York, in becoming a Human Rights City, embraces a vision of a vibrant, diverse, fair and safe community built on the foundations of universal human rights. This vision is shared by citizens and institutions in our city, including the City Council, North Yorkshire Police, voluntary organisations and faith communities.

We are building on York’s own particular history of democratic innovation, philanthropy and an international outlook, all of which have shaped our commitment to social justice.

This declaration marks an ambition, a significant point in a journey, not a final destination. As the United Kingdom’s first Human Rights City we are committed to making our vision real, putting fundamental rights at the heart of our policies, hopes and dreams for the future.

Signed by
COUNCILLOR DAVE TAYLOR,
The Right Honourable Lord Mayor of York
at the declaration event at the
Merchant Taylor’s Hall, on Monday 24th April 2017
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 4
Key Findings 5
Achievement and Impact 6
Equality and Non-Discrimination Indicators 8
Education Indicators 9
Decent Standard of Living Indicators 10
Health and Social Care Indicators 12
Right to Housing 14
  • The Right 14
  • Key Issues that Impact the Right to Housing in York 14
  • Legislation 15
  • An Overview of Housing in York 16
  • Indicator: Statutory Homelessness 18
  • Experiences of Rough Sleeping 19
  • Local Connection Guidelines 21
  • Pathways to a Home: Resettlement and Housing First Schemes in York 21
  • Indicator: Number of Households in Temporary Accommodation 23
  • Two Case Studies: York Travellers Trust and City of Sanctuary 24
Recommendations 28
Endnotes 29
Contact 30
Welcome to York’s third annual human rights indicator report. This report has been produced by the York: Human Rights City network for everyone in York. We want to inspire debate, encourage activism for human rights, challenge discrimination, and build on the momentum of York becoming the UK’s first Human Rights City.

Human rights are the basic rights and freedoms that belong to everyone, based on shared values of dignity, fairness, justice and equality. In York, we report on two or three indicators for each of the five human rights that have been selected as priorities by the people of York. These rights are: equality and non-discrimination, education, health and social care, a decent standard of living, and the right to housing.

This year, as well as reporting on all five rights we include additional information around the right to housing.

**WHAT ARE HUMAN RIGHTS INDICATORS?**

- Indicators are pieces of information that can help us to understand how well York is doing over time in relation to York’s five priority human rights. The indicators we use have been selected through consultation with local organisations, users of services and service providers.

- For most of our indicators we use official local or national government figures as well as data collected by local organisations (please see p. 29 for more details).

- Indicators in the form of statistics only tell us a certain amount, so this report also features the stories and comments from personal accounts of people whose right to housing is either not being met or is being met only in part. This includes those who are, or have been, homeless, those who currently use or previously have used temporary accommodation and groups who are in precarious housing situations.¹ One key limitation of this report is that we were unable to include the experiences of all distinct groups with compromised housing rights.
Key Findings

In this section, we provide a brief overview of how this year’s statistics compare to last year’s

Positive Progress
• The proportion of young people aged 16–17 not in education, employment or training (NEET), has slightly reduced.
• Numbers officially accepted as homeless are down.
• Households in temporary accommodation, including those with children, are lower.

Going Backwards
• Foodbank use has increased by over 25% (a quarter).
• The proportion of users of Adult Services who have as much social contact as they would like has fallen by 5%.
• The earnings gap has grown, as low wages have not increased as much as wages overall.

Little Change
Most indicators show little change compared with last year’s figures and this is a cause for concern. For example:
• Gender weekly pay gap in York (£117) remains above the national average.²
• Child poverty rates have not reduced.
• Life expectancy by ward continues to vary by up to 8 years.
• The number of hate crimes recorded is almost unchanged.

New Indicator
Due to changes in the way that central government reports on education we used a new measure called Progress 8 last year, but it was difficult to understand. This year, we instead compare the percentage of economically disadvantaged children reaching the expected standards for reading, writing and maths at the end of primary education to the rest of the children in York.
ACHIEVEMENTS AND IMPACT

In 2018, we have built on the momentum created by the 2017 declaration of York as a Human Rights City. Key developments include:

- Supporting the establishment of a Human Rights and Equalities Board for the city which includes political party representatives and a wide range of other stakeholders. In 2018 the Board has focused on young people not in education, employment and training (NEETs), applying a human rights-based approach to a pressing social issue for the city.

- Delivering a Community Voices programme to enable individuals not usually reached by Council consultation processes to have their say. In 2018, outreach was conducted with homeless people, and in some of the city’s less affluent wards.

- Conducting extensive outreach and engagement activities, in particular with people with disabilities, women and young people.

Impacts have been generated both locally and nationally.

“The rights of disabled people are human rights and for York to succeed as a Human Rights City applicable to all it must ensure that the needs of those with disabilities who live in or visit the city are respected. York: Human Rights City is supporting this goal by being a catalyst for organising events such as the York programme for the UN International Day of People with Disabilities and Disability History Month, which put human rights at their core.”

Jane, Disability Activist

“Research undertaken by the York: Human Rights City coordinator was invaluable when we first established York Women’s Forum. The network has continued to support our work by recruiting postgraduate students to conduct a survey of local women to identify priority areas for us to focus on in York as we look to implement CEDAW [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women] as a framework for our future activity.”

Anna Perrett, Chair of York Women’s Forum
“We have begun our journey in Swansea to becoming a Human Rights City. As the first city in the UK to have this status, we have sought advice and support from York, which has been very helpful. The information has informed our own approach and the debate about our actions in taking this work forward... being able to draw on the experience of a UK city has been invaluable for us.”

Chris Sievers, Swansea City Council

“I felt you would be interested in our work here in Bridport, especially following your wonderful declaration last year as being the first Human Rights City. We have been working hard down south as well - Bridport in Dorset is to be the first town in the UK to make a similar declaration. This is not a new idea for Bridport, although York’s declaration has inspired us to ‘get a move on’!”

Anne Rickard, Town Mayor, Bridport (The UK’s 1st Rights-Respecting Town)

“York being the first Human Rights City in the UK carries serious responsibility to bring redress to the inequalities our city faces. We now need to see politicians and agency leaders adopt a human rights approach to decision-making accompanied by a refocusing of resource allocation to ensure that no one is denied opportunity on the basis of class, economic or social advantage or protected characteristics. I will be using the report to highlight the importance of a human rights approach to services and equality issues (I am currently doing this as Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Ageing and Older People). I will personally be using the data in my work also.”

Rachael Maskell, MP
EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION INDICATORS

The Right

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>International law</th>
<th>Domestic law</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966, Article 26</td>
<td>Human Rights Act 1998, Schedule 1, Part 1, Article 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equality Act 2010, Section 149</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Indicators

Hate crimes or incidents recorded by the North Yorkshire Police

2014/15 108
2015/16 141
2016/17 189
2017/18 180

After several years of increases, reported hate crimes levelled off in the year to March 2018. It is worth noting the hate crimes reported in just two wards (Guildhall and Micklegate) make up 50% of those reported across the city.

Gender pay gap

2015/16 £85.10
2016/17 £117.00
2017/18 £117.30

In the year that celebrated the centenary of (some) women getting the vote, the gender pay gap in York remains a significant issue in the city.
EDUCATION INDICATORS

The Right

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>International law</th>
<th>Domestic law</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, Article 28 (e)</td>
<td>Equality Act 2010, Part 6, Chapter 1, Section 85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education Act 1996, Section 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education and Skills Act 2008, Part 1, Chapter 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Indicators

Numbers of 16-17 year-olds not in education, employment or training (NEET)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2016/17</th>
<th>2017/18</th>
<th>2016/17</th>
<th>2017/18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>York</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire &amp; Humber</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparator (cities like York)</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Numbers of 16-17 year-olds not in education, employment or training (NEET) have fallen since last year, both in York and nationally, although York’s figures remain higher than “comparator” cities with similar demographics to York.

New Indicator – Pupils attaining expected standard in reading, writing and maths at end of primary education – disadvantage gap.³

This new indicator shows that just two-fifths of children who are considered economically disadvantaged leave primary school with the expected standards of reading, writing, and maths, compared to two-thirds of other pupils.
DECENT STANDARD OF LIVING

The Right

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>International law</th>
<th>Domestic law</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1966, Article 11</td>
<td>There are no domestic laws specifically relating to the right to a decent standard of living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, Article 27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Indicators

Foodbank referrals in York went up by more than a quarter, according to The Trussell Trust, with a significant proportion of referrals relating to benefit changes, delays or sanctions. Although this tells us that food poverty and insecurity are increasing, it doesn’t give the true scale of the problem. These figures don’t include independent foodbank projects in the city (e.g. through community centres), and there is no comprehensive data on numbers of people using free or pay-as-you-feel meals. The Independent Food Aid Network estimates that the Trussell Trust accounts for around half of the nation’s foodbank use, and the York Food Poverty Alliance is working on other ways to measure food poverty in the city.

**Foodbank Use**

![Foodbank Use Chart](chart.png)

- **2015/16**
  - Children using foodbank: 1395
  - Adults using foodbank: 3281
  - Total people using foodbank: 1259
  - Foodbank referrals: 2022

- **2016/17**
  - Children using foodbank: 1406
  - Adults using foodbank: 3379
  - Total people using foodbank: 1343
  - Foodbank referrals: 2036

- **2017/18**
  - Children using foodbank: 1737
  - Adults using foodbank: 4262
  - Total people using foodbank: 2615
  - Foodbank referrals: 1647
The earnings gap measures the difference in weekly wages between those earning median (mid-point) wages, and those on low wages (25th percentile). For York, the gap rose slightly, because earnings grew more at the median level than for lower wages. York’s mid-point earnings continue to be lower than the UK mid-point earnings, but higher than those in surrounding areas.

The graph shows clearly the impact that housing costs have in pushing families with children into poverty. Even so, over 1 in 10 of York’s children live in poverty before housing costs are considered. The graph also highlights significant differences in child poverty levels within the city.
HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

The Right

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>International law</th>
<th>Domestic law</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1966, Article 12</td>
<td>Care Act 2014, Section 1 and 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006, Article 12</td>
<td>National Health Service Act 2006, Section 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National Health Service Constitution 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Health and Social Care Act 2012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Indicators

Proportion of service users who have as much social contact as they would like

- 45.8% in 2015/16
- 50% in 2016/17
- 44.5% in 2017/18

We use social contact as a measure of loneliness, because it is recognised as a major contributor to mental ill-health. Despite moderate increases in previous years, fewer than half of users of Adult Services have as much social contact they would like and those satisfied with levels of contact fell 5% in the last year.
Life expectancy varies across the city. The graph demonstrates a clear correlation between poverty and life expectancy, with people living in the more deprived wards (towards the top of the graph) likely to die at a younger age than those in the more affluent wards (towards the bottom of the graph).
HOUSING

‘The right to adequate housing should not be interpreted narrowly… Rather, it should be seen as the right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity’
UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

The Right

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>International law</th>
<th>Domestic law</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Housing Act 1996, Part 6 &amp; 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Protection from Eviction Act 1977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Homelessness Reduction Act 2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key Issues that Impact the Right to Housing in York

A perfect storm of austerity and welfare reforms has created a crisis in housing and homelessness in York, and the UK more generally. Those who are homeless or in insecure housing experience multiple human rights violations, including poverty, exclusion, stigma, and physical and other forms of violence.

In York, access and availability of suitable accommodation are highlighted as key issues. The causes of housing insecurity and homelessness are complex and multi-layered, and include:

- Affordability of local housing, both for buying and renting
- Supply of local housing, especially social housing, and lack of a local plan to address this issue
- Quality of housing stock
- Stigma around social housing and homelessness
- People’s ability to access meaningful support when they need it
- Hidden homelessness
- Insecure tenure
Legislation

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1966 (Art.11):

- Affirms the right of all to adequate food, clothing and housing, along with the continuous improvement of living conditions. States must take “appropriate” steps in order to secure these rights for their citizens.

Human Rights Act 1998 (Art.8):

- Protects the right to respect for family and home life, in addition to a person’s home and correspondence.

Housing Act 1996 (Part 6):

- Local authorities must provide free advice and information about applying for housing and necessary assistance must be given to those who may have difficulty applying.
- Every housing allocation scheme must offer either a choice of accommodation or the ability to express a preference.

Housing Act 1996 (Part 7):

- Every housing authority must provide free information and advice on preventing homelessness, securing accommodation, the rights of homeless people, any help available and how to access it.

Definition of Homelessness (Housing Act 1996):

- Someone is considered homeless if they have no accommodation available which they are entitled to occupy. A person may also be considered homeless if they have accommodation they cannot access or have moveable accommodation but nowhere to park it.

Homelessness Reduction Act (2017):

- The Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) came into force in April 2018. This allows those at risk of homelessness to seek assistance earlier (56 days prior to being made homeless, rather than the previous 28 days).
- The duty to accommodate is limited to those who are considered vulnerable, or in priority need (mainly families and people with disabilities); for those not in priority need, there is a duty to help to secure suitable accommodation.
An Overview of Housing in York

The most recent data available (for 2017) shows that York’s population is made up of 208,000 people, living as 100,500 households.

House prices in York averaged £264,580 in 2017, whilst the mid-point (median) salary of residents was less than £27,000. This gives an “affordability ratio” of housing of 9.92, the 15th highest of any city in the UK.  

High house prices in York mean that more residents rent than the national average. However, rental costs are also higher than the national average and York rents are the most expensive in North Yorkshire.

Council houses are subject to a quality check called the Decency Standard. For York, the number of council-owned homes failing to meet this standard in 2017/18 was 546, nearly double the amount failing in 2016/17, though still a relatively small proportion of the total. The council is the largest single provider of social housing in the city but housing associations and other private providers account for two-fifths of this type of accommodation. Private rented housing quality is not monitored through the decency standard. The most recent published Private Sector House Condition Survey was conducted in 2008.
It indicated that almost a third of housing in York was “non-decent”, “unfit” or otherwise hazardous, with Guildhall, Micklegate and Hull Road wards most affected.

The most recent census (2011) shows significant variation in the quality of housing in the city. At that time, more than 1 in 10 houses in 6 of York's 22 wards had an “occupancy rating” of -1 or less. An “occupancy rating” of less than 0 means that households do not have enough bedrooms for the people who live there, based on government guidelines about, for example, how many children can share a bedroom, and who in the household should have their own bedroom.

York wards with a higher than the national average number of households with an occupancy rating of -1 or less

The data show that Guildhall ward has the highest percentage of homes that are too small for the households that live in them. Ward information shows that the proportion of children living in poverty in Guildhall is almost twice that of York overall (10.2% vs 5.7%), suggesting that members of this group are disproportionately more likely to be in cramped and unsuitable accommodation.

Furthermore, in 2011, 7 of York’s 22 wards had a higher proportion of households with no central heating than the national average.
Indicator

The “statutory homeless acceptance” figures for York are slightly lower compared to the two previous years and indicate that York’s overall homeless levels are approximately half the national average.

Rough sleeping is the most visible and extreme form of homelessness. It has increased rapidly in York in the past 5 years, with 29 rough sleepers identified in the annual count in 2017 compared with 9 in 2013.\(^8\) Increased rates of rough sleeping are not exclusive to York. Between 2013 and 2017, numbers have doubled nationally, an increase widely attributed to government policies such as austerity and welfare cuts.

However, the latest (2018) rough sleeper count indicates a dramatic fall in the number of rough sleepers in York to just 9 individuals. We cautiously welcome the reduction in people sleeping on the streets. This is likely to be partly due to the increased number of emergency overnight beds available in the city, especially between November and March. If so, any actual reduction in rough-sleeper homelessness may be much lower.

Most rough sleepers are white men. We do not have data on ethnicity or other characteristics for other categories of homelessness, or for those in temporary accommodation or insecure tenure.

What the information available also cannot tell us is the number of people who are sleeping in cars, on friends’ sofas, or even at their place of work – the so-called “hidden homeless”.

There are many misconceptions about people who sleep rough. Some people consider rough sleeping to be a lifestyle choice but while a small number do prefer life on the streets, most only sleep rough as a last resort.
Experiences of Rough Sleeping

Most of the participants we talked to who sleep rough said they had been the victims of physical or verbal harassment. Attacks included name-calling, physical assaults, and being urinated on.

““The Minster Steps... I go here because I know there’s tourists constantly going past, I know I’m safe, that no one is going to come up at random and attack me, just like that.”

Sam

Where you feel safe: Sam’s photo

Concerns over physical safety and the security of personal possessions took precedence for participants over other types of self-care (e.g. mental wellbeing).

All of the rough sleepers we interviewed in York aspired towards having their own “place” and saw this as an important step in their future. However, getting off the street can be complicated and high rents, limited income, and shortages of suitable housing often lengthen the time people spend rough sleeping.

“One picture that I did want to take that I didn’t, is basically a future of how I’d like to be safe, and that’s just a picture of a house. Because that’s what we’re aiming for at the end of the day, or most of us are [...] my own place, and my kids staying with me now and again, like they were before, before I ended up on the street. That’s me, that’s my safety blanket.”

James

Rough sleepers often face stigma and marginalisation and this can severely impact their ability to claim basic human rights, or their perceptions about why access to services is denied to them.
Andy told us he was refused a hospital stay upon contracting pneumonia:

“as soon as they knew I was homeless they changed their attitude, no matter what I said they weren’t going to give me a bed.”

Being visibly homeless can also limit the spaces and services that people can access. Rough sleepers are often excluded from everyday places or self-exclude due to fear or the perception that they are unwelcome. Some described choosing not to access services, to avoid being identified as homeless (for example, by potential employers).

For example, by providing shower facilities as well as breakfast, Carecent enables rough sleepers to minimise their “visible” homelessness. In turn this can reduce the stigma and discrimination they face in their everyday lives.

“For example, by providing shower facilities as well as breakfast, Carecent enables rough sleepers to minimise their “visible” homelessness. In turn this can reduce the stigma and discrimination they face in their everyday lives.”

A lack of housing should not have to mean a reduction in dignity.

For several participants, a single poor experience with a service provider or statutory body affected their perceptions of whether that agency would or could provide help, shaping their actions on an ongoing basis. Those who were unable to demonstrate a “local connection”, for example, were limited in terms of which services they could access.
Local Connection Guidelines

Although the council has a duty under the Homelessness Reduction Act to offer to support anyone who is homeless and requests support, the assistance may be limited, depending on individual circumstance. The first step in accessing support for those who are rough sleeping is through the Salvation Army drop-in at Lawrence Street. Individuals are assessed when they first attend for housing support and advice. One of the criteria for accessing further housing help is to have a local connection. This usually means one or more of:

- having family in York,
- having secure employment in York,
- having lived in York for at least six months.

Those without a local connection and not considered to have a priority need, are usually referred to a town or city where they can claim a local connection, although the Council can and does waive this requirement in some circumstances.

The local connection system is based on the assumption that people will be better able to address the issues that have led to them being homeless in a familiar town, and where they have family ties.

Some participants told us they had come to York to escape a bad situation, and stated their intention to remain in the city despite the extreme hardship and difficulties in accessing basic rights.

Pathways to a Home: Resettlement and Housing First Schemes in York

“Resettlement” is the most common approach that we encountered that is used to reduce homelessness in York. York’s Homelessness Strategy “Preventing Homelessness Together” states that the City of York Council adopted the radically different “Housing First” approach in 2015. Although the Council advise that ten individuals have been helped through this pathway, it was not mentioned by any of the service providers or participants we spoke to so no feedback is available.

Traditionally, rough sleepers go through a lengthy journey from street to permanent accommodation. Typically, the first stage is to move into hostel
Pathways

Resettlement

Independent Housing
Room in Shared House
Hostel
Night Shelter

Housing First

Permanent housing
Ongoing flexible support

accommodation, then to a room in a shared house, and then to private rented or social housing. At each stage, individuals are expected to undertake various activities and training to demonstrate that they are ready to move to the next stage. In return, those who complete the programme are given priority housing status.

Some participants said the structure provided by the Resettlement Programme can be beneficial to those dealing with mental illness or drug addiction or on parole. But amongst others there was a perception of there being very little support, and a fear of being drawn into drugs or crime themselves when in hostels.

John said:
“if I don’t play the game, I won’t be able to get my own place, which is what I really want. But I don’t actually stay there, because I don’t drink, and I don’t do drugs, and if I stay in the hostel for any time, I’ll get pulled into it. So mostly I sleep at work.”

Those interviewed who had been rough sleepers but are now in permanent housing described their experience as having “to jump through hoops.” They told us that the journey from street to a place to call ‘home’ took around 5 years.

Housing First theory assumes that people are better able to overcome the often complex issues that have led them to become homeless if they have a stable home at the earliest opportunity. This approach is often described as a human rights-based approach to housing in that it emphasises self-determination and choice, and respects individuals’ rights to be involved in decisions that affect them.
Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of households in temporary accommodation</th>
<th>2015/16</th>
<th>2016/17</th>
<th>2017/18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of households in temporary accommodation with children</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most people using temporary accommodation that we spoke to did not have experience of sleeping rough. Most were placed in temporary accommodation (often hostels) as a result of requesting help when faced with homelessness.

Council figures indicate that 616 “at risk” households were prevented from homelessness last year. Nevertheless several of our participants became homeless despite approaching the Council. This was because they were considered insufficiently vulnerable to qualify for support.

“It started, partially, when my mum died. She’d wanted the house to go in my name which the Council didn’t agree, it went into her partner’s name. Then he died last year. We told the Council and they gave us a notice to quit basically and leave the house. So that left just me and my brother, we asked if they would rehouse us and they said that you aren’t suitable.”

Micah

The 2017 Homelessness Reduction Act, which came into force in April 2018, enables those at risk of becoming homeless to access support at an earlier stage, and requires local authorities to give greater assistance to those who would not previously have qualified. We would expect this to lead to a higher number of homeless preventions, and fewer households in temporary accommodation in the future.

A common goal of those living in hostels was securing a flat for themselves, either from the Council or through private letting. Those registering on the Council waiting list are assessed for their level of need (gold, silver or bronze), where gold indicates an urgent need for housing, and bronze indicates that housing
needs are currently fully met. High rental prices in York created significant challenges:

- People on low incomes or relying on benefits found it difficult to save up for a deposit, even with assistance from City of York Council.
- Most rents are more than the housing allowance; finding the difference, which can be £100s per month, is often challenging, especially for those on low incomes or relying on Universal Credit.
- Some landlords no longer accept tenants in receipt of housing benefit because under Universal Credit, rents are no longer automatically paid directly. Although the Council can help to arrange for rents to be paid directly, this was not widely known amongst those we interviewed.

Most Council tenants that we spoke to were satisfied with their housing. In contrast, those who had moved into private rented accommodation suggested that there was significant variety in the quality of housing available to someone in the private sector, and they expressed concern that turning accommodation down would disqualify them from further help.

Mould and damp were common problems reported. Several people reported being offered private rental flats that had not been repaired after being damaged by previous tenants.

“They tried to offer me [a flat] and I’d never see anything like. It looked like someone had gone on a rampage; all smashed doors, walls punched. How can you offer this to someone as liveable?”
Paolo

Two Case Studies: Travellers and Asylum Seekers/Refugees

This report has focused on homelessness and temporary accommodation, in line with the Right to Housing indicators agreed in consultations prior to our first indicator report in 2016. We now expand our discussion on housing through two case studies of communities which often experience insecure or atypical housing, represented by York Travellers’ Trust (YTT) and York City of Sanctuary (an organisation that supports refugees and asylum seekers within the city).

The majority of participants from both YTT and City of Sanctuary were not aware of their housing rights. Even so, around half of them believed that the city authorities provided the right protection to fulfil the right to housing.

Most respondents from YTT lived on designated sites (or in housing) provided by the City of York Council. Half were satisfied with their current housing conditions and a further quarter believed that progress was being made. On the other hand,
the majority of those interviewed from the City of Sanctuary lived in accommodation provided by a third party, mostly through letting agencies. Their experiences were very negative, with a common feeling of having no housing rights at all.

Both groups believed that the City of York Council was trying to help but felt that the assistance was often either not efficient, too bureaucratic, or did not go beyond legal minimums.

“The Council is trying to help, but has steps to follow” remarked Jessica

They felt that the Council tended to assess needs in ways that result in the allocation of accommodation of an unsuitable type or size. This often led to overcrowded temporary accommodation on the one hand and unnecessarily large emergency accommodation on the other. There were frequent mentions of slow and bureaucratic processes when seeking help, and problems of inflexibility of the Council authorities resulting in provision of misleading and confusing information. All participants noted that promotion of any information about the Council’s available services is underdeveloped and rather passive.

In addition, there was felt to be a major communication gap between respondents, the third sector service providers and the Council.

Daniel noted:

“the Council has problem with communication, there is a human aspect missing.”

York Travellers Trust

Gypsies and Travellers form one of York’s longest standing ethnic minority communities, having lived in and around the city for hundreds of years. As a community protected by the characteristic of race under the Equality Act 2010, local authorities have a duty to actively seek to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and promote good race relations in relation to the community.

The YTT estimate that there are 350 Gypsy and Traveller families living in York. Some choose to live in houses, but for others there is little option because there are only three designated Gypsy and Traveller sites in York providing a total of 66 pitches for their trailers. The sites located on marginal brownfield and former industrial areas are overcrowded. Some pitches are “double-parked” with two households sharing amenity blocks. Those living in trailers on the sites are less secure than their fellow citizens in housing as they are licensees rather than tenants of the Council, with fewer protections against eviction as a result.

Members of the YTT put a strong emphasis on their community spirit
and consider themselves as a “close community.” The self-help approach to providing social care on the sites by the community means the costs to social services are greatly reduced. However the lack of appropriate accommodation has led to many now living in houses dotted around the city. Participants felt that this has a negative impact on the mental state of the residents. Living away from the community leads to feelings of isolation and segregation, increased levels of depression and anxiety and overall decline of the community and its cultural ideals. Participants reported increased rates of mental ill-health and suicides. They believe that when assigning accommodation, the City of York Council fails to take into consideration their cultural and community needs.

Local authorities are required to assess the need for accommodation of Gypsies and Travellers when undertaking a review of housing needs in their district, particularly in relation to local development plans. York Council is doing this in relation to the forthcoming Local Plan. The independent consultants hired by the Council estimate the need for 47 new pitches whereas YTT consider the need to be nearer to 60 – in effect a doubling of current provision. YTT is working closely with the City Council Planning Department on this, but has deep concerns about the Council’s proposed approach to delivering the required accommodation, which is to place an onus on housing developers to provide pitches within their development, or to pay for the provision elsewhere.

**City of Sanctuary**

York gained national recognition in 2016 as a City of Sanctuary, joining a network of cities across the UK which had met the requirements of the City of Sanctuary movement. City of Sanctuary holds the vision that our nations will be welcoming places of safety for all and proud to offer sanctuary to people fleeing violence and persecution.

Here in York, City of Sanctuary promotes an environment of understanding and compassion within the city, visiting institutions and places of education to give talks and lead discussions. The organisation also works with individual refugees and asylum seekers who for whatever reason find themselves in York and are unable to return to their countries of origin. These goals are entirely in line with York’s declaration as a Human Rights City.

**Private sector housing**

Many of the challenges that refugees and asylum seekers face in securing private sector housing mirror those already discussed, including high rents which are not fully covered by the housing allowance. Key issues for clients of City of Sanctuary are problems of unfair letting agency
procedures. People have to agree to what they consider “ridiculous and unfair requirements” from the agencies in order to access accommodation. An example is one agency’s requirement that the tenant take out home insurance, which must be provided by that letting agency, often on more expensive rates.

Other requirements which form a barrier for refugees entering the private rented market are:

- Recent Government legislation requiring landlords to be responsible for checking immigration documents proving tenants have the right to rent property. Failure to comply can lead to a large fine. This is deterring landlords from engaging with the refugee market.

- Guarantors must be found to back tenants entering rental agreements – a guarantor must earn not less than 3.5 times the annual rent of the property. In York that amounts to an income of not less than £36,000 a year to guarantee a person seeking a 3 bedroom house. Such guarantors are hard to find for both refugees and those on low incomes.

- The increasing number of landlords refusing to take on tenants who receive housing benefits is a barrier for refugees and asylum seekers. Landlords are reluctant to have tenants falling into arrears of two months or more, which is a frequent occurrence under the payment process of Universal Credit.

- As discussed earlier in the report, private rented housing in York is amongst the highest in the North of England and is not matched by housing allowances.

**Council housing / Socially affordable housing via Housing Associations**

Of greatest concern to refugees is the three assessment categories framework (gold, silver, bronze), to register with the Council for a house. If assigned a category other than gold i.e. in desperate need / emergency housing, the chance of getting a house in York and surrounding areas is considered low or non-existent because demand for council houses exceeds the number available. It is like a “never-ending waiting list,” said one of the respondents. It is not exceptional to be on the waiting list for council accommodation for several years. Many refugees must therefore find private rental accommodation through the help of local NGOs (such as City of Sanctuary) and Housing Associations.
RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Recommendations

In 2017, York became the UK’s first Human Rights City and this report aims to inspire debate and action to help achieve its vision of York as a vibrant, diverse, fair and safe city.

This report has focussed in some depth on the right to housing. The recommendations below address related concerns rather than for all five priority rights for York. It is clear that for some the right to housing is either not being met or is not being met in full. This is especially the case for those who are homeless, those in temporary accommodation, those who live in poor quality housing, those with insecure tenure, and some specific communities.

Key Recommendations are set out below:

- The Human Rights and Equalities Board should oversee the implementation of the following recommendations whilst investigating ways to mitigate the wider issues around housing affordability within the city.
- City of York Council should review how housing officers and service providers are implementing the Housing First policy in the city to ensure that it adheres to its human rights framework for all categories of people.
- City of York Council should engage more closely with marginalised communities, such as the Gypsies and Travellers and asylum seekers and refugees, to better understand the particular needs of each group, and work collaboratively to ensure that city-wide plans and strategies address unmet housing rights.
- City of York Council should take steps to identify and sanction the small number of private landlords that provide substandard housing, to implement a “decent standard” within the private rental sector, and to provide an updated private rental sector housing quality report.
Visit York Open Data to explore the statistics and data. York Open Data (2018) www.yorkopendata.org – unless otherwise stated, data for our indicators has been provided through the Open Data portal, and relate to the period April 2017– March 2018.

1. We worked with relevant organisations to identify potential participants from each target group and conducted in-depth interviews and/or focus groups with between four and ten individuals in each category during July, August and September. All interviewees were guaranteed anonymity, so we have used pseudonyms for direct quotes. Research participants also took photos to illustrate their experience of homelessness. Those interviewed are sometimes referred to as “participants” in the report.

2. Our 2017 report showed a gender pay gap of £120.20 for 2016/17; the official data has since been revised to show a 2016/17 gender pay gap of £117.00.


4. Data provided by The Trussell Trust (2018).


CONTACT

info@yorkhumanrights.org

www.yorkhumanrights.org

via our two host organisations:

York CVS
15 Priory Street, York, YO1 6ET
01904 621133

Centre for Applied Human Rights
6 Innovation Close, York, YO10 5ZF
01904 325778

For housing advice

City of York Council Housing Department website contains information on a wide range of housing-related topics and contact details for services in the city

https://www.york.gov.uk/housing

If you are at risk of losing your home within the next 56 days, please contact:

Housing Options Team
West Offices, Station Rise, York, YO1 6GA
Telephone: 01904 554500
Email: housing.options@york.gov.uk

If you are rough sleeping in York, you should contact the Early Intervention and Prevention team at the Salvation Army – there is a weekday ‘drop-in’ between 10.00am and midday at 63 Lawrence Street, York, YO10 3BU – telephone: 07586 570432

Shelter
Shelter is a charity that provides free, confidential advice for all kinds of housing problems including homelessness

https://www.shelter.org.uk/
York: Human Rights City

York: Human Rights City (YHRC) is a network of local people, including representatives from the voluntary and public sectors in York. We want to be a catalyst for York people, business and organisations to champion a vibrant, diverse, fair and safe city.

We include representatives of the City of York Council, York Centre for Voluntary Service (CVS), Citizens Advice York, International Service, Explore York, North Yorkshire Police, Tees Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust, York NHS Teaching Hospital Foundation Trust, York City of Sanctuary, the Centre for Applied Human Rights at the University of York, and York St John University.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are very grateful to all those who participated in the preparation of this report. We would also like to thank the following organisations for their assistance: Carecent, Changing Lives, City of Sanctuary, City of York Council, Peasholme Charity, The Trussell Trust (York), York Business Intelligence Hub, York Food Poverty Network, York Travellers’ Trust.

We thank the following individuals for their contributions to the development of this report: James Allen, Marilyn Crawshaw, Jon Fry, Paul Gready, Michaela Kucerova, Liz Lockey, Isaac Myer, Adina Tejadilla Orozco, Stephen Pittam, Christopher Ryles, Amelia Smith, Cat Tottie, Natalia Herrera Trujillo, and all those who contributed to the final report during our public meeting discussion. This includes panelists Julia Histon, Nicholas Pleave, Han Hui Hui and Cat Tottie.