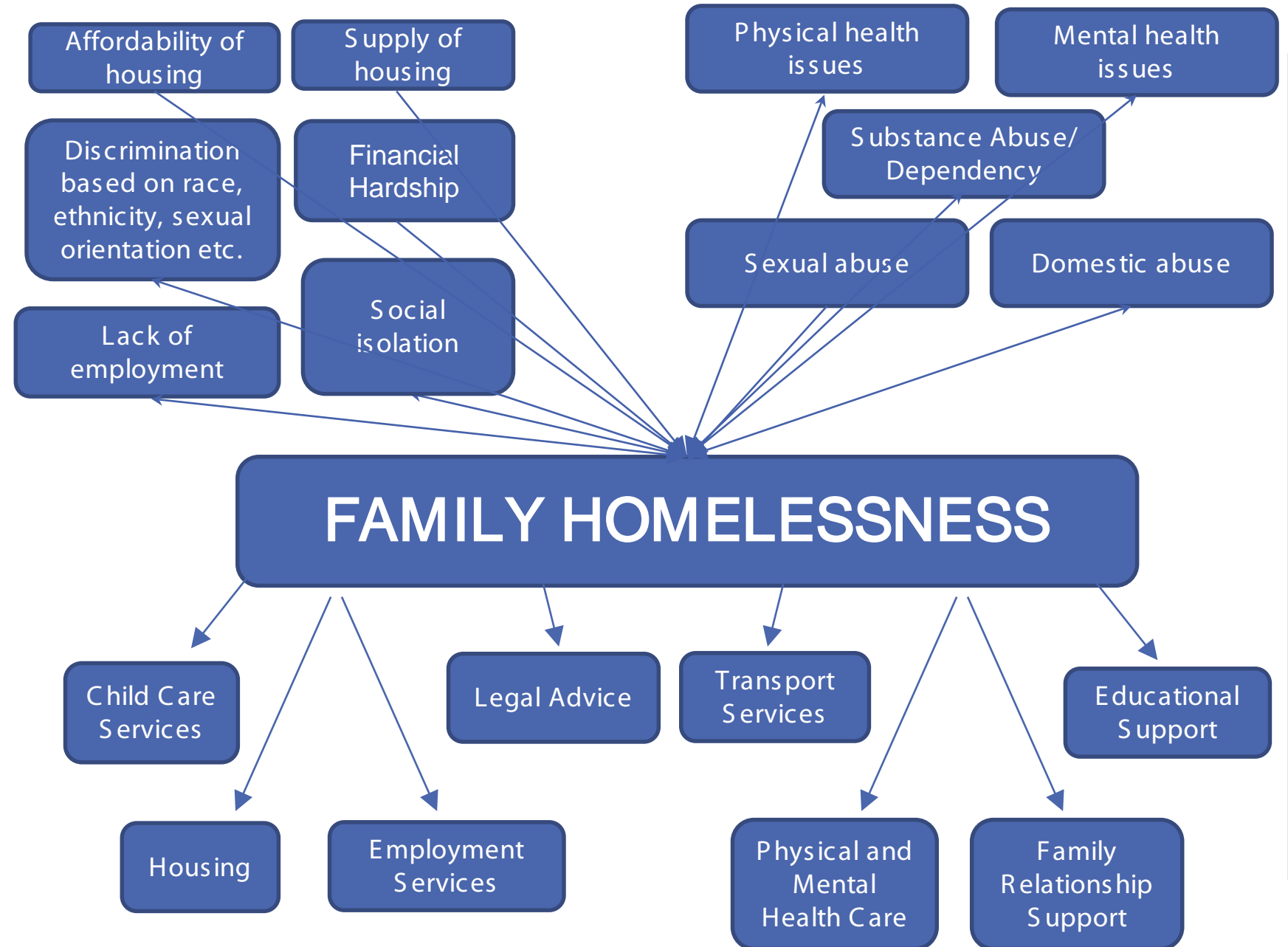
- 1) Maternal depression and mental health problems (Bhui et al., 2006; Fazel et al., 2008)
- 2) Mental health problems in children (Cumella et al., 1998; Haber and Toro, 2004)
- 3) Hunger and malnutrition in children (Richards and Smith, 2007)
- 4) Physical health problems (Parks et al., 2007; Panter-Brick, 2010; Tischler et al., 2006)
- 5) Developmental delay and academic problems (Parks et al., 2007)
- 6) Education (Noll and Watkins, 2003; Molnar et al., 1990; Masten et al., 1997; Rafferty, 1998; Whitman, 1990)
- 7) Social exclusion (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011)
- 8) Detrimental effects on emotional well-being (Shelter, 2006)

Consequences of Family Homelessness



Source: Homeless Link

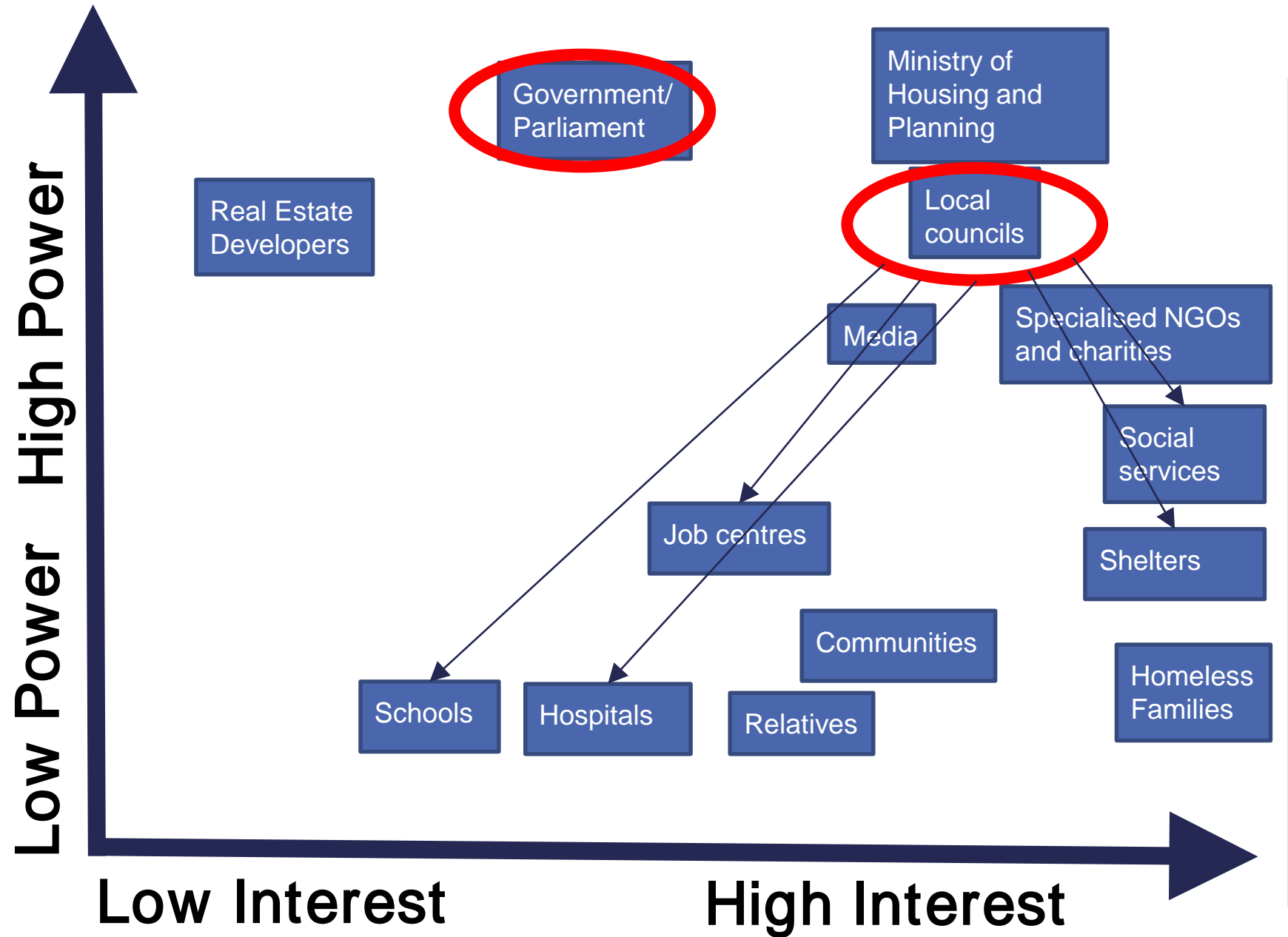
Family homelessness is a **multi-dimensional problem** with a number of complex and interconnected causes and consequences, implying a multiplicity of different support needs.





Toward Policy Solutions

Stakeholder mapping



Homelessness Policy in the UK: The existing policy landscape

- **Housing (Homeless Persons) Act of 1977**
 - Defined homelessness for first time, defined “priority need” populations including people with dependent children
- **Housing Act 1996**
 - Expanded “priority need” populations that local authorities were required to house, including single homeless people who may be social vulnerable (e.g., fleeing violence)
- **Homelessness Act of 2002**
 - Required local authorities to review extent of homelessness in their jurisdiction and create a strategy to tackle.
- **Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, to be implemented 2018**

It effectively bolts two new duties onto the full rehousing duties introduced by previous Acts:

- **Duty to take steps to prevent homelessness:** Councils will have to help people at risk of losing suitable accommodation as soon as they are threatened with homelessness within 56 days. This means people should get help on receiving a notice from their landlord if they are struggling to find a letting, rather than being told to come back when they have a bailiff's date.
- **Duty to take steps to relieve homelessness:** Councils will have to help all those who are homeless to secure suitable accommodation, regardless of whether they are 'intentionally homeless' or priority need. This should mean that all eligible households are offered help to find a home, rather than some people being turned away. It should also ensure that the true scale of homelessness is recorded.

“Duty to assess every eligible applicant’s case and agree a plan

189A Assessments and personalised plan

- (1) If the local housing authority are satisfied that an applicant is—
 - (a) homeless or threatened with homelessness, and
 - (b) eligible for assistance,the authority must make an assessment of the applicant’s case.
- (2) The authority’s assessment of the applicant’s case must include an assessment of—
 - (a) the circumstances that caused the applicant to become homeless or threatened with homelessness,
 - (b) the housing needs of the applicant including, in particular, what accommodation would be suitable for the applicant and any persons with whom the applicant resides or might reasonably be expected to reside (“other relevant persons”), and
 - (c) what support would be necessary for the applicant and any other relevant persons to be able to have and retain suitable accommodation.

Sources: Shelter and legislation.co.uk

Immediate Prevention

**Homelessness
Reduction Act 2017**

Immediate

Relief

Existing
homelessness
policy
landscape

Immediate

Two-pronged policy approach: addressing upstream causes and downstream effects

Long-term structural root causes

Immediate Prevention

Increase the number and affordability of housing units



Immediate Relief

Increase the accessibility and coordination of social services

Long-term social consequences

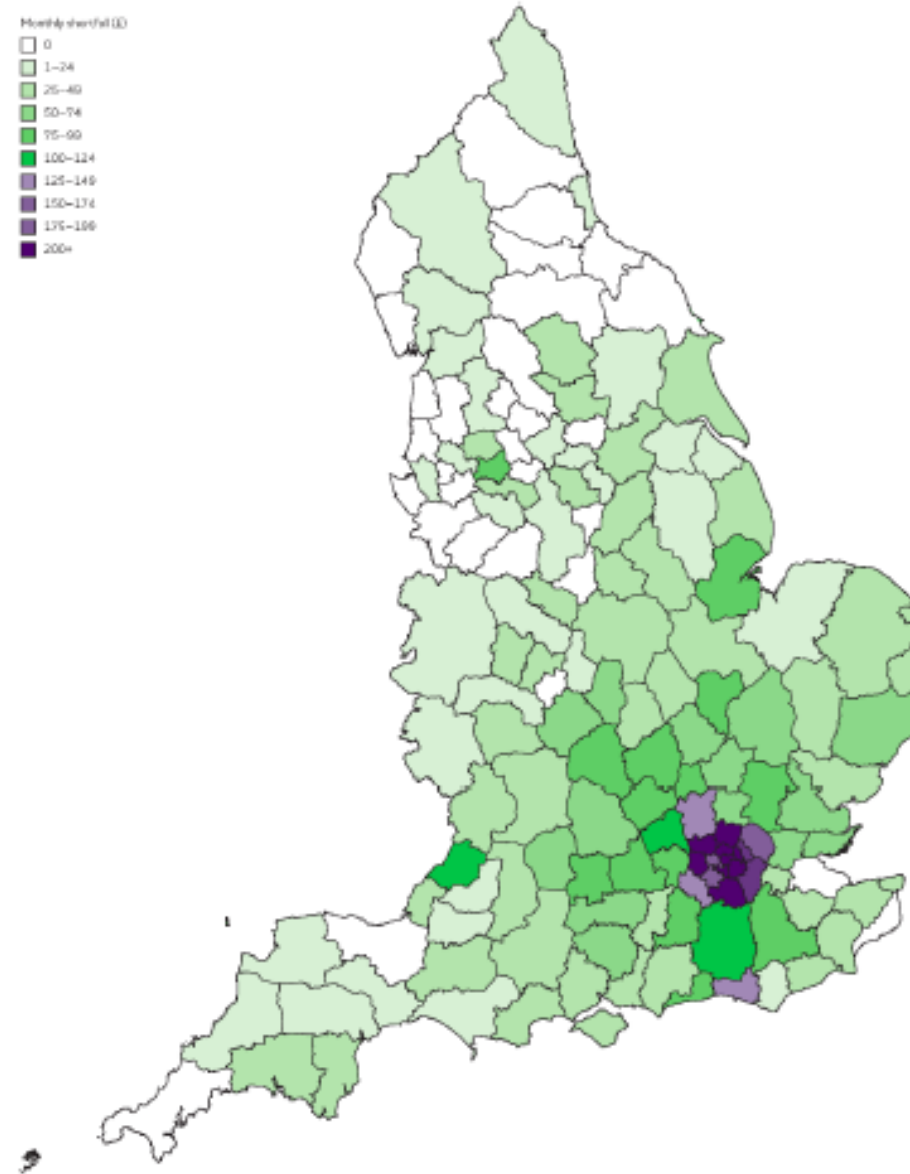
First prong: Addressing the lack of affordable housing

Objective: Increase the number and affordability of housing units

1. Immediate Action: Lift the freeze on the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) in order to make the amount more in line with real market costs (Fitzpatrick et al., 2017)
 - a. The LHA should be equal to the 30th percentile of local rent prices and adjusted for inflation annually (Robson, 2017)

i) Lifting the cap on the Local Housing Allowance

Figure 12: Monthly shortfall (£) between 30th percentile market rent and LHA for two-bedroom properties, by BRMA



First prong: Addressing the lack of affordable housing

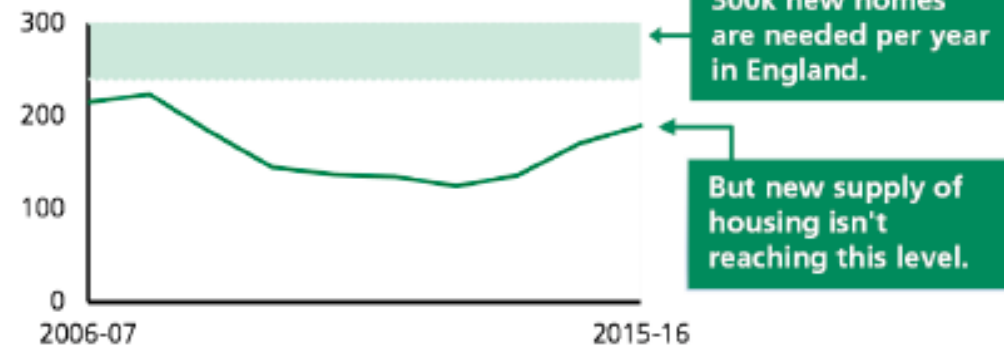
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1. Long Term Action: Increase the number of new public homes per year from 200,000 to 300,000 through an increase in funds for the Affordable Homes Programme (Jefferys et al., 2014)
 - a. With a focus on affordable housing and units at social rent levels (Wilson, Barton, & Smith, 2017)

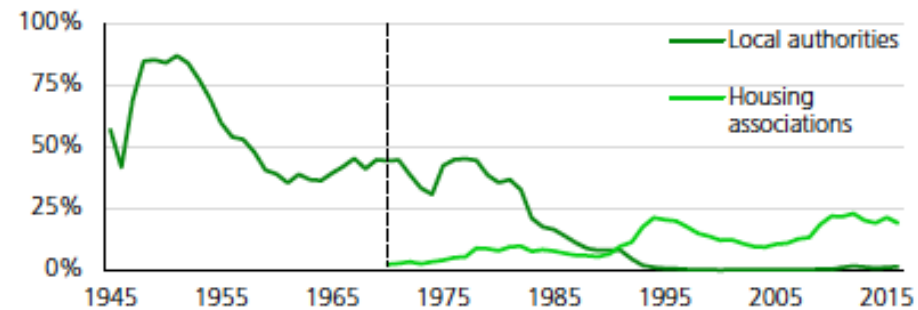
ii) Lowering the housing supply gap

In charts: Housing supply in England¹



Proportion of new houses built by local authorities and housing associations, 1945 to 2016²²

England and Wales



Source: House of Commons Briefing Paper, No. 07671

**Second
prong:
Increasing
coordination
between
services**

Objective I : Improve coordination between all different services involved in the life of a homeless family

WHILST...

Objective II: assisting and helping homeless families lead normal lives + protecting the children while in a state of homelessness

Why?

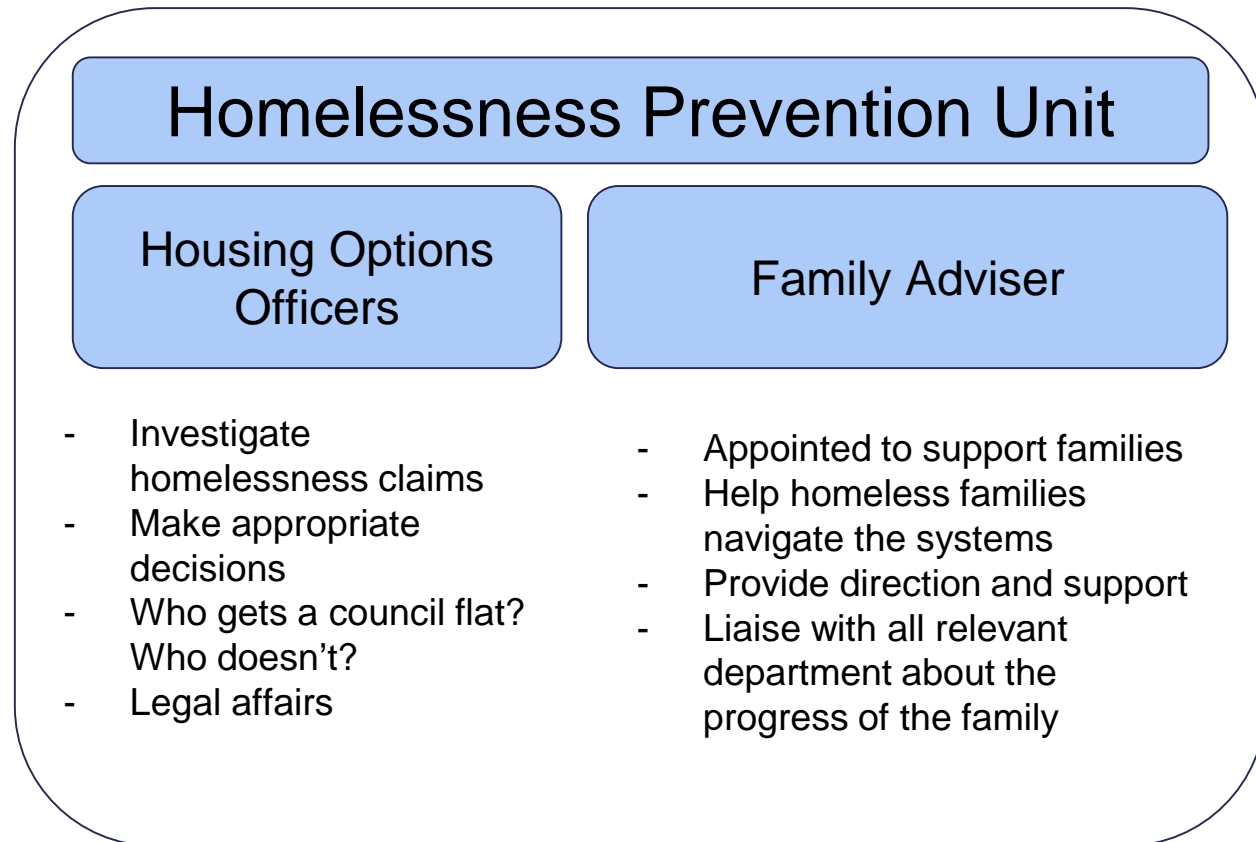
→ There is evidence that greater collaboration is needed to protect these families whilst homeless (National Audit Office, Crisis Independent Expert Panel, 2015)

Lack of coordination in social services

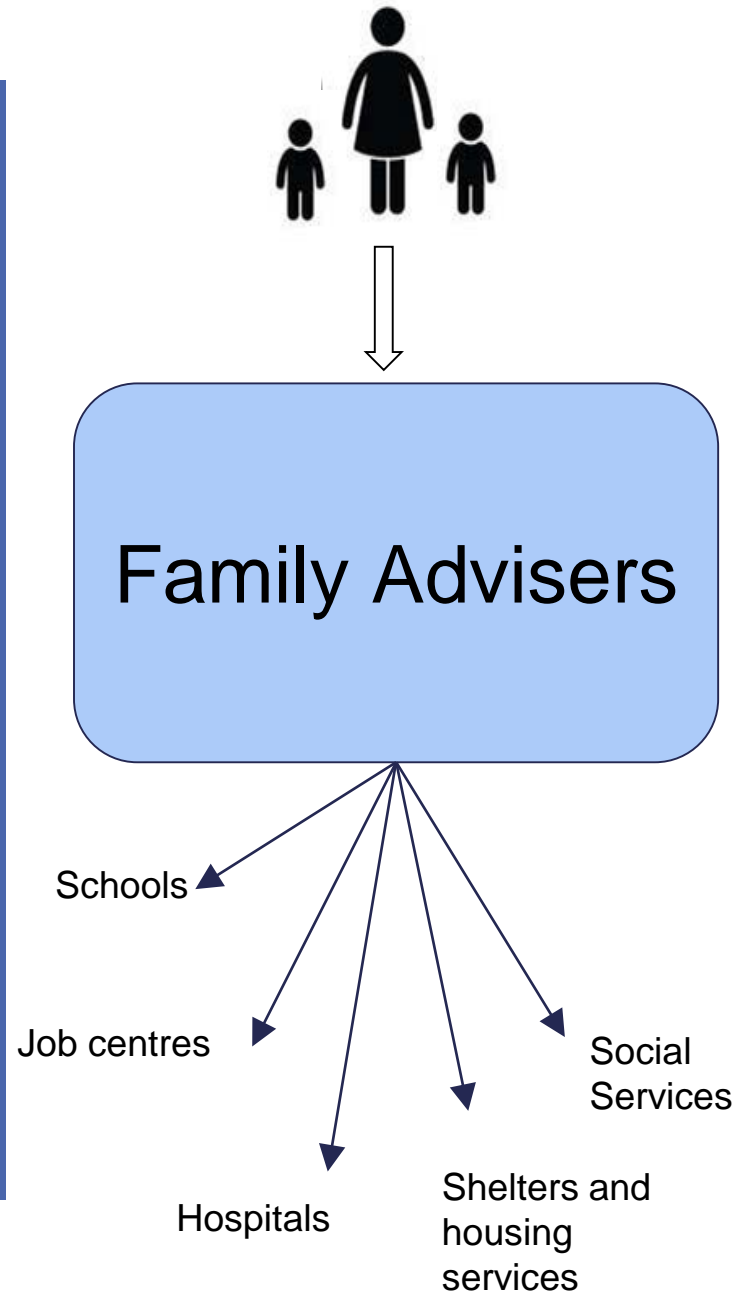
- When a family becomes homeless....
 - Apply for housing at the local council level
 - Get appointed a Housing Options Officer
- They investigate all claims of homelessness and make appropriate decisions under the Housing Act of 1996, aid finding housing, manage caseloads, and deal with legal matters
- The families are left alone to navigate the different systems and bodies they come into contact with and have little contact with their Housing Options Officer
- No coordination between shelters/ housing agencies/ schools/ social services/ job centers etc. (Shelter, 2002-2003)

Introducing Family Advisers

- Introduce a new role under the umbrella of the Housing Prevention Unit at local council level: Family Advisers



Responsibilities Of Family Advisers



Responsibilities would include: ANYTHING TO ENSURE THE CHILDREN AND THE FAMILY CONTINUE HAVING A NORMAL LIFE.

- Informing the school of the children's situation
- Setting up appropriate measures in the school for the children to be counselled by someone
- Liaise with the school about the progress of the children
- Being there for all family members
- Organising appointments with specialist doctors if needed
- Setting up meeting with job centres
- Encouraging parents to attend these meetings
- Going along with them
- Connecting victims of domestic abuse with the appropriate organisations

Why do we
think it
could work?
A Policy
Transfer
Framework

Adapting policy from other spheres of social services:

In the UK victims of rape and sexual abuse receive the assistance of **Independent Sexual Violence Advisers**.

- Not counsellors
 - There to listen
 - There to help victims navigate the criminal justice system
 - Helps victims access healthcare
 - Informs victims about their rights
 - Accompany victims to meetings
 - Helps victims in depositions
- Widely beneficial results: these victims feel heard and supported (Helster & Lilley 2015, Robison, 2009)

Feasibility and Challenges

Barriers

- Budgetary
 - Housing construction costs
 - Lifting LHA freeze
 - Hiring family advisor
- Political Will
- Local council and service provider pushback
- Real estate pushback

Facilitators

- Costs of homelessness
 - 1 billion/year
- Legislation
 - HRA 2017
- NGOs/charities
 - Shelter and Crisis
- Media/Public Opinion
 - Poor press on increasing # of homeless families
- Policy “window”
 - Post-Grenfell Tower [London]

Thank You!

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