



Citizens Advice Bedford

# Homeless in Bedford

Housing Research + Campaigns

# **HOMELESS IN BEDFORD**

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# HOMELESS IN BEDFORD

## 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1Ai The Department for Communities and Local Government released the autumn 2015 figures for rough sleeping on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2016. These showed that, compared to 2014, there had been a 30% increase of rough sleepers across England as a whole with a 38% increase in the Eastern region. Bedford Borough itself reported 51 rough sleepers: an increase of 104% over the previous year. Compared to all other councils across England, Bedford was listed as having the eighth highest number of sleepers.<sup>1</sup>
- 1Aii However the count gives no details about the rough sleepers, their age, why they are homeless or sleeping rough. It is therefore difficult to get a picture of who these people are and how they might best be helped. It is also worth remembering that while rough sleepers are the most visible group of homeless, there are also those:
- living or “sofa-surfing” with friends or family;
  - living in hostels
  - Placed in B&Bs.
- 1Aiii This survey was an attempt to get behind these numbers and to construct a fuller picture of the homeless in Bedford. It consists of two elements:
1. A qualitative survey of a sample of rough sleepers in Bedford town centre conducted on the evening of Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> March 2016
  2. An analysis of the **Enquiries**<sup>2</sup> handled by Citizens Advice Bedford (CAB) during January- May 2016
- 1Aiv In presenting this report Citizens’ Advice Bedford (CAB) would like to thank its staff and volunteers who conducted the interviews with the rough sleepers and who captured the data, used in the analysis of the wider homeless, as part of their case recording.

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<sup>1</sup> 2015 Rough sleeping Count: Homeless Link:  
<http://www.homeless.org.uk/facts/homelessness-in-numbers/rough-sleeping/rough-sleepingexplore-data>

<sup>2</sup> *Enquiries* are the 2<sup>nd</sup> level of contact where clients are interviewed by general or specialist advisers and receive more detailed advice or support with their issues.

## 2 ROUGH SLEEPERS

### A Interviewing Rough Sleepers

2Ai The survey was conducted on the evening of Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> March 2016. The town centre was divided into four areas (see Appendix A) and a pair of staff/volunteers worked in each area interviewing rough sleepers. The areas were:

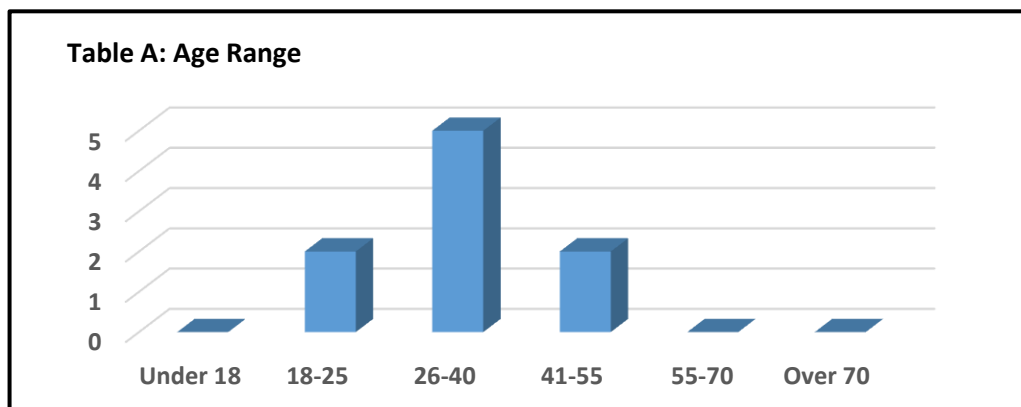
- The town centre
- West of the centre as far as the railway line
- East of the centre as far as Newnham Avenue
- North of the centre as far as Bedford Park

2Aii The interviews were semi-structured in that the interviewers had been briefed on what information was wanted and were left to gain this data as they talked to the rough sleepers. They also noted down other information they gained using a pro-forma provided for this purpose (see Appendix B).

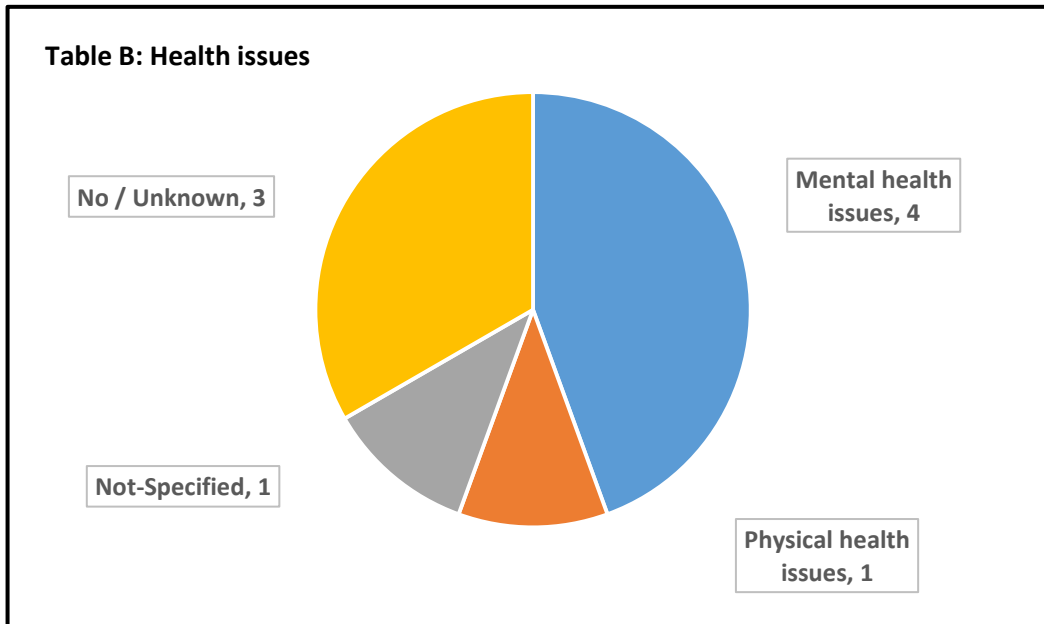
2Aiii Of those approached about half were willing to talk to the interviewers. The sample was thus self-selecting and so cannot be a representative sample. However the 9 interviews equates to just over 17% of Bedford's rough sleepers, as such it can be used to create a picture of this group of Bedford's homeless people.

### B Interview Results

2Bi All the interviewees were White British and all but one were Male. There was some variation in age, though most were aged 26-40 yrs (see Table A below).

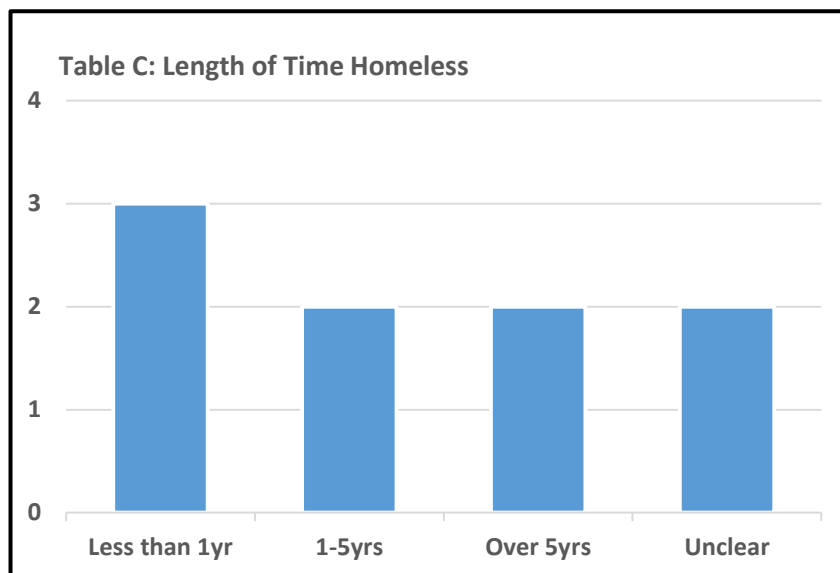


2Bii Some, but by no means all, had health issues and most of these were mental health or behavioural conditions rather than physical illnesses or disabilities (see table B).



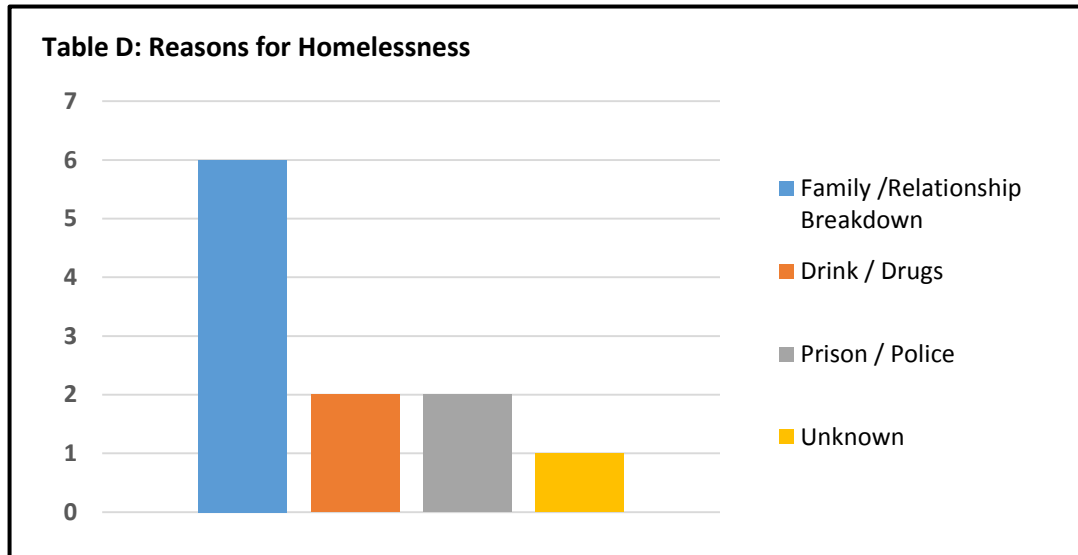
2Biii Despite concern in the past about ex-service personnel and the problems of adjusting to civilian life, none of the interviewees stated that they had served in the Armed Forces.

2Biv The interviewees had been sleeping rough for between a few months to over 15yrs (see Table C). However this was fairly evenly divided between those who been constantly homeless and those who had been in and out of some form of accommodation over this period.



2Bv Although there could be multiple reasons for being homeless, three were cited by the interviewees (Table D). The most common reason was a family or relationship breakdown, in two cases this was the death of a parent and the tenancy not being transferred. In one case the interviewee cited all three reasons: a family breakdown caused by or causing a drink/drugs problem and involvement with the Police. None cited the costs of renting as an issue. This is

not to say that rough sleepers are somehow to blame for their own predicament, . . .the causation of homelessness is complex, with no single ‘trigger’ that is either ‘necessary’ or ‘sufficient’ for it to occur. Individual, interpersonal and structural factors all play a role – and interact with each other<sup>3</sup>.



2Bvi Of those who had been in and out of accommodation since originally being made homeless, the same range of reasons were given for being unable to keep it and again the costs of renting were not cited as an issue in itself. Two interviewees commented that they had recently been given accommodation but had problems furnishing / equipping them and could not access grants for furniture, electrical appliances etc. The Homelessness Monitor report also comments upon this pattern of people returning to the streets:

*one possible contributory factor may be cutbacks in Supporting People ‘preventative’ services . . . making it more difficult for vulnerable groups to sustain their accommodation, particularly those with mental health or substance misuse problems,<sup>4</sup>*

2Bvii Two interviewees admitted that they had been in and out of prison and a third intimated this but offered no details. A fourth said that he had been in trouble with the Police but this would not appear to have resulted in a prison term so may have been for anti-social rather than criminal behaviour.

2Bviii A similarly mixed picture emerged when the interviewees were asked about their links to Bedford. Five had lived in Bedford prior to being homeless and three others had family connections elsewhere in the county or the bordering areas. Only one had no connection at all with the area.

<sup>3</sup> p2 The homelessness monitor: England 2016: JRF Jan 2016

<sup>4</sup> p52 The homelessness monitor: England 2016: JRF Jan 2016

2Bix A number of the interviewees were keen to point out that they did not beg, relying instead upon soup kitchens, drop-in centres and scavenging for food in shop bins. One interviewee commented that the support facilities in Bedford were better than elsewhere, though it is impossible to identify where he was comparing Bedford to. Two specifically said that they had an income (In one case JSA, in the second a company / disability pension probably resulting from an industrial accident. Two interviewees also mentioned seeing, or having seen their GPs, suggesting that they do have some access to health treatment.

2Bx What also emerges from the interview notes is a level of anger, resentment and resignation.<sup>5</sup>

- Anger towards those in authority e.g.:
  - When applying for JSA – *“they said he had to use computer and he never used one. Told he would have to go on a course so he walked away and has never been back”*.
  - *“Has used support services but feels un-listened too”*.
  - *“Recently had a stay in hospital – was sent out homeless – no after care.. very angry about this”*
- Resentment against immigrants and particularly the Polish community, not necessarily for causing the homelessness but for using facilities they see as theirs – *“stealing their (i.e. the interviewees) food from the Soup Kitchen”*.
- Resignation to their own situation –
  - *“Said he was used to his situation and did not want help”*.
  - *“Impression that he would like to sort out his life but his disabilities make it difficult and he is used to this life”*

In this context it is worth noting that the interviewers reported that about half the rough sleepers approached refused to speak to them, and those who did only did so when convinced they were not the Police or “government”, suggesting there is a level of suspicion of others which could impact on those trying to help them.

2Bxi There is also a sense of independence, that they do not need help and are quite capable of coping. This sense of independence amongst some rough sleepers is also illustrated by a note from one of the interviewers on a campsite near Aspects to the east of the town centre:

*. . . not occupied : 3 tents : large and smallest is a 2 person tent: Canopy area for cooking, Fire Cold. Numerous bicycle frames and bits and 2 bicycles chained together. Metre Sq of general rubbish inc clothes, shoes and food packaging. Area adjacent to the river is used as latrine for washing and lavatory. – Visited site twice no sign of occupants and no response to calls.*

2Bxii One interviewee said that he had used Citizens Advice in the past and two others said that they were not aware that we could help and that they might use us, though whether they actually will is another question.

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<sup>5</sup> The quotations are from the interviewers’ notes of the interviews, not necessarily directly from the interviewees.



## **C Picture of a Rough Sleeper**

- 2Ci Without stereotyping, the survey does help to provide a picture of who a rough sleeper in Bedford is likely to be.
- 2Cii A rough sleeper is likely to be a young mature man, white British with some connection to Bedford or the surrounding area (say within 25 miles). He was probably originally made homeless by a family or relationship breakdown, possibly caused or complicated by drink, drugs and/or criminal or anti-social behaviour. He will probably have some health problems which are as likely to be long-term mental health issues (which may also have contributed to the family/relationship breakdown) as physical health concerns. He may or may not have a criminal record. If he has been offered accommodation in the past he has been unable to hold on to it.
- 2Ciii His attitude is likely to be a big barrier to helping him. Even if he is willing to talk, there is a degree of hostility towards those in authority and a reluctance to give detailed information – information which would be needed to help him properly, particularly to access any benefits due. He may also have the view that he is beyond or does not need help, this may be a genuine sense of independence or a defence mechanism to avoid interventions from those in authority.
- 2Civ With regard to this picture of rough sleepers compared to that created by recent interviews in the local papers it is worth noting that not all homeless people who are on the street during the day are rough sleepers (e.g. some may have hostel places or be “sofa surfing”). These other homeless people may also use soup kitchens and other facilities used by rough sleepers and journalists investigating “homelessness” may not distinguish between them.

### 3 THE WIDER HOMELESS: Analysis of CAB data

#### A Assumptions about the Homeless

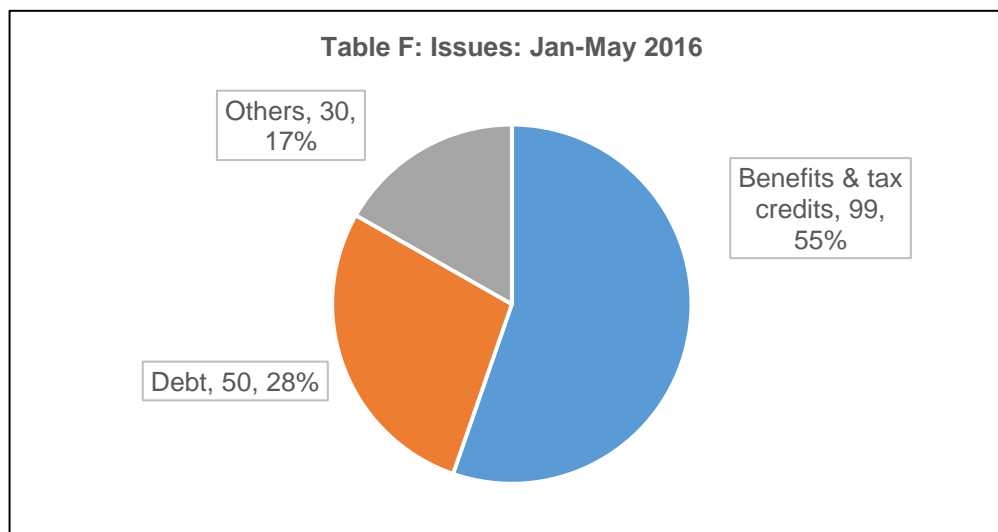
- 3Ai The assumptions behind the analysis in the second element were based on the issues raised in the first stage. These were that:
1. There are more Rough Sleepers than the officially recorded figures suggest.
  2. There are different categories of homeless persons other than the visibly street homeless
  3. The overwhelming majority of rough sleepers and homeless are single males
  4. A significant number of Rough Sleepers and homeless are from Non – EU countries.
- 3Aii Those who are homeless may not actually be rough sleepers: they may have made a range of other arrangements from B&Bs or hostels to staying with friends or relatives. Citizens' Advice Bedford (CAB) does capture the type of Housing of its clients as well as other data, making a comparable analysis possible.
- 3Aiii Rather than analysing the caseload only for the month of the Rough Sleepers survey, the analysis covered the period Jan – May 2016 to provide a useful sample size and avoid any monthly variation appearing as the norm. This gave a sample of 74 clients with 179 issues, an average of 2.45 issues per client with a range of 1 - 10 issues per client. Although staying with friends or relatives were the largest groupings (over 62%), there were nearly 15% in either hostels or B&B while a fifth of all had made some other arrangement (see Table E below).

**Table E: Homeless Clients by Housing Type (Jan-May 2016)**

Housing Type	No	%
Homeless (incl B&B)	5	6.76
Hostel	6	8.11
Other	15	20.27
Staying with Relatives/Friends (Paying Rent)	14	18.92
Staying with Relatives/Friends (Rent Free)	32	43.24
Staying with relatives / friends arr, unknown	2	2.70
TOTAL	74	

#### B A Profile of Homeless

- 3Bi The dominant issues were those related to Benefits and Debt (Table F). Together these two areas accounted for nearly three-quarters of all issues with most clients having both debt and benefits concerns.

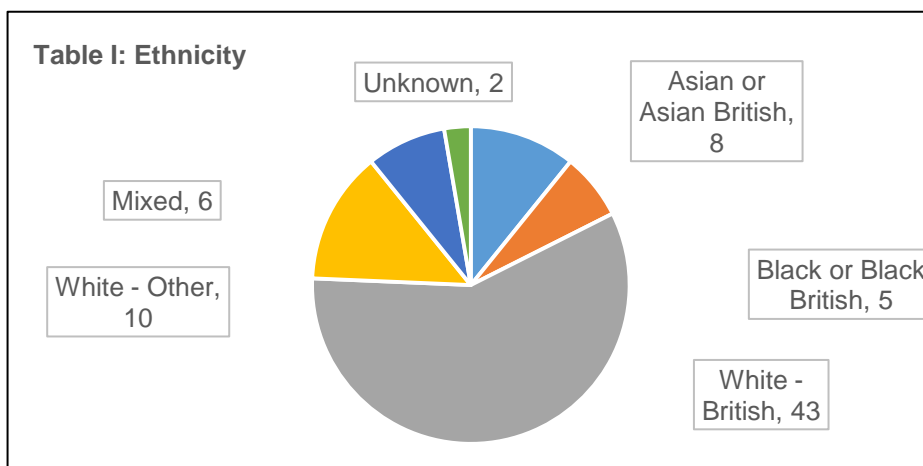
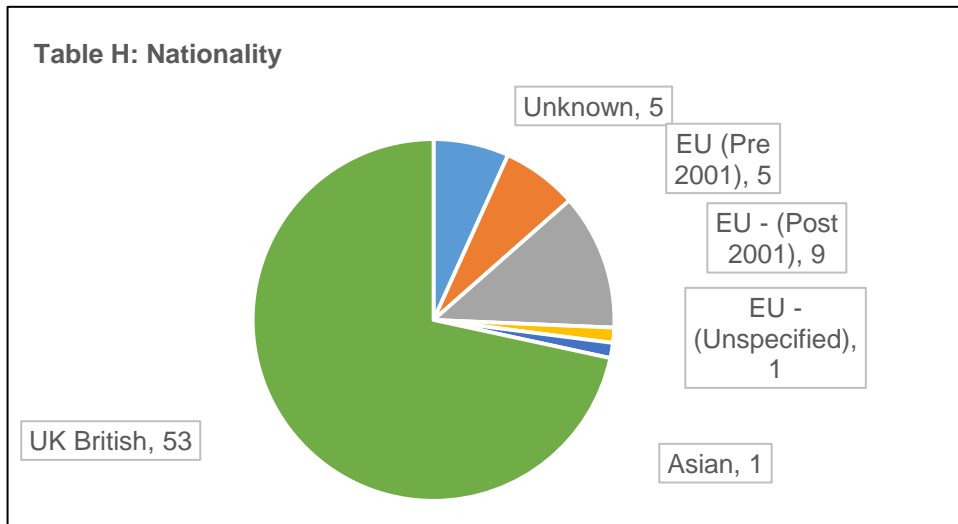


3Bii The 74 clients were again fairly even divided in terms of Gender: 40 (54%) male and 34 (46%) female. Most of these (68%) were single (Table G below), however nearly 14% were in a relationship and 10% separated, indicating a relationship breakdown. A further difference from rough sleepers was that a significant minority (20% of all) had dependent children.

**Table G: Marital Status & Dependent Children**

Marital Status	All		With Dept chldn	
	No.	% of All	No.	% of All
Married / Cohabiting	10	13.51	6	8.11
Divorced / Separated	8	10.81	4	5.41
Single	51	68.92	5	6.76
Widowed	2	2.70	0	0.00
Unknown	3	4.05	0	0.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>20.27</b>

3Biv Some of the rough sleepers interviewed expressed resentment about the number of East European migrants using “their” services (see para 2Bx). Looking at Nationality (Table H), the majority of CAB’s homeless clients (53 clients or 71%) were UK nationals, over 20% were from EU countries, with 14% (9 clients) coming from those countries that joined the EU since 2001. Only one client was from a non-EU country. This pattern was also reflected in the clients’ ethnicity (Table I). 43 clients (58%) described themselves as White-British and 13 (17%) as Asian or Black British, a further 13% were ethnically non-British White.



3Bv These figures indicate that the majority of homeless are in fact:

- Ethnically White British (58%)
- British in terms of nationality (71%)
- British or from within the EU (92%)

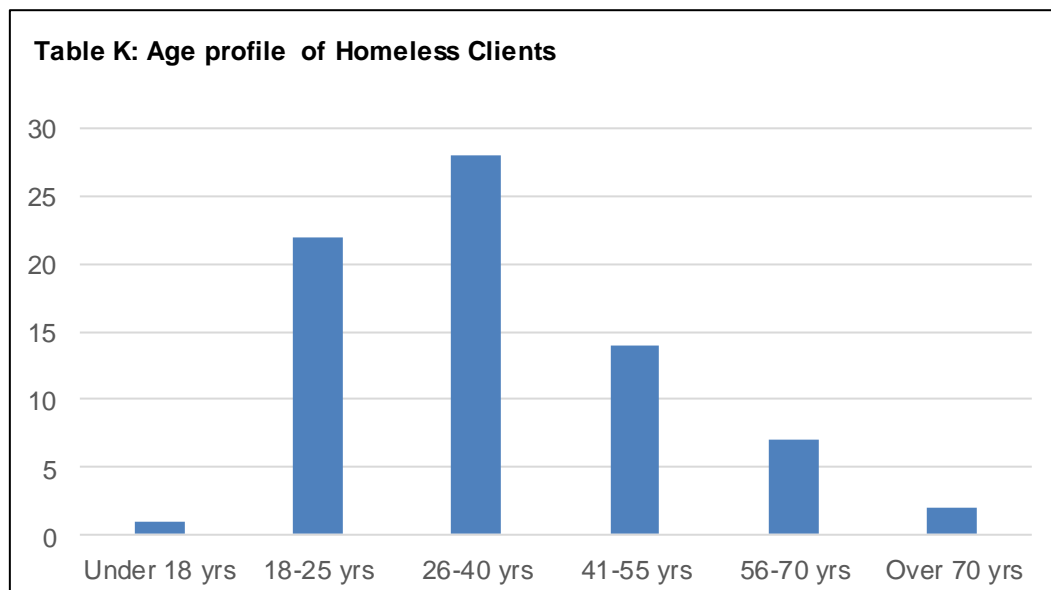
This negates the assumption that a significant number of homeless are from outside the EU.

3Bvi A significant factor in the interviews with rough sleepers was Health and a similar profile emerges for the wider homeless. Out of the 74 clients, 19 described themselves as having a disability and 11 as having a long-term health condition (see Table J), meaning two in five (40%) had some kind of on-going health concern. Looking at the nature of the disability or health issue, the sample was fairly evenly divided between Mental Health, Learning Difficulties, Physical disabilities and other long-term health issues. When compared to all clients over the same period the wider homeless are over four times more likely to have health issues than the population as a whole: only 9.8% of all clients had recorded disabilities or long-term health conditions.

**Table J: Disability & Long-Term Health**

Nature of Disability / Health Condition	Disabled	Long-Term Health	Not Disabled	All
Mental Health	5	3		<b>8</b>
Long-term Health		5		<b>5</b>
Learning Difficulty	6	2		<b>8</b>
Visual	1	1		<b>2</b>
Physical	4	0		<b>4</b>
Other/Not Stated	3	0		<b>3</b>
<b>All</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>74</b>

3Bvii The age profile was also broadly similar to that of the rough sleepers with the majority of clients (68%) being under 40yrs.



## 4. CONCLUSIONS

### A Rough Sleepers

- 4Ai Rough Sleepers appear to present a complex set of issues beyond simply needing support to access services and benefits and help to “*get back on their feet*”. The pattern of being in and out of various types of accommodation linked to drink / drug issues and difficulties with relationships, suggests that some at least would require on-going support to help them “*stay on the their feet*” once established in accommodation
- 4Aii Regarding CAB’s wider work on the private rental sector, it is difficult to blame the increase in rough sleepers on practices within this sector. The issues causing their homelessness appear to be much more fundamental than the availability or affordability of tenancies.

### B The Wider Homeless

- 4Ai Looking back to the purpose of the analysis of the homeless and the assumptions made (para 3Ai above),
- Assumption 1: There is actually no way of knowing whether the official count is an accurate reflection of the number of rough sleepers without doing a separate count. However, the interviews with rough sleepers indicate that a number of them drift between hostels and sleeping rough. Furthermore over 40% of the broader homeless group were staying rent-free with friends or relatives which may reflect a short-term or temporary arrangement. Thus although there may be only a limited number on the street on any one night, the potential pool is much larger. The issue is whether the “count” is intended to reflect the number who **are** sleeping rough or who **might** sleep rough on any given night.
  - Assumption 2: It is generally accepted that there are other homeless people beyond rough sleepers. This includes people:
    - Placed on the council’s homeless register and placed in B&B or other temporary accommodation,
    - Living in hostels
    - Staying with relatives or friends (possibly paying or not paying rent).
  - Assumption 3: While rough sleepers do appear to be mainly male (this is not necessarily true of the homeless as a whole. From those seeking help from CAB, there is a much more even split. It is possible that women feel or appear more vulnerable and therefore are more likely to seek or to be offered accommodation (e.g. from friends or relatives).
  - Assumption 4: There is no evidence that the majority of rough sleepers, or homeless, are from non-EU countries. In fact, from the data presented the majority of homeless in Bedford are UK nationals and ethnically White British. There is a sizeable minority of the wider homeless that are East European but there is nothing to suggest that they make significant use of soup kitchens etc.

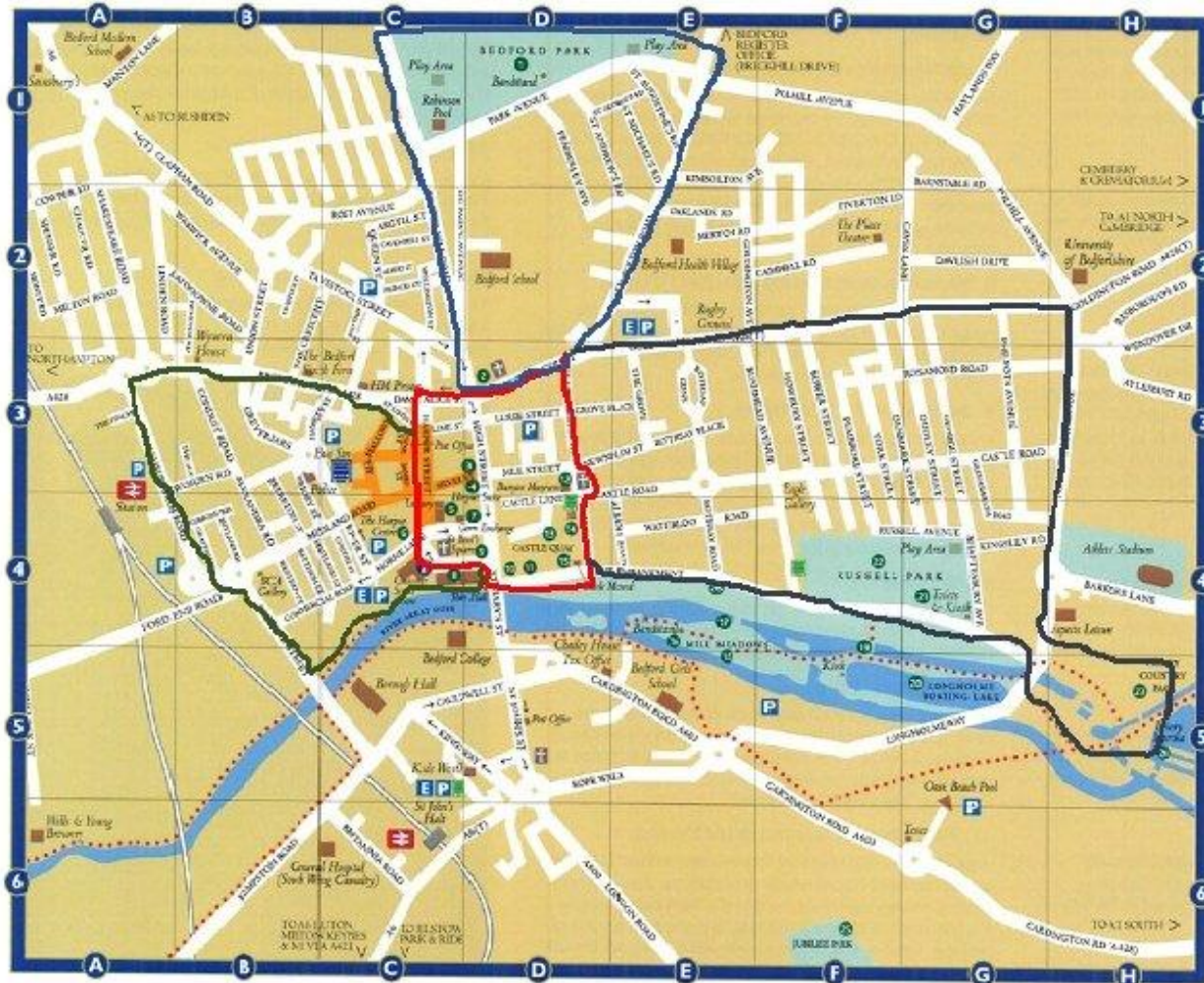
4Aii Furthermore there is no evidence from this survey that ex-offenders or ex-service personnel are significantly represented amongst the homeless. However, these questions are not normally asked as part of the CAB client profile so this is may be due to the lack of recording rather than an actual absence of people with such a background.

4Aiii What is significant is that amongst the homeless, including rough sleepers:

- A high proportion are single people.
- About two thirds are under 40yrs old
- They are most likely to be UK nationals and ethnically White-British
- Males are more likely to sleep rough than females
- A high proportion, compared to the general population, have disabilities or long-term health conditions, particularly mental health issues or learning difficulties.
- Benefit and Debt related issues dominate the concerns they present to CAB, though whether these are a cause or a result of their homelessness is unclear.

## Appendix A

### Map of Bedford showing areas for Rough Sleeper Interviews



#### Areas for Interview Teams

**1. RED**

The town centre

**2. GREEN**

West of the centre as far as the railway line

**3. DK BLUE**

East of the centre as far as Newnham Avenue

**4. BLUE**

North of the centre as far as Bedford Park



## Appendix B

### Homelessness Survey 2016: Interview Recording Pro-forma

*This form is intended as a guide to the information we would like to collect and to help record information during or after the interview as appropriate. If the issue/question did not arise enter "Not covered". Enter "No" or "None" if response was negative.*

<b>Interviewer's Initials:</b>		<b>Interview No.</b>		
<b>General Information</b>				
Gender	Male / Female			
Age	Under 18 / 18-25 / 26-40 / 41-55 / 55-70 / Over 70 / Unknown			
Nationality		Ethnicity		
Disability / Health Issues				
If Ex-Service:	Service Arm:	Years of Service	Rank on leaving	Year left:
<b>Information about being Homeless</b>				
How long has subject been homeless				
Cause of homelessness				
How many times has subject been homeless and when first homeless				
Ever had a tenancy & if so experience of this				
Connection to Bedford if any – or why in Bedford.				
Other information collected				