Finding a Better Frame

How to Create More Effective Messages on Homelessness in the United Kingdom

A FrameWorks Strategic Report
Sponsored by Crisis

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Introduction

Homelessness remains a critical social problem because of a shortage of affordable housing, the lingering effects of a deep economic recession and government cuts to housing and other social benefits. People are working on programmes, services and policy changes to prevent and reduce homelessness, and moving public thinking is a critical part of social change work. If members of the public recognise homelessness as an important issue and have a more accurate understanding of how the issue works, they will be more likely to support necessary policies and engage in actions that can address, prevent and perhaps someday end homelessness.

But how can communicators talk about homelessness in a way that deepens public understanding, attracts new allies and builds demand for change? How can the third sector use communications to guide media reporting so that it encourages people to think about and support systems-level change and solutions? And, perhaps most critically, how can communicators avoid unintentionally reinforcing unproductive attitudes and negative stereotypes that stymie social change and set the cause back?

This report, the first phase of a larger project supported by and in partnership with Crisis, offers guidance on these questions. It begins by defining the core ideas that third-sector experts want to communicate about homelessness. It then identifies patterns in public thinking, media discourse and third-sector agencies' communications that present the sector with challenges and opportunities. The report concludes with a set of strategies that people can use to communicate more effectively with the public about homelessness. The sector should begin applying these recommendations now, but the strategies outlined here also serve as the basis for subsequent research in the larger project. Moving forward, the project will identify the most powerful values, metaphors and narratives for increasing public understanding of how homelessness works and driving support for the necessary policies and changes to address it.

Executive Summary

To better understand how people in the United Kingdom understand homelessness, and to analyse the gaps between public and expert thinking, FrameWorks interviewed members of the public and a panel of experts. To further analyse why these gaps in understanding exist, and to help the third sector communicate more effectively, FrameWorks researchers analysed a sample of organisational and media materials about homelessness. The analysis revealed the following patterns in public thinking and public discourse about homelessness:

Homelessness is divorced from larger economic forces. The research presented here finds that the public does not think about homelessness in the context of broader economic trends. When members of the public see people sleeping rough, read news stories about abused women living in refuges or hear about immigrants living in overcrowded housing, they don't make the connection to larger economic forces such as rising housing costs, wage stagnation and the unemployment rate.

Homelessness is an individual rather than a collective problem. Overwhelmingly, we find that public thinking about homelessness is trapped by individualism (the idea that a person's circumstances are shaped by their willpower, character and choices), related concepts of charity and morality, and the belief that the only solution to homelessness is direct remedial services such as clean beds and hot meals. The media echo and amplify this individualistic story. Popular television shows, nightly news bulletins and social media chronicle people's 'fall' into homelessness via a series of bad personal choices, and tell cautionary tales about the importance of self-discipline and personal responsibility. Homelessness is a story about individual people and their trials and tribulations; the public has very little access to robust discussions of its social roots, social costs and the social solutions required to address it.

This pervasive individualism has major implications for the third sector. To start, individualism **prevents people from seeing the systemic causes of homelessness.** When people narrowly focus on individual-level factors, including personal character and circumstance, they cannot see how broader systems structure and perpetuate this social issue. Individualism ultimately undermines calls for coherent social policy to address homelessness, and obscures the importance of the contextual factors that cause and exacerbate homelessness.

Prevention is not a part of the public discussion about homelessness. People struggle to think about how to prevent homelessness, and there is extremely limited information available from either the media or third-sector organisations' communications about how prevention works.

Third-sector organisations are missing framing opportunities. Compounding these challenges is the fact that third-sector organisations are not using their communications opportunities to advance and encourage thinking at the systems and collective level. **Our research finds that the sector largely misses the opportunity to counter individualism with systemic stories.** Not only is there no organised, coherent and memorable systems-orientated narrative in popular discourse, but the stories currently

being told – including by the sector itself – may also inadvertently *activate* an individualistic way of thinking. Third-sector organisations frequently rely on vivid stories of individuals who are experiencing or have experienced homelessness, but rarely connect these cases to systems-level causes or solutions, thereby undermining their own cause.

Third-sector organisations' communications likely increase the public sense of fatalism about homelessness. Organisations tend to leave out solutions in their communications. When organisations and the media discuss the prevalence of homelessness or emphasise its urgency without offering solutions, they substantiate the public's fatalism about the issue, allowing the public to fall back on the fatalistic sense that homelessness is an unavoidable problem.

Third-sector organisations can start reframing now. Unproductive patterns of public thinking present the sector with major challenges. However, our research also shows that people *are* able to think in other, more productive ways about this issue. Pulling more productive ways of thinking forward in the public mind through careful and disciplined messaging, while pushing narrowly individualistic ways of thinking to the cognitive background, will require a departure from current communications practice. Communicators should strive to widen the lens when telling stories about homelessness, by including discussion of the economic, political and social conditions that shape people's experiences of it. They should also include the societal – rather than just individual – consequences of homelessness. This way people will understand system change initiatives as having collective rather than selective benefits. This report lays the foundation for this reframing work.

The third sector must change its frame; unless and until it does, the public will continue thinking about homelessness in unproductive ways, and the media will continue to tell stories that further reinforce these patterns of thinking.

Research Base

This report represents the initial stages of Strategic Frame Analysis®. This approach to communications research and practice begins by investigating patterns of public thinking on a social issue and then documents the frames in use by the media and third-sector organisations. Comparing patterns in thinking and discourse with the ideas the sector wants to communicate reveals the framing challenges on an issue. With an understanding of what messages are up against in public thinking and media discourse, and the conceptual work that frames must perform, Strategic Frame Analysis develops and empirically tests framing strategies for their ability to shift attitudes, improve understanding and generate support for solutions. The goal is to find ways to spark more productive conversations on pressing issues to create the public will that is needed for policy change.

This report presents results from the initial phases of Strategic Frame Analysis. Its findings and recommendations are based on four sources of data:

Expert Interviews: To explore and distil target messages on homelessness – the ideas that members of the third sector want to be able to communicate to those outside the sector – researchers conducted 15 one-on-one, one-hour phone interviews with individuals who work on and study homelessness in each UK nation. These interviews were conducted in July and August 2016 and, with participants' permission, were recorded and transcribed for analysis. FrameWorks compiled the list of interviewees in consultation with Crisis and an advisory panel assembled to represent the third sector. The final list of interviewees was designed to reflect the diversity of disciplines and perspectives involved in efforts to address homelessness. Throughout this report, the third sector is referred to as simply 'the sector'.

Cultural Models Interviews: Cultural models findings are based on 20 in-depth cognitive interviews with members of the public in London, Manchester, Glasgow, Belfast and Aberystwyth in October 2016. Cultural models interviews are two-hour, one-on-one, semistructured interviews with members of the public. These interviews allow researchers to capture discourse that, upon analysis, reveals shared patterns of reasoning, assumptions and implicit understandings – what anthropologists call 'cultural models' – that participants use to make sense of an issue.[i]

On-the-Street Interviews: Thirty 10-to-15-minute 'on-the-street' interviews were conducted to supplement the cultural models interview data. These took place on pavements and squares in London and Glasgow in October 2016. Efforts were made to recruit a broad range of participants. All participants signed written consent and release forms and interviews were filmed by a professional videographer. Interviews included a series of open-ended questions to gather information about people's top-of-mind thinking about homelessness, its causes and what should be done about it. Data from these interviews were analysed along with the cultural models interview data, using methods described in the companion methods document.

Media Content and Sector Frame Analysis: FrameWorks researchers also studied a sample of 333 organisational and media materials about homelessness that appeared between October 2014 and October 2016. FrameWorks compiled the list of third-sector agencies in consultation with Crisis staff. This analysis was conducted using a technique called Latent Class Analysis (LCA). LCA is a statistical method that identifies mutually exclusive subgroups or 'classes' within a large set of data. Using LCA, researchers identified three dominant narratives about homelessness in the media and four dominant narratives from the sector's communication materials.

A fuller explanation of methods is provided in a companion document to this report.

Communications Challenges

To design effective communication strategies on a complex issue like homelessness, it is first necessary to understand what the sector's messages are up against. Knowing the patterns of thinking and existing frames with which messages will have to interact and compete allows communicators to anticipate how and why messages go awry. It also enables them to craft communications that advance productive thinking and discourse, and to identify which specific aspects of the issue require the most work to reframe.

In this section, we review the communications challenges faced by those working to end homelessness. These challenges emerge from an analysis of patterns of public thinking and the framing practices used in media and third-sector messages.

Overarching Challenge #1: There is a narrow definition of what homelessness is and whom it affects

Sector View

For experts, the term 'homelessness' encompasses a wide range of insecure housing situations.

- **Homelessness is the lack of affordable, stable and secure accommodation; the lack of a *home*.** People may be homeless if they lack an affordable place to live where their tenancy can be stable over a period of time; are in physical, psychological or emotional danger; or are living in overcrowded quarters.

- **Homelessness can be both visible and hidden**. Although 'rough sleeping' is the most visible form of homelessness, many people whom experts categorise as homeless are hidden from both the public and local authorities. Hidden homelessness includes 'sofa surfing' (staying with friends or family members with no expectation of permanent tenancy), being in housing but at risk of violence or abuse, and living in overcrowded quarters.

- **Homelessness can be transitory or long-term.** The length of time for which people are homeless varies considerably. Even temporary homelessness can be extremely damaging to health and wellbeing, and the negative consequences increase the longer people experience homelessness.

Experts also emphasise that some groups are at higher risk of homelessness than others, including:

- **People living in poverty**. People living in poverty are at the highest risk of homelessness because they are already in precarious financial positions and are particularly vulnerable to rising housing costs, unemployment and cuts in social welfare benefits. Furthermore, individuals living in

poverty often lack social networks that can provide temporary housing or additional financial resources. Finally, people living in poverty often experience stressful situations that can destabilise familial relationships and lead to mental health problems and drug and alcohol misuse, all of which are risk factors for homelessness.

- **Young single adults aged 16–25**. Young adults are expected – and may be forced – to leave home, but often lack the financial, social and emotional resources to live independently, particularly if they were previously 'in care'. Young people are disproportionately affected by low wages, temporary work contracts and rising housing costs, and as single adults are often not eligible for housing benefits or other forms of assistance under welfare rules. All of these circumstances place young people at higher risk of homelessness.

- **Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups.** Experts note that BAME groups are generally at higher risk of homelessness than the majority-white, native-born population. This is particularly true for Bangladeshi, Pakistani and African Caribbean groups, and is linked to higher rates of poverty in these communities.

- **Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people.** The LGBT community often faces social stigma, leading to family conflict, limited social support networks and discrimination in employment and housing.

- **People exiting institutions such as state-sponsored care, prison and the military**. These groups may have limited social support networks and have often experienced violence and trauma, leading to poor mental health and addiction.

Cultural Models

Employing a dominant set of cultural models, the public thinks very differently about what homelessness is and who is affected. These models have implications for those communicating about homelessness.

The *Homelessness = Rough Sleeping* model
The public shares a highly dominant model that directly and narrowly equates homelessness with rough sleeping. In this model, homelessness is defined as the complete absence of housing or any kind of shelter. Thinking in this way, homelessness is synonymous with 'living on the streets', 'sleeping rough' and 'living in doorways'. The following quotes are representative of participants' answers to general questions about homelessness and show the presence of the assumption that *Homelessness = Rough Sleeping*.

> **Participant:** People sleeping on the street. You see them in the doorways in London.
> —
> **Participant:** Not having anywhere to sleep. Being outside.
> —
> **Participant:** Without a house, without shelter, living on the streets usually.

The model prevents the public from recognising other types and forms of homelessness. This was evident when interviewers introduced examples of homelessness other than rough sleeping; participants questioned whether these examples were 'real' homelessness and resisted classifying the individuals involved as 'really' homeless.

Implications:

- **Limits the public's definition of homelessness.** The *Homelessness = Rough Sleeping* model not only narrows people's understanding of the scope of the issue but also limits people's ability to see homelessness as a spectrum of insecurity. When using this model, the public assumes a binary definition: people on the street are homelessness, and those with any type of shelter – however temporary or insecure – are not. This definition makes it hard for people to see other forms of housing insecurity as forms of homelessness.[ii] It also stops them from seeing that insecurity itself operates along a spectrum, and prevents engagement with housing insecurity as a broader issue shaped by a range of contextual factors.

The *Home as Refuge from a Dangerous World* model

According to this model, home is a place of loving relationships, comfort, security and protection. When thinking with this model, home is conceptualised in opposition to the outside world, which is understood as impersonal, cold and dangerous. The home is modelled as a foundational and essential part of human life; it is something we all need, not only for our physical wellbeing but also for our mental health and wellbeing. It is a space that makes ordinary human life possible.

> **Participant**: Home is a place where you feel at your safest. Somewhere that you call your own.
> —
> **Participant***:* A home is my security. I'm secure there. I'm happy in my house. I'm pretty much a home bird. I'm happy in my house that I close every night. When I pull the curtains I say to my daughter – she copies me now, pulling the string, look at it and say, 'Goodbye world, see you tomorrow'. And she looks at it and says 'Goodbye world, see you tomorrow'. I'm happy in my home. I've put everything I want in my home. It's my castle. My comforts are there.

When the combination of the *Homelessness = Rough Sleeping* model and the *Home as Refuge* is active, people express very deep and powerfully negative emotions about homelessness. Homelessness is understood as a state completely outside of and alien to 'normal' human existence.

Implications:

- **Homeless is strongly modelled as a negative and undesirable state.** People bring very strong negative emotions when the assumption that homelessness is rough sleeping pairs with highly negative feelings of the 'outside world'. This can result in a powerful sense of the gravity and severity of homelessness issues. When thinking this way, people clearly understand that homelessness is undesirable and attribute negative feelings to the issue. This suggests that the

sector does not need to spend considerable time and resources convincing people that homelessness is a negative state. Cuing negative emotions when thinking about homelessness is, in other words, a fairly easy and direct framing manoeuvre.

- **Highly negative perceptions of people who are homeless lead to greater stigmatisation and make homelessness an issue about 'other people' but not 'me'.** Members of the public associate people who experience homelessness with powerful, deep and negative emotions, which contributes to the stigmatisation and dehumanisation of these individuals. As we discuss below, the public's prototypes of homeless people are deeply othering, leading people to view homeless people as standing outside of and apart from society in crucial ways. The negative emotions that stem from the *Home as Refuge* model reinforce the 'untouchability' of homeless people, as these people lack something so basic to human life – a home. In this way, focusing messages on how bad it is to be homeless may actually backfire; vivid portrayals of the struggles that people who are homeless experience may further stigmatise them and reinforce senses of 'otherness'.

Prototype Models Used to Think About Who is Homeless

To a remarkable degree, people's thinking about homelessness is organised by images of specific types of people. When people think about homelessness, they have in mind a prototypical 'homeless person'. Subsequent thinking about causes, effects and solutions to homelessness is structured by these specific prototypes. The cultural models people draw on to think about homelessness are constrained by which prototype people have in mind, and certain ways of thinking are only available when specific prototypes are in mind. It should be noted that the power of prototypes on public thinking about homelessness is remarkably strong. Across all of the social issues on which FrameWorks has conducted research, we have not identified prototypes that so powerfully shape subsequent thinking about that issue as we have during the course of our research on homelessness.

The public draws on three prototypes of homeless people. The first is clearly dominant – it is most top of mind, easy to access and powerfully guides and shape thinking. The other two prototypes are not as dominant, but nonetheless accessible and available to people as they think about homelessness.

1. *The Middle-Aged Man:* The archetypal homeless person is a man, between the ages of 40 and 60, who has been sleeping rough for an extended period of time. The homeless *Middle-Aged Man* is assumed to be homeless because of serious mental illness and ongoing addiction. As we discuss below, the *Middle-Aged Man* prototype is cognitively linked with cultural models that blame homeless people for their situation and that are highly fatalistic about the possibility of addressing the issue.

   Participant*:* Some people cannot interact well. Some people might have mental health problems and never be able to have what is normal to society. They will always be at the fringe or they are at the fringe and nobody is looking out for them and then they end up homeless.

   Researcher: Why do you think that homelessness is more prevalent amongst the older age group?

Participant: I think it's maybe alcohol, addictions, gambling. They've lost their job. They went bankrupt. They've just lost everything.

—

Participant: You could become homeless in late to middle age because you lose your job. Maybe your profession is now obsolete in the modern world, and you can't retrain or you don't want to retrain. You could find yourself against the wall there.

2. *Young and Homeless*: Another prototype is a young person who has been kicked out of his or her home and is living on the streets. Unlike the highly gendered *Middle-Aged Man*, this prototype is both male and female. The *Young and Homeless* person is assumed to be homeless due to family dissolution or conflict. This prototype activates individualistic thinking about families and makes it difficult for people to see beyond the family to broader societal issues that contribute to homelessness.

> **Participant**: Again breakups – as in family breakups. A young person finding themselves homeless, it could be that they chose not to live there, it's not a safe place to be and they just have had enough. It could be breakup with his parents, if it's drugs or alcohol, you know they tried and tried and tried to help and they can't do anything else because it's, you know, just a really bad place to be would be the only alternative.
>
> —
>
> **Participant**: I think about the children who get sexually abused and run away. You know? Maybe from a stepfather, or mum's boyfriend, or whoever. And they run away. And then they've nowhere to go and end up just living on the streets.

3. *Abused Women*: A third prototype is of women who are escaping domestic abuse and are forced to live on the streets. As we discuss below, when people think about this prototype, they think about the need for remedial, direct services for people who are living through some kind of personal crisis.

> **Participant**: They might be a woman who's been thrown out by her husband, in this modern day and age. Or, they're in danger and so they could be homeless.
>
> —
>
> **Participant**: Say you come from a family and you decided to leave that relationship because it's so septic, but you go to a woman's refuge. It's a home for now but it's not a home, just somewhere safe.

Implications:

- **These prototypes exclude certain groups from the discussion and keep people from seeing homelessness as a *social* issue.** While the prototypes focus the public's attention on important populations that experience homelessness, they exclude other groups from people's thinking. These mental images make it easy to communicate about certain groups of people who are affected by homelessness (middle-aged men dealing with mental health and addiction issues, young people who have experienced adversity and women who have been abused), but hard to

communicate about individuals who do not fit these prototypes. In addition, because the public strongly associates homelessness with prototypical cases, it is hard for people to see homelessness as a broad social problem that affects many different types of people. All of these prototypes reinforce the equation of homelessness with sleeping rough, further preventing the public from recognising homelessness as housing insecurity that affects many different types of people.

- **The public 'others' homeless people when thinking about these prototypes.** These prototypes limit people's ability to identify with homeless people. This is particularly true when people think about the dominant *Middle-Aged Man* prototype. Because he is imagined to live completely outside of normal modes of human existence, people struggle to understand his experiences and how they might be addressed. The specificity of the experiences associated with *Young and Homeless* and *Abused Women* prototypes (that is, family dissolution and domestic abuse) constrains people's ability to relate to them if they have not had similar experiences.

- **Images are powerful in activating prototypes.** Because specific prototypes activate specific cultural models, as we discuss further below, images of particular homeless people are powerful cues that constrain and channel public thinking in very specific directions. Given that the prototypes make it difficult for the public to take a broad perspective on the issue, communicators must be extremely careful about using such images.

- **Prototypes obscure connections between economic insecurity and homelessness.** As we discuss throughout this report, members of the public model homelessness and poverty as distinct issues. In contrast to experts, who highlight economic insecurity and poverty when explaining homelessness, the public fails to connect homelessness and poverty. This disconnect is largely grounded in the fact that people's prototypes of homelessness are *not* of people who have become homelessness as a result of poverty. Rather, each prototype is associated with specific understandings of the causes of homelessness – mental illness, addiction, family dissolution and domestic abuse – that are unrelated to poverty in public thinking. **That is, when people think about these prototypes, they disassociate poverty from homelessness.**

Media and Sector Frames

The prototypes that structure public thinking about homelessness are simultaneously represented in media and third-sector agencies' materials. First, rough sleeping is by far the most frequently discussed type of homelessness in both media and third-sector materials. Thirty-five per cent of the third-sector agencies' materials reviewed discussed rough sleeping, 14 per cent discussed sofa surfing and 6 per cent discussed squatting. The media are even more likely to discuss rough sleeping: almost half (48 per cent) of the news stories analysed discussed rough sleeping, while only 11 per cent discussed sofa surfing and fewer than 5 per cent discussed squatting. Furthermore, the *Middle-Aged Man* prototype is a dominant image of homelessness in media and third-sector agencies' materials. In the excerpts included in the report, sector examples are in green and media examples in blue.

From a very young age I was in and out of care, and this was really difficult for me, as I was bullied badly there. From the age of nine I slept rough, mostly in shop doorways and sometimes in a lift in a car park until I got caught. Whilst sleeping rough I met two men who were homeless, and they became my friends. Unfortunately, this is when I started to drink and then later take drugs, glue and solvents mainly. This went on throughout most of my life. I had to shoplift to support my habit and to be able to eat, and I quickly became very streetwise, because this was my only way to survive. I got support from family housing after being told I had schizophrenia; after this my life started to change for the better. I met my partner who I adore, she makes my life complete.[iii]

The passage above demonstrates how media and organisations' materials present the *Middle-Aged Man* in ways that closely mirror the prototype in public thinking. Third-sector agencies and media materials typically include some description of the individual's 'fall' into homelessness that references struggling with mental health issues, substance misuse or involvement in the criminal justice system. Redemption stories are particularly prevalent in third-sector agencies' materials – the person who rough sleeps seeks and receives help, and is able to turn his life around and live a 'normal' and productive life. Stories that focus on people sleeping rough also detail tragic endings, such as homeless men who struggled with addiction and died while living on the streets.

Media and third-sector discourses provide members of the public with a constant 'diet' of images and stories that confirm their dominant prototypes of homelessness. This ultimately creates a vicious cognitive cycle: members of the public have existing negative and inaccurate images of homeless people; they encounter these images when they read the news, watch television or open their internet browsers, and this experience substantiates their understanding of who is homeless and where homelessness occurs. This cycle drives these cultural models and prototypes deeper and deeper into thinking with each exposure. The excerpts above also work to suppress thoughts about other social groups at risk of homelessness (for example, women, parents of dependent children, immigrants and so on.) and other forms of homelessness (for example, sofa surfing and squatting). People do not have access to stories about other situations that experts define as homelessness.

Furthermore, as experts note, the types of homelessness most frequently referenced in media and third-sector materials are the most extreme forms. This will likely reinforce the public's notion that people who 'fall' into homelessness are 'other' and that their experiences are outside the norm. It is unlikely that they will be able to understand these experiences as existing on a continuum of housing insecurity. Moreover, both excerpts provided above trigger unproductive individualistic thinking about moral lapse (for example, drug and alcohol abuse and shoplifting), which then raises unproductive questions about whether this person (or any homeless person, for that matter) is worthy of help from society.

Most importantly, these kinds of stories and the cultural models they reinforce constrain people's ability to see and support systemic solutions for homelessness. The sector passage mentions outside services and supports, alludes to the care system and concludes with a discussion of how 'family housing' helped re-establish important social connections. Neither excerpt, however, explains *how* social conditions rather than personal circumstances place people at higher risk of experiencing homelessness. For example, the

sector piece does not link the inadequate care system to the increased likelihood of experiencing homelessness, and lacks discussion of *how* family housing services address problems like mental health issues, substance misuse or financial distress. Finally, in these passages homelessness is described as the *result* of problems like mental health issues or addiction, but there is little discussion of how housing insecurity throughout the life course *contributes to and exacerbates* existing mental health issues or economic insecurity. With these kinds of stories, people will likely discount the need for stable housing as a preventive rather than remedial strategy for addressing homelessness.

Overarching Challenge #2: People see homelessness through the lens of individualism; media and third-sector materials do not challenge this view, and unintentionally reinforce it

Sector View

Experts take a population-based and systems-level approach to understanding homelessness. They see the causes of homelessness as rooted in policy and funding decisions made at the local, devolved and national levels. Experts are also deeply attuned to the importance of the broader ecology – the physical, social, economic and cultural contexts that shape people's housing circumstances.

Experts explain that macroeconomic trends such as rising housing costs and wage stagnation make it more difficult for people to find and secure affordable housing. Furthermore, homelessness is also caused by the erosion of systemic government supports such as social housing, as well as social welfare programmes that are inadequate, complex and punitive. Experts also make it clear that violence, trauma, child abuse and other adverse childhood experiences, as well as poor health – particularly poor mental health and addiction – are precipitating events that increase the likelihood of experiencing homelessness.

Relationship breakdowns, such as divorce or separation, are a major immediate cause of homelessness. But experts note that breakdowns are often caused by larger social or structural forces, such as financial hardship caused by a layoff or the stress of living in poverty. Experts concede that some people 'choose' to become homeless, but note that these choices are often constrained by context and circumstances; homelessness may be preferable to alternative circumstances, such as living with an abusive partner or parent.

Experts note that homeless individuals experience a range of effects, including poorer health and wellbeing, higher rates of mortality, lower education and employment outcomes, stigmatisation and social exclusion. But experts understand that the consequences go far beyond the homeless individual and his or her family or peers. People who are homeless often need extensive health care and assistance with education, training and employment, and the costs of these services are borne by the state. Individuals who are homeless are less able to make economic and social contributions. And areas with high rates of homelessness have more transient populations, which undermines active social participation in communities and can erode community cohesion. The lack of local social connections can also create a

sense of alienation, decrease empathy and depress support for social services.

On these points, public thinking and media discourse diverge sharply from the sector's ideas. Homelessness is framed by the media and understood by the public as a private issue that affects individuals and their immediate family members or loved ones. This makes it difficult for communicators to argue for the importance and appropriateness of collective efforts to prevent and end homelessness.

Cultural Models

A *Foundational Individualism* model

Individualism is a foundational cultural model that shapes how the public perceives the causes and consequences of, and solutions to, a range of social problems. *Individualism* powerfully affects public thinking on homelessness. When drawing on this model, people understand the causes of large-scale social problems such as poverty, crime and homelessness through a lens that looks at individual actors' characters and situations but leaves the broader social context out of view. Thinking in this way, people blame problems on 'bad' people who make 'poor' choices or 'dysfunctional' families with 'deficient' values. *Individualism* obscures systemic and structural factors that cause or contribute to social problems, such as institutionalised discrimination, insufficient and inequitable access to quality education, affordable housing, public transit and other resources, and national policies and conditions that affect employment. Homelessness, through this logic, is a personal affliction rather than a social problem.

The strength of the *Individualism* model is directly tied to people's prototypes of homelessness. Because prototypical images of *individuals* structure thinking about homelessness, thinking about the issue begins – and often stops – at the individual level.

Implications:

- ***Individualism* prevents people from seeing the systemic *causes* of homelessness.** By directing attention to individual-level factors, including personal character and circumstance, the model blinds people to the broader systems and structures behind homelessness. This undermines support for systems-level solutions – if the problem is seen at the individual level, policy solutions are understood as misguided and inappropriate.

- ***Individualism* limits engagement with homelessness.** When using the *Individualism* model, members of the public see the negative implications of homelessness on individuals, but not on society. For example, people can identify the connections between homelessness and poor physical and mental health, but they struggle to understand the impacts of homelessness on communities or at the national level. This limited understanding diminishes people's sense of responsibility and limits their motivation to engage in the issue.

Embedded in the foundational model of *Individualism* is a set of more specific patterns of reasoning.

The *Self-Makingness* model

The *Self-Makingness* cultural model is the widely shared and frequently applied belief that individuals make their own fates and determine their own destinies. According to this model, everyone has the opportunity to achieve success; people who experience homelessness or other hardships have simply failed to work hard and seize those opportunities. When thinking in this way, people attribute success or failure to individual agency – whether a person has tried hard enough or not. People are homeless because they 'choose' to engage in behaviours that lead to the loss of housing. Members of the public, for example, often list addiction as a factor that can lead to homelessness, especially when thinking about the *Middle-Aged Man* prototype. But they understand addiction as a *choice*. People choose to drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes, take drugs or gamble despite the risks inherent in these activities. In this way, addiction is a series of bad personal choices that lead to homelessness.

> **Participant**: You always get reckless people, people who do things maybe on the spur of the moment. They're an easy-come-easy-go kinda lot. And I suppose if you get into being an alcoholic, and people like that, it's quite easy just to say, 'Whatever, I'm not bothered'. Now, that's the alcohol. But in the real world, I think they're just a bit – I mean, it's people who like to go out and fight every night. Things like that. To me, they're reckless people. But that's what they do.
> —
> **Participant**: My dad was homeless … He was homeless about the age of 50 …
>
> **Interviewer**: Do you know why he became homeless?
>
> **Participant**: Yeah, because he drank. And then my parents got divorced … And my grandfather was really a good man and always very supportive of my dad. So he had a lot of support, but the drink won over me, all of our family, his home, his business, everything, the drink won. We went to a thing once. Anthony Hopkins was speaking and he was talking about [how] he made a choice, and the choice was drink or his family, and he said, 'I wasn't going to lose my family', and he stopped drinking. But my dad, as I used to think it, he didn't value us enough to stop.

Implications:

- **The *Self-Makingness* model limits what the public can see as effective solutions.** If homelessness is the result of a lack of individual fortitude and drive, the way to address it is for people to find and exert more willpower. This removes actions that lie outside of the boundaries of willpower from the public's radar of potentially effective solutions.

The *Rational Actor* model

The public thinks about homelessness through another specific model of behaviour, again rooted in the more foundational *Individualism* model. According to this model, many people who are homeless have made a deliberate decision that they would rather be homeless than adhere to societal norms, responsibilities and expectations. In this way, homelessness is a decision made by an individual to avoid the costs of familial obligations, participation in the labour market or social constraints and

responsibilities. Homelessness is a conscious and affirmative choice to live without shelter.

> **Participant**: It can be a choice. People can decide to make themselves homeless and to seek a more free approach to life.
>
> —
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> **Participant**: I think it was a documentary about homelessness in Swansea and they were following two or three homeless people. … Some of these people they were happy … And then some of them were sleeping in the woods, a couple of people living in the woods. They've had enough of society and people and they decided to make themselves homeless and live in the woods and they thought it was the best thing they've ever done.

Implications:

- **Viewed from a *Rational Actor* perspective, punitive approaches to homelessness are considered effective social policy.** When thinking through the *Rational Actor* model, the logical way to address homelessness is to affect the decision calculus: If people are deciding to become homeless, you can dissuade this decision by increasing the costs of this behaviour. This line of thinking supports the same punitive approach that is the hallmark of the criminal justice system and can make 'cracking down' on homelessness seem an effective way of preventing more people from making the choice to live on the streets. This is clearly at odds with the sector's perspective and existing research on effective approaches to homelessness prevention. This cultural model explains why the public sometimes adopts a punitive response in thinking about how to address homelessness.

The *Already Available* model

The public also assumes that the services necessary to support those who are homeless are readily available and easily accessible. The problem, people reason, is not that services don't exist but that homeless people are either unaware of or unwilling to use them.

> **Interviewer:** How do you think homelessness should be addressed?
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> **Participant:** That's a difficult one. I suppose giving people the opportunity and the knowledge to know there is shelter there. Shelters are there. There is help. There are people there to help and that is their job.
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> —
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> **Participant**: Say for example, if it's a condition of the hostel that you don't take drugs on the premises and you don't come into it intoxicated, there are people that will fulfil those rules and there are people that won't have the mental strength to fulfil those roles. In each case, they would just be wandering around on the streets, probably get arrested every now and again.

- **If services are available, then the problem is the homeless person's unwillingness to seek help and make changes.** The *Already Available* model puts the blame narrowly on the shoulders of those individuals who are currently homeless – they remain so because of a lack of knowledge of or an unwillingness to access existing services. Thinking in this way, the public does not advocate for *more* or *better* programmes or services but rather for raising awareness of existing programmes and motivating those in need to access them.

The *Charity* model

This model is also structured by the foundational *Individualism* model. When drawing on it, the public assumes that individual acts of kindness and charity towards people in crisis are effective and sufficient in addressing homelessness.

> **Participant:** I've seen that there are people who actually take food out or give them a sleeping bag or warm coat or some warm clothes but the majority of people I would have thought would pass. —
>
> **Participant**: Even people who are my acquaintance, people who I haven't seen for a long time, I couldn't turn anybody from my door if they came and said, I really need help for the night or I'm going to have to sleep in the street. I just couldn't, I don't know how anybody could turn somebody away in that situation.

Implications:

- **The *Charity* model distracts from the importance of systems and policy change.** The *Charity* model – the belief that people should do whatever they can as individuals to help people they encounter who are in need – impedes thinking about social and structural interventions and diminishes people's perception of the role of government in making policy-level changes to address this issue.

In addition to the *Individualism* models discussed above, there are more socially-orientated ways of thinking about the causes of and solutions to homelessness.

The *Universal Social Forces* model

People draw on the *Universal Social Forces* model to explain the causes of homelessness. The model becomes active when people think about employment and the economy. Using the model, people attribute the causes of homelessness to external economic circumstances and forces that are beyond individual control. People talk about these economic forces as largely mysterious powers and understand them in fuzzy terms. The model leads people to assume that economic trends shift suddenly and affect people in unpredictable ways. People see rising housing costs and an unstable job market as the product of these economic forces, but the exact ways in which macroeconomic forces shape the labour and housing markets are unspecified by the model.[iv]

The model leads people to assume that these unpredictable economic forces put *all* people at *equal* risk of becoming homeless. The underlying idea is that, since we are all dependent on the economy, major economic shifts or downward trends make all people vulnerable to losing their jobs and their homes.

> **Interviewer**: Do you think homelessness can affect *anybody*?
>
> **Participant:** Yes, definitely. Definitely, especially in these days with the depression and the way things are. People can't afford to pay their [mortgages]. They are working every hour trying to keep above and they can't pay their mortgages and things happen and people can't afford to live. —
> **Participant**: The global financial crisis has a massive effect. I think Brexit is going to have a massive effect … A lot of people lost their jobs, and losing their jobs is going to push a lot more people there.

Implications:

- **The *Universal Social Forces* model has mixed implications.** This model is a rare example of a model that enables people to clearly see that individuals are embedded in and affected by a larger structure. However, it leads people to universalise risk and assume that, since we are all impacted by economy, we are equally at risk of 'falling' into homelessness should it suddenly change. This runs counter to the expert view that risk is unequally distributed across demographic groups (in terms of class, migration status, race and so on). Future research needs to explore how the productive structural aspects of this model can be cued in a way that helps people see that certain groups are more sensitive to economic fluctuations than others, and thus that the risk of becoming homeless is *not* distributed equally across the population.

- **The model obscures the connection between poverty and homelessness**. If changes in the economy affect us all equally, it becomes difficult to see that poverty dramatically increases the risk of becoming homeless, and thus makes addressing poverty seem less important as a preventative strategy.

- **If homelessness is caused by mysterious forces out of our control, what can we ever do to address the issue?** In addition, attributing the causes of homelessness to the workings of national and global economies contributes to a powerful sense of fatalism, which is discussed in detail below. People tend to view the economy as a set of mysterious, opaque and intransigent forces that are beyond control or intervention. If the only systemic source of homeless that people can see is one we cannot control, it becomes difficult to view homelessness as a problem that can be addressed.

- In addition to these largely unproductive cultural models, analysis revealed a set of more recessive but potentially productive culturally models, which can be seen as communications opportunities for those working to address homelessness in the United Kingdom.

The *Some Sit at the Brink* model

Analysis found a model that helps people think about why some people *are* at higher risk of homelessness than others. This model contrasts with the *Universal Social Forces* model above. According to the *Some Sit at the Brink* model, some people are holding onto their homes 'by a thread' (and others are not); the loss of a job or a family disruption can easily push such people into homelessness. Here, money is a 'safety net'; people who don't have it are more likely to end up homeless. At base, this model rests on the simple assumption that a person's housing situation is directly tied to his or her economic status. When people live in poverty, they are less likely to be able to afford a stable home and thus more likely to become homeless. While this assumption is seemingly obvious – banal, even – what is striking is *how rarely* participants drew upon it to think about homelessness. Again, the connection between poverty and homeless is tenuous in public thinking.

> **Participant:** I think that would be the third step. At first you're poor, then you're poverty stricken, and then you become homeless, which is a sort of sliding scale.
> —
> **Participant:** Well if you have less money you don't have that safety net. If I was a millionaire and my house burnt down and I had to go live in a hotel, more likely they have purchased insurance for my home and then they will give me the money to rebuild it. But if you are poor, in poverty, you can afford a roof over your head but you can't really afford to feed yourself. Which means you are less likely to have bought fire insurance and if you house burns down you are screwed. You may have a very poor-paying job but you might lose it as a result of this and then where do you end up then? Money is the safety net; it's the cushion to fall back on if you've got it. The same instance of misfortune of your house burning down or your partner passing away and you taking drugs and alcohol to deal, are the same for both sections of society, but the rich person has money to rely on, the poor person doesn't and as a result they will more likely find themselves on the streets … You hear things like everybody is only three pay cheques away from being homeless. I don't know how true that is.

Implications:

- **The *Some Sit at the Brink* model is a tool for communicators, but it is recessive, and demonstrates how distinct poverty and homelessness are in public thinking.** Analysis suggests that the presence of this model in public thinking is extremely recessive. People don't have a lot of practice thinking in this way. But the availability of the model shows that people *can* recognise the links between poverty and homelessness. The fact that they so rarely do speaks to the strength of the prototypes and models discussed, which lead people to think of poverty and homelessness as separate issues.

The *Government as Protector* model

The public can also envisage a role for the public sector in addressing homelessness. Drawing on the *Government as Protector* model, people understand government and local authorities as protectors of the vulnerable and as bearing some responsibility for addressing homelessness. This model is especially active

when people think about one group of people who are at risk of homelessness: abused women. The public views this group of women as particularly vulnerable and deserving of services, both because they have been abused and because they are not held responsible for making the kinds of 'bad choices' attached to the other prototypes of homelessness.

> **Interviewer:** Is shelter important?
>
> **Participant**: For vulnerable groups of society, yes of course. If you are being abused by your spouse or your partner you do need to be protected and society should look after you in that sense. Where else would you go if you couldn't go to a shelter? Maybe it's not appropriate, maybe you move to another part of the country to get away from that person and then they are battering you, where do you go? You've got kids or you don't got kids and you can't go home because your parents are dead or whatever you have to go somewhere. So society should look out for you in that sense.
>
> —
>
> **Participant**: If you're a woman with two kids, and you leave your abusive husband, and you move into a hostel or a sanctuary for women, then, once you're given your council flat, you might still be poor. There's much more of a kind of likelihood of you maintaining some kind of consistency in your life.

Implications:

- **The *Government as Protector* model can trigger paternalistic thinking.** This model disrupts the understanding that individuals are solely responsible for addressing homelessness. However, there is a danger that this way of thinking sets up paternalistic views about recipients of government assistance. The public consistently treats groups like abused women as objects to be cared for and protected, rather than as subjects to be empowered and engaged.

- **The *Government as Protector* model leads to assessments of worthiness.** This model also often led people into the problematic terrain of worthiness – the need to examine the reasons why a person has become homeless to determine if they are deserving of the government's protection.

Media and Sector Frames

Individualism clearly shapes how people make sense of homelessness – why it occurs, what should be done to address the issue and who is responsible for taking action. Analysis of media and third-sector materials shows that part of this dominance is due to the fact that this cultural model faces no opposition, and existing stories actually (likely inadvertently) reinforce this way of thinking. Put another way, not only is there no organised, coherent and memorable systems-orientated narrative in popular discourse to counter the *Individualism* cultural model, but the stories that are currently being told – in both media and third-sector materials – actually *activate* an individualistic way of thinking about homelessness.

This conclusion is based on two key findings from the media and third-sector frame analysis:

- The media and sector tell stories that lack systemic and collective dimensions; in particular, they are missing discussions of the systemic causes and social consequences of homelessness and society's responsibility to address the issue.

- The narratives that *are* told in media and third-sector materials are framed in ways that actively reinforce *Individualism*.

Key Absences in Media and Sector Discourse

Both media and third-sector materials tend to leave out discussions of the social causes and consequences of homelessness, as well as systems-level solutions to the issue. This is particularly true among media materials. More than half of the media sample (51.7 per cent) did not mention any systemic cause of homelessness, and nearly three-quarters (74.4 per cent) made no mention of any of its societal consequences. Finally, 86 per cent of media articles did not include any explicit arguments – what we call 'values statements' – about why addressing homelessness is a matter of collective concern.

Table 1: Absences in Media and Third-Sector Organisations' Materials

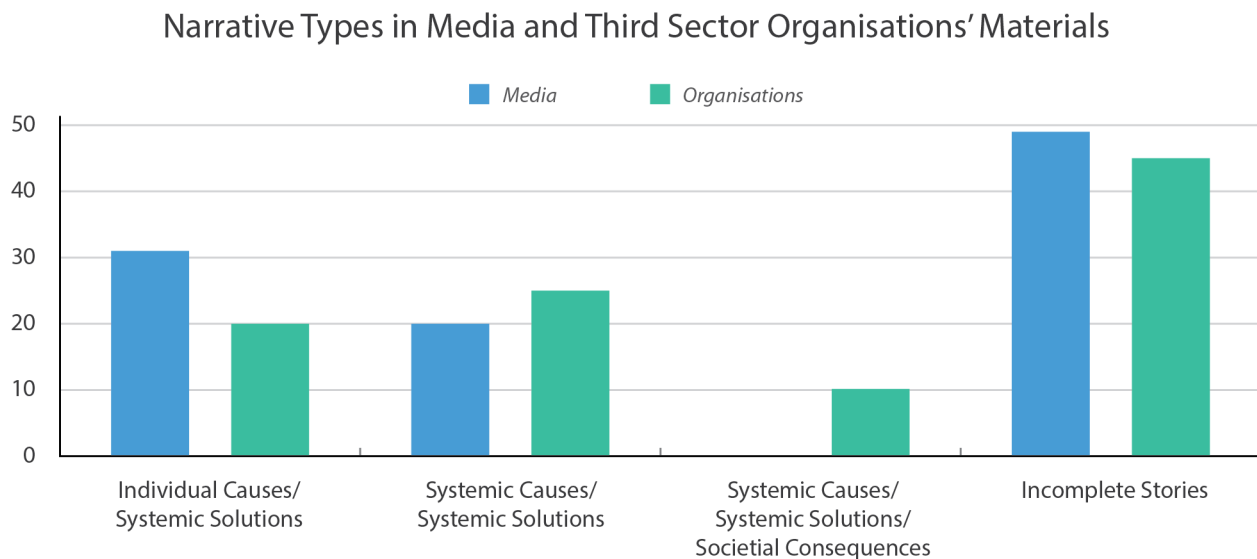| Narrative Component	Per cent of Third-Sector Materials	Per cent of Media Materials
No values statement	62.7	86
No systemic cause mentioned	54.7	51.7
No societal consequence mentioned	69.6	74.4

These absences are similarly glaring in third-sector agencies' materials. Nearly two-thirds (63 per cent) of these materials lacked values statements communicating why public action is necessary to address homelessness. And almost 70 per cent lacked any discussion of the societal consequences of homelessness. Without robust discussions of the societal impacts of homelessness, the public will not be able to see how the negative consequences are felt beyond those who are currently homeless. This lack of a social frame dramatically limits public engagement with the issue and reduces demand for solutions. This is a key finding: **Groups working to address and prevent homelessness are not communicating why the public must take collective action to work towards these goals or how society will benefit if they do. Neither the media nor third-sector agencies counter *Individualism* with collective- or systems-orientated stories.**

Media and Sector Narratives

In addition to these holes in the media and third-sector stories, the analysis identified a set of narratives in media and third-sector materials. Figure 1 shows the prevalence of these narratives in media and third-

sector discourses, and therefore the power they are likely to have in shaping the public's thinking about homelessness. In the sections below, we discuss these narratives and the ways in which they shape public thinking – both reinforcing *Individualism* and, in some cases, presenting a wider perspective on homelessness issues.

Figure 1: Narrative Types in Media and Third-Sector Organisations' Materials

Narrative Types in Media and Third Sector Organisations' Materials

■ *Media*   ■ *Organisations*

Narrative Type	Media	Organisations
Individual Causes/Systemic Solutions	31	20
Systemic Causes/Systemic Solutions	20	25
Systemic Causes/Systemic Solutions/Societal Consequences	0	10
Incomplete Stories	49	45

Narratives that Cue Individualism

The *Individual Cause/Systemic Solutions* narrative is present in both media and third-sector materials. Thirty-one per cent of media materials and 20 per cent of third-sector materials tell this story, which has a predictable and consistent form across these materials. First these stories zoom in on a homeless individual and describe his or her living conditions. Then they describe the individual-level circumstances (substance misuse) that led to the person's loss of stable and secure housing. Finally, they advocate for more direct services or policy change to help the individual find stable housing. The passage below, excerpted from a message from the sector, exemplifies this narrative type.

> Paul previously lived and worked legally in the UK for many years, but for the past 14 years he has been a visa overstayer. He has had 1 application and 2 appeals to stay in the UK on human rights grounds turned down. Paul does not want to return to his country because there is nothing for him there – his family are all in the UK. He has not accepted the offer of being returned voluntarily … Paul is 70 and destitute. He has deteriorating chronic health problems that have led him to be in hospital 4 times in the last 2 years. After one ITU (Intensive Therapy Unit) stay (for ketoacidosis), he was turned down by 4 GP practices, as he lacked a residential address, or adequate ID. Fortunately a mainstream practice well known for supporting homeless clients did eventually register him. […] At the conference, we will be discussing how we can best help Paul. Should the Home Office take responsibility for people like Paul who have multiple health needs? What is the role of health care professionals? Where is the safety net?

Given the strength of the *Individualism* cultural model, it is easy to predict the public's response to this article and others that use this narrative structure. The communicator clearly aims to build public support for solutions to homelessness, but members of the public are likely to get stuck on the details of Paul's story: Why did he make the poor decision to overstay his visa? Are his health problems a result of bad personal choices? Are they perhaps related to his decision to use alcohol or drugs? Why did he make those choices?

When communicators tell individual stories like Paul's, they unintentionally prompt audiences to question whether the individuals profiled actually deserve public assistance. In so doing, they run the risk that audiences will answer this question with a resounding 'no'. Interpreting this example through the lens of *Individualism*, people will likely conclude that Paul did not live up to his responsibilities and does not 'deserve' support through a stronger 'safety net'.

This narrative type is not all bad. It does give the public information about solutions that go beyond individual willpower or drive – these stories challenge people's sense that more motivation and better decisions are the only or best solutions to homelessness issues. But because these narratives do not link systemic solutions to systems-level causes, they are ultimately unable to counter *Individualism* – they leave space for people to fill with their dominant individual explanations of the causes of homelessness.

The *Incomplete Story* narrative was the most common type in both media and third-sector materials, appearing in nearly half of all media and third-sector articles (45 per cent and 49 per cent respectively). Messages falling into the *Incomplete Story* category fail to answer essential narrative questions like: Why does homelessness happen? What are its consequences? And what should we do about it? These articles tend to be short pieces on websites or blogs that provide mission statements, announce events, describe organisational activities or depict statistical information through the use of infographics. The piece below represents these kinds of stories.

> Forty cyclists will use peddle power to fight homelessness in a fundraiser for a large homelessness organisation this weekend. It's the third year of the Borders cycle challenge, which will set off from Kelso racecourse at 7 am on Sunday morning. The hardiest of the riders will take on a gruelling 100-mile tour, which includes an ascent of almost 2,000 metres. For less experienced riders, a shorter race cuts out some of the hardest climbs, and everyone will get to enjoy some of Scotland and northern England's best scenery as they cycle through Border towns including Duns, Eyemouth and Coldstream. Both routes will finish back at the racecourse. The organisation's director said: 'I am in awe of the cyclists who are taking on this challenge to help us ensure no one battles bad housing or homelessness alone. I'd like to wish them all the best for the event and give them my heart-felt thanks'.

People working to address homelessness may not think of event announcements like this one – or other short communications – as framing opportunities. But even short communications – including those of 140 characters or less – are valuable opportunities to frame an issue. Communicators should strive to always be framing and take advantage of every opportunity to tell systems-level stories that counter *Individualism* in public thinking. We model how communicators can do this in the Recommendations section below.

To elevate homelessness as a social issue as opposed to a personal problem, communicators must find ways to expand public thinking beyond *Individualism*. This is no easy task, as *Individualism* is a deep, pervasive and well-established cultural model, powerfully shaping thinking about homelessness. Reframing efforts must avoid reinforcing a narrow focus on individual choice and willpower, and advance a frame that allows the public to attend to the full spectrum of factors that make people more or less likely to experience homelessness. An effective frame must also help people see that the consequences of homelessness are shared across society – not limited to individuals who are currently homeless.

Systems Narratives

While the first two stories discussed above are problematic in advancing public engagement with homelessness, our research identified two more promising story types. These systems stories more closely align with expert understandings of homelessness, and are therefore good starting points for thinking about how to integrate systemic thinking into popular discourse. The problem is that these stories do not appear frequently; only 20 per cent of the media materials and 35 per cent of the third-sector materials could be categorised as systems stories. **The sector is missing the opportunity to tell systems stories – only one-third of its materials advance a systems view on homelessness.**

The *System Causes/Systems Solutions* narrative was present in both the media and third-sector materials (25 and 20 per cent respectively). The following passages exemplify this story type.

> Christmas is a mere one week away, so what timely gift should you panic-buy the politics and economics enthusiasts (yes, they exist) in your life? Fret no more: I've come up with the ideal present – a Build Your Own Housing Crisis kit. In the box provided, you'll find a city with rapidly growing research and medical industries; a large student population; a scarcity of unoccupied land to build on; a desperate homelessness problem; massive central government cuts to scupper planned housebuilding; and a green-belt encircling the city, strangling any hopes of expansion. Once you've followed the instructions, you may be surprised to learn you've built your very own Oxford, rather than London. The city is now the most unaffordable in the UK, with rents and house prices relative to earnings higher than even the overheating markets of the capital. The average house price in the city is 16 times the average wage, compared with London's 15.7. Even in the cheaper parts of the city, ignoring the north where it's common for houses to change hands for £1.2m, you're still unable to nab a house for less than seven times the average salary.
>
> --
>
> Whenever our staff support or visit families living in these conditions we witness the terrible toll it is having on their children – damaging their ability to learn and longer term life chances as they witness things they shouldn't, struggle to sleep, maintain their self-esteem, and lack the space to study and play.

Both examples demonstrate that rates of homelessness are directly related to rising housing costs; other parts of these pieces also briefly point to actions that might have prevented the housing crisis. However, these examples are missing discussions of the societal consequences of homelessness – an absence that characterises the *Systemic Causes/Systemic Solutions* narrative type more generally. In the first passage, the impact is that 'you're still unable to nab a house'. In the second passage, the authors fail to note that when

children do not have access to the resources they need to reach their full potential, entire communities feel the impact.

Without explicit connections to societal (rather than individual) impacts, communicators risk cuing the *Charity* model and the responses it brings to mind. If the impacts of homelessness are only felt by individual people, members of the public may feel inclined to help vulnerable people and others deemed worthy of assistance but are unlikely to engage with the policy-level changes important in preventing homelessness. Furthermore, they are likely to fall back on punitive approaches to addressing homelessness if the potential recipient of assistance is categorised as undeserving of help.

It is important to note that the media's version of the *Systemic Causes/Systemic Solutions* narrative focuses nearly exclusively on the housing market – rather than economic conditions more generally – as the cause and potential solution to the homelessness problem. The general structure of the media's *Systemic Causes/Systemic Solutions* story is that rising housing prices result in increased rates of homelessness, and that regulation of housing costs is therefore the most effective way to address homelessness. This is a critical first step in expanding the public discourse and popular thinking about the systemic causes of homelessness. However, it does show that the public lacks access to media stories that explain the relationship between poverty and homelessness, which is a connection they already struggle to see. Experts explained that providing stable housing is critical, but they espoused a more holistic approach – such as 'wraparound' services, well-paying jobs and other supports designed to address economic inequality. If media discussions of homelessness are confined to whether or not people have houses to live in, more comprehensive supports are difficult for members of the public to engage with.

Finally, third-sector materials do include a complete *Systemic Causes/Systemic Solutions/Societal Consequences* narrative. Documents that included this narrative explained how societal conditions and structural forces produce homelessness, and how societal-level interventions can prevent and reduce the numbers of people who experience homelessness. These stories also incorporate discussion of impacts that go beyond individual homeless people and their immediate families. This is a complete social change story about homelessness – but it is only present in **10 per cent of the field's communications and is completely absent from the media.** The following excerpt exemplifies this type of story.

> With cuts to public services, restrictions on welfare, rising housing costs and a lack of housing supply, there are real fears that homelessness will rise further. Women are likely to be particularly affected by the impact of welfare changes as they are more likely to be dependent on benefit income, including housing benefit. The concern is that we now face a 'timebomb' of women's homelessness. As homelessness rises, funding for support services is being cut. Overall, homelessness services reported a 17 per cent reduction in funding in 2013, with the proportion targeted at women falling from 12 per cent to only 8 per cent in the last two years. This is very concerning considering women make up a quarter of people using homelessness services. The costs of women's homelessness can be devastating for women and their families. These high costs are also felt by the wide range of support services which women come into contact with during their experiences of homelessness.

This report and others like it focus on conditions that structure the prevalence of homelessness and highlight how societal changes have disparate impacts on different groups of people. Unlike the *Individual Causes/Systemic Solutions* narrative, this narrative does not link homelessness to an individual's decisions.

One thing to note is that the two systems narratives tend to be very long. Despite this trend, our experience working across many issues is that full stories can be told in short pieces – even on social media, where content is highly limited. However, the average length of a *Systemic Causes/Systemic Solutions/Societal Consequences* document was 49 pages and the average length of a typical *Systemic/Causes Systemic Solutions* document was 17 pages. The *Individual Cause/Systemic Solutions* narrative, by contrast, averaged two pages. Of the few organisational materials that tell the full, systemic story, most are long reports that the public is unlikely to read. The sector must find ways to tell complete systems stories in shorter, more accessible materials. This is a framing challenge, but one that can be addressed – as discussed and modelled in the Recommendations section below.

To shift unproductive public narratives, the sector must tell new, more productive stories about homelessness. These stories should, at all costs, break out of the individual frame and make the societal consequences of inaction clear.

Overarching Challenge #3: Prevention is poorly understood by the public, missing from the media and underdeveloped in the sector's messages

Sector View

Experts agree that steps can be taken to prevent homelessness, and call for bold action in this area. This is one of the sector's core ideas. It proposes policies that would, for example:

- Regulate zoning rules to make it easier to increase the housing supply, which would help lower the cost of housing
- Implement rent controls and longer tenancy contracts to stabilise costs and make rents more affordable in the private rental market and ensure better access to stable, long-term housing
- Build more high-quality social housing and ensure empty housing is being used to provide affordable housing that is accessible to those in need
- Redistribute government monies to build a stronger social safety net for people living in poverty and other populations in need
- Train social services personnel, doctors and teachers to recognise at-risk families or individuals and refer them for early interventions, including assistance with housing as well as non-housing services such as employment advice, mental health services and family mediation.

Together, members of the sector argue, these policies would dramatically reduce the rate of homelessness in the United Kingdom.

This focus on prevention is a critical disjuncture between sector and public understandings of homelessness. Citizens lack a robust understanding of the concept of prevention, and the subject is largely absent from public discourse. It is little surprise, therefore, that members of the public do not think of prevention as a viable social policy.

Cultural Models

The public's dominant cultural models and prototypes of homeless people prevent them from thinking about prevention of homelessness in systemic terms. Because dominant models and prototypes background systems in thinking and prevent people from seeing context, people struggle to recognise how steps that intervene in this context can prevent homelessness. As a result, the systemic steps to prevent homelessness that those in the sector recommend are simply off the public's radar and hard to support. Working within the foundational *Individualism* model, people can think about how *individual* actions can prevent homelessness – making better choices, for example – but they fail to recognise how society can reorganise public structures to increase access to stable, affordable housing.

Moreover, because the public sees homelessness and poverty as distinct issues, when people *do* think of ways of preventing homelessness they do not think of broader economic policies or solutions, such as ensuring a strong benefits system or stable jobs with good wages. Notably, FrameWorks' recent research on poverty in the United Kingdom found that the public *does* think of such measures as solutions to poverty. The fact that such measures are not discussed as ways of preventing homelessness further underscores the disconnect between these issues in the public's mind.[v]

The public's difficulty in thinking about prevention is reinforced by a dominant model of solutions:

The *Crisis Intervention* model
Participants consistently equated addressing homelessness with intervening to help people in moments of crisis, such as when women who have been abused find themselves on the streets. This typically involves finding people shelter, but can extend to addressing other causes of personal crises, such as mental illness or addiction. Because homelessness becomes visible to the public only when people are on the streets, the public focuses its solutions thinking on the events that prompt people to lose all shelter.

> **Participant***:* They need help. They're down on their luck and they need somebody to help pull them up. Give them a home, give them a house, a job, help them. They're still human beings. They're just people. And they should – it's not, you know, they shouldn't be on the streets.
> —
> **Participant***:* I think there's people on the street with mental health issues and they probably need to address that. Because as far as I know there's one place in Northern Ireland for mental health, that's mad. There's got to be a big connection between mental health and homelessness. Because just for somebody not to have the get up and go to get themselves the basic needs has to be a big, big problem within themselves. So they are vulnerable people, they are very vulnerable, they need to be protected. And if they are very vulnerable and out in the streets the government needs to

maybe address that.

- **The *Crisis Intervention* model impedes thinking about systemic steps to prevent homelessness.** Because people lack a way of thinking about homelessness that includes any parts of the spectrum other than rough sleeping, and see intervention in crisis and remedial terms, thinking upstream about preventative measures is decidedly difficult. This suggests the need for considerable work on explaining the causes of homelessness such that people can see the potential power of intervening early or preemptively, and imagine ways of doing so, to avoid problems and create better outcomes.

Media and Sector Frames

Analysis of the media and third-sector frames helps explain the public's difficulty in engaging with the idea of prevention. Only 7.6 per cent of media articles and 24.2 per cent of third-sector documents dealt with the idea of homelessness prevention. Of the third-sector materials that did address prevention, many *asserted* its importance but very few *explained* how preventive approaches would work to address homelessness.

Third-sector agencies adopted one of two strategies in their prevention-focused materials. The first was to simply include the word 'prevention' without defining its meaning or providing any additional elaboration. The following passage exemplifies this strategy:

Preventing Homelessness
We support thousands of people at risk, who we know from our street work are at risk for rough sleeping. Our 2014 statistics of health reveal that:

- 27 per cent of our clients report physical and mental health problems and substance use issues
- 52 per cent of our clients use alcohol and/or drugs problematically
- 65 per cent of our clients report a mental health problem
- 70 per cent of our clients report a physical health need.

This piece is titled 'Preventing Homelessness', but there is no discussion of what that means, especially in relation to at-risk populations. In this piece and others like it, the word 'prevention' is included but is thought to speak for itself – there is no attempt to define it for non-experts.

The second tendency in third-sector prevention messages is to *describe* prevention by stating determinants ('if we do X') and outcomes ('we will prevent Y from happening'). These discussions excluded the processes or mechanisms that connect determinants and outcomes. The frequent use of 'return on investment' data was one way that third-sector agencies described prevention without explaining it:

> I was particularly pleased by the announcement this week that that every £1 spent on services in Northern Ireland saves £1.90 for the public purse. This news holds powerful significance for the similar programmes in Wales – particularly when we ask ourselves how we can continue to campaign for the continued ringfencing – (and increased protection) – of this vital funding stream. Commissioned by Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA), the report demonstrates that significant savings are delivered through the programme's focus on prevention and reducing the need for statutory services such as health, social care and the criminal justice system.

This excerpt states that focusing on prevention will reduce dependence on the need for statutory services. However, it does not include any information about *how* the programme's services result in these savings. Audiences learn that actions will prevent negative outcomes from occurring, but they do not know how this all works. Even public education campaigns that are explicitly about preventing homelessness – the kinds of campaigns in which one would expect to find explanations of how prevention works – do not give the public the details they need to understand and appreciate why prevention is critical.

The lack of explanation of preventive approaches is not restricted to the issue of homelessness or confined to the United Kingdom. FrameWorks research has found that difficulty communicating about prevention affects many other issues – from early childhood to addiction and climate change to justice reform. The third sector should not take for granted that members of the public understand what prevention means are how it works in homelessness issues.

Overarching Challenge #4: Fatalism limits solutions support and reduces issue engagement

The final challenge facing communicators is fatalism, or the public's propensity to see and characterise problems that relate to homelessness as inevitable and unsolvable.

Sector View

Members of the sector emphasise that problems related to homelessness are complex, severe and large in scale. They are clear, however, that society can take actions to address homelessness and drastically reduce the number of people experiencing it.

Despite the sector's emphasis on solutions, though, there is a strong sense among the public – supported by media and sector frames – that homelessness is an intractable problem and an inevitable part of modern life in the United Kingdom.

Cultural Models

The public's sense of fatalism is strong on homelessness issues. It is driven by an interlocking set of cultural models.

The *Bad Break* model

Participants often attributed homelessness to simple bad luck. When discussing causes of homelessness like mental illness or loss of a job, people explain that these situations are frequently the result of random chance, rather than social–structural conditions. Bad luck is typically understood as an event – a 'bad break' – that strikes quickly, pushing people out of their homes and onto the street. When the *Bad Break* model is active, homelessness is seen as wholly unpredictable. A bad break can strike anytime, anywhere and anyone; bad luck is immutable because it is out of the control of any individual or group. This model leads the public to assume that some degree of homelessness is inevitable – bad breaks are bound to happen – and to doubt that policies or programmes can do anything to prevent it.

> **Participant**: I don't see mental illness as a weakness but as an illness. I see it as just unfortunate – like getting cancer. I don't know why I tend to associate mental illness with homelessness. I just get the impression there's a lot of people who are mentally ill. Yeah. I just think unfortunate circumstances. You're not necessarily destined to be a homeless person. There's not some character trait that makes you homeless.
>
> —
>
> **Interviewer:** Why does homelessness occur?
>
> **Participant**: It can be a number of reasons. One is just plain bad luck. […] Some guy's unlucky and his wife kicked him out. Freezes all the accounts, blah, blah, blah.

Implications:

- **The *Bad Break* model makes it hard for people to recognise that homelessness can be prevented.** While the model does, productively, lead people to see external factors rather than people's own will and decisions as causes of homelessness, the understanding of these factors as 'luck' renders them outside of anyone's control or remediation. Because luck is outside of human control, the model imbues the issue with a strong sense of fatalism and prevents people from seeing how solutions of any kind could prevent homelessness in the first place. The sector needs to work hard to show people the social causes of homeless and demonstrate that there *are* measures that can address these causes and improve outcomes.

The *Modern Life is Hard* model

A cultural model holding that *Modern Life is Hard* leads people to conclude that the social structures of contemporary life set people up for financial struggle and instability. The underlying assumption is that modern life has seen a breakdown of traditional community relationships, and in doing so has fractured a critical source of social support, while simultaneously putting extraordinary pressure on people to achieve a certain lifestyle. Homelessness occurs when people who are unable or unwilling to achieve this lifestyle 'fall through the cracks' of society, because they have no family or community to depend on during hard times. Importantly, the public thinks of this dissolution of support mechanisms as permanent and irreversible.

Participant: People don't know their neighbours anymore. People are – you see them here, they are all rushing. Nobody is smiling or doing anything. Doesn't matter whether you are in America, England, Scotland, anywhere. People are only interested in their own little bubble.
—

Interviewer: Who is responsible for homelessness happening?

Participant: Generally society. Because it puts a lot of pressure on people. I want this, I need this. And some people just don't want that and need that, don't have the ability, capability of coping with the pressures of getting it.

Implications:

- **The *Modern Life is Hard* model makes homelessness seem inevitable.** While this model, unlike many of the others described here, does enable people to place homelessness in context and to see lack of community support as a causal factor, it reinforces the public's fatalism by injecting a strong sense of inevitability into the issue. Because the conditions of modernity are perceived as locked in and irreversible, homelessness seems endemic to today's world and impossible to prevent or meaningfully address. Communicators must be careful about employing nostalgic language, as this is likely to trigger the model and lead people to yearn for a past that they perceive to be irretrievable.

The *Vicious Cycle* model

Especially when thinking about the *Middle-Aged Man* who rough sleeps prototype, the public assumes that people who experience homelessness are trapped in a downward spiral from which they are unlikely to recover. The *Vicious Cycle* model assumes that the prototypical problems that lead to homelessness – like addiction and mental illness – are exacerbated by living on the streets and make it difficult for middle-aged men to escape homelessness. Like experts, members of the public recognise that the causes and effects of homelessness, such as addiction, are intertwined and reinforce each other. However, among the public this leads to a strong sense of fatalism about addressing homelessness. Members of the public assume people are permanently damaged by their experiences of homelessness. They assumes that 'damage done is damage done', and that anyone who experiences homelessness for an appreciable amount of time will not be able to reintegrate into mainstream society as productive citizens.

Participant: I know somebody who is a chronic alcoholic and he really wants to get off the street and wants to go to a clinic. He can't go to one because he is not without drink for long enough that they will pay for him to go. But he also knows he's going to die. And I talk to him sometimes and he is always really, really 10 sheets to the wind, and he says to me, 'I can't stop because what am I going to do? When I'm trying to stop on the streets with my friends who are all drinking, I can't stop. But until I can stop I can't have help'? So you've got like a spiral of, 'Well, you are going to die young when you are on the street as well, aren't you'?
—

Participant: You're not conventional. You've shied away from convention. And you virtually become unemployable. And you probably don't own a suit, you can't go to an interview, they can't phone you and say … you know? Because you have no fixed abode. It's just a vicious cycle to the bottom.

Implications:

- **The *Vicious Cycle* model dampens public support for programmes and policies designed to respond to existing homelessness**. The model leads people to assume that the self-reinforcing momentum of homelessness is essentially unbreakable; once the cycle has begun, it is virtually impossible to disrupt. This makes policies and programmes that address existing homelessness seem Sisyphean and pointless. Providing the public with a way of understanding the reinforcing relationship between the causes and effects of homelessness that is *not* fatalistic is vital to cultivating efficacy about – and, in turn, support for – interventions.

The *Game Is Rigged* model

The *Game is Rigged* model assumes that elites manipulate the economy and the government to serve their own interests and reinforce inequality and a rigid social class structure. Effective solutions to homelessness do not serve those elites' interests, the logic goes, so there will always be homelessness. In cultural model interviews, this model often arose when respondents talked about the sell-off of council housing. Respondents would half-heartedly suggest that increasing affordable housing would alleviate the problem, but there was deep cynicism that widespread social housing could ever occur in the current economic and political climate. The *Game is Rigged* model leads people to think narrowly about the role of charities in addressing homelessness and frustrates broader thinking about solutions.

> **Participant:** I think it's a disgrace in this country. It's one of the wealthiest countries. Ten per cent of the population own 90 per cent of the wealth. So I think it is scandalous that people can't work and they're denigrated for not working. 'Cos there is no work. You know, my attitude on that is, it seems to me that the people that are homeless have usually got learning difficulties, or mental health problems. The weaker in society that the rich can push down, and other people can push them down. It's a crime in this country I think to be poor or to be homeless.
> —
> **Participant:** They need to look at their policies, they need to look at their funding and what way they are dishing out money for the – I mean you look in the local papers and you know it's full of councillors' events and dinners and you're thinking, 'What the heck is all that about' and just how much money kind of goes where it's obviously not being addressed properly. There shouldn't be anybody on the street.

Implications:

- **The *Game is Rigged* model is a deep barrier to thinking about systemic change in the United Kingdom.** FrameWorks research has found that this model consistently structures public

thinking across social issues in the United Kingdom, and it consistently leads to deep and pervasive fatalism. While this is not necessarily an incorrect assessment, by locating the problem in elites' intentions and characters – their greed and self-concern – the model leads people to conclude that meaningful change is impossible, because elites will not suddenly become more public-spirited or altruistic. The model leads to an underestimation of the role of political context and institutions in shaping outcomes. When the model is active, people do not see that shifts in this context such as increased public pressure, or changes in institutional incentives through reforms of government, can open up the possibility of significant policy change. Communicators must find ways of tuning out the *Game is Rigged* model and foregrounding more efficacious ways of thinking about the collective action that can make real policy change on homelessness possible.

Media and Sector Frames

The patterns of media and third-sector coverage substantiate and contribute to fatalistic thinking. We noted earlier that structural and policy-level *solutions* appear infrequently, especially in the media. But many media and sector materials do not list any solution at all, whether it be individual or structural. Almost one-third of media materials surveyed did not offer any solutions to homelessness, and 17 per cent of sector materials did not provide readers with a solution.

Another way in which communicators support the public's fatalism is through crisis messaging. Crisis stories emphasise the scope of the problem of homelessness by focusing on its prevalence and impacts, without including solutions that match the scope of the problem presented. In the following passage, this crisis framing becomes apparent in the lopsidedness between the amount of the story that focuses on the problem versus the amount that discusses solutions:

> The fact that there will be 626 more homeless children in Scotland this Christmas than last year – a 15 per cent increase – is simply not good enough and a badge of shame for such a relatively wealthy country. Our winter appeal aims to raise awareness of the plight of homeless children who will spend this Christmas living in temporary accommodation. The increased number of homeless children indicates a growing bottleneck of families stuck in temporary accommodation due to the major shortage of affordable housing across Scotland. We are calling on all of Scotland's political parties to include ambitious targets for new affordable housing in their manifestos for next year's Holyrood election campaigns and bring hope to the 150,000 families and individuals stuck on council waiting lists across the country.

When organisations and the media discuss the prevalence of homelessness or emphasise its urgency without offering solutions, they substantiate the public's fatalism about the issue. They allow the public to fall back on the fatalistic sense that homelessness is an unavoidable problem.

Individualistic depictions of homelessness, described above and exemplified in the following extract, also contribute to the public's sense of its intractability:

> The hostel was intended to provide temporary accommodation for homeless families; however, once they move in here, 'temporary' can mean years. The hostel is a modern day version of Dickens's

> Marshalsea prison from Little Dorrit, a reluctant community with its own hierarchy of suffering, where years are ticked off by unlucky people who have run aground for one reason or another. Janice has been here for five-and-a-half years, with her husband and two children now aged nearly two and five. In one corner of her room, on top of a small fridge, stand a couple of electric rings to cook on. That's the kitchen. There's a shower room in a cupboard and all the family's possessions are stuffed into a stack of suitcases squashed by the door. There is only just enough room for the double bed which they all share, the four of them sleeping together restlessly. Janice is a thoughtful, lively 30-year-old, a worried mother eager to get back to work some day. When I first met her 18 months ago, she was still bewildered to find herself in these circumstances. 'I never, ever expected something like this to happen to me', she said. At that time, however, she still had some glimmer of hope that she would be rehoused.

Similar to Paul's story (above), the public will likely get drawn into the details of Janice's story and search for a character flaw or bad decision that can explain her plight. When popular discourse narrowly defines homelessness as an individual issue, any intervention apart from greater self-control is seen as futile. Furthermore, this news story leaves the public with little faith in the efficacy of existing social services or the possibility of improving them. Instead, the public is trapped in a story about a Dickensian dystopia from which Janice and her family are unlikely to escape. The story may be tragic, but there is really nothing that can be done.

In order to build support for the kind of reform that is needed to ensure stable housing for all people in the United Kingdom, the sector needs strategies to elevate public awareness that homelessness is designed into policies and practices – and can thus be addressed by redesigning those systems.

Initial Recommendations

The following recommendations address the challenges enumerated above. They aim to help communicators avoid cuing ways of thinking that block productive consideration of efforts to prevent and reduce homelessness, and instead to encourage support for the actions necessary to address these issues. In upcoming work, we will empirically test whether these and other strategies are effective in improving understanding, shifting attitudes and increasing policy support on homelessness in the United Kingdom.

Recommendation #1: Seize every framing opportunity.

Our analysis revealed that third-sector agencies are missing many opportunities to spark detailed, robust and sophisticated discussions about homelessness. The power of an effective frame lies largely in its repetition by a broad range of communicators over an extended time. Communicators should take advantage of every opportunity to tell a more systems-orientated story about homelessness – even in short communications such as headlines, captions, event announcements and posts on social media channels. Earlier in this report, we excerpted an announcement of a charitable bike race to end homelessness. A reframed version of this announcement might look like this:

> **Before:** The director of this organisation said: 'I am in awe of the cyclists who are taking on this challenge to help us ensure no one battles bad housing or homelessness alone. I'd like to wish them all the best for the event and give them my heart-felt thanks.'

> **After:** The director of this organisation said: 'I am in awe of the cyclists who are taking on this challenge because they know that when we make housing more secure, we are preventing homelessness and making our entire communities stronger. I'd like to wish them all the best for the event and give them my heart-felt thanks.'

Recommendation #2: Define homelessness.

To advance a more productive conversation on homelessness, communicators need strategies to disrupt the public's archetypal image of the homeless person: the *Middle-Aged Man* who sleeps rough. A reframing initiative must enable people to see other types of homeless people (for example, women, parents of dependent children, young adults and so on) and other forms of homelessness (for example, sofa surfing, overcrowded housing and so on). Communicators should not assume the public understands homelessness in the way that members of the sector do; they must incorporate broader definitions into their communications collateral to help the public understand the full scope of what homelessness is and who it affects. Crisis makes this effort in the phrase 'homelessness is more than rooflessness'. Additional communications tools are required to expand the public's understanding of what, and who, homelessness is about. Our previous research on poverty and child maltreatment in the United Kingdom suggests that while expanding public understanding about the scope of a social problem is valuable, it requires a cautious approach.[vi] There is a danger that broadening the definition of homelessness could create fatalism among the public if the higher prevalence of homelessness appears insurmountable. Future research will test the best strategies for improving public understanding of the range of homeless situations while maintaining a sense of efficacy about solutions.

Recommendation #3: Avoid talking about personal choices and motivation.
Acknowledging the role of individual agency and emphasising people's ability to change may seem like a good idea, given the way that this aligns with public thinking. But talking about personal choices and describing their motivation to escape homelessness will likely cue *Individualism,* which will undermine change efforts. 'Meeting people where they are' is an ineffective and counterproductive strategy if you are trying to move people to new ways of seeing the world. 'Meeting people where they are' reaffirms rather than challenges their current beliefs. Communications should focus instead on where they want to move thinking to; for example, talking about the ways in which the social welfare system is designed – and can be redesigned – to prevent homelessness and provide comprehensive assistance to homeless people.

Recommendation #4: Avoid images that reinforce the public's prototypes of homelessness.
The public's prototypes of homelessness are powerful and typically structure unproductive thinking about its causes, consequences and solutions. Third-sector agencies should make sure that any imagery they include in their materials do not reinforce those images and inadvertently trigger cultural models that do not align with their goals. Communicators should aim to widen the lens and show as much context as possible when choosing images for their materials.

Recommendation #5: Tell stories about conditions that place people at risk of homelessness.
Overcoming the challenge of the 'person who sleeps rough' prototype is not as simple as substituting one group of people at risk of experiencing homelessness with another. Putting a 'face' on the issue of homelessness – regardless of whose it is – will likely fail to help the public imagine homelessness as a social problem that requires coherent and effective social policy. Communicators should strive to explain the social (as opposed to personal) conditions that place people at greater or lesser risk of homelessness. The narrative should focus on the *conditions* that put certain social groups at greater risk of homelessness, and explain how those conditions affect those groups in different ways. A reframed version might look like this:

> **Before:** Our organisation is dedicated to helping end homelessness in the United Kingdom. Since 1899, we have supported and empowered the groups that are most vulnerable to homelessness, including people recovering from addictions, youth, families with histories of abuse and other at-risk individuals. In collaboration with other organisations, we are able to advocate for the most vulnerable among us.

> **After:** Our organisation provides the bricks and mortar of wellbeing: stable and affordable housing, access to counselling and other supports for mental health. When these materials are weak or aren't available, people are at higher risk of experiencing homelessness. Without strong supports, a job loss, the loss of a loved one, or a lingering health concern can lead to the loss of housing, which can lead to or exacerbate other problems. Since 1899, we have helped strengthen the materials that support wellbeing for people in need through advocacy, research and direct services.

Recommendation #6: Highlight the societal consequences of homelessness.

Members of the public need to be reminded that homelessness is an issue that affects everyone. Homelessness, of course, does have terrible consequences for individuals and families. But stopping the explanation there puts communicators at risk of cuing a *Charity* response to homelessness. Audiences may feel empathy for an individual who has experienced homelessness, but they will likely not transfer this energy into support for systems or policy change. The extreme marginalisation and 'othering' of homeless people means communications must also emphasise the ways in which homelessness affects everyone, not just those who experience it. If audiences can connect the dots between the immediate impacts of homelessness to its societal impacts, they will be better able to build public support for broad-scale change.

Recommendation #7: Explain prevention and build a story that people outside the homelessness third sector can help carry.

Sparking more robust public discussions about prevention will require an empirically tested meta-narrative that advocates and experts across different sectors can use to increase public understanding of prevention and motivate people to demand a system, a society and a culture that supports it. Prevention must become part of the British idea, as firmly entrenched as *Individualism*. If communicators are able to identify and spread this narrative and collaborate with other sectors, they will improve outcomes – not only in the area of homelessness but also across a wide range of interrelated social problems. This narrative will require that communicators include more discussion of the mechanisms by which preventative actions result in improved outcomes. And it is important to remember that this kind of framing can even be done in small spaces. The following are examples of 'before' and 'after' tweets about housing insecurity.

> **Before:** Every £1 spent on Supporting People (SP) services in Northern Ireland saves £1.90 for the public purse. See report here: bit.link.ly

> **After:** Every £1 spent on housing assistance helps people stay in their homes – and prevents them from needing £1.90 in services later on. *bit.link.ly*

Recommendation: #8: Combat *Fatalism* by explaining collective solutions.

Communicators need effective strategies to combat the public's fatalistic attitudes. The sector must increase the public's sense of efficacy – its belief that collective action *can* drive change – to increase support for the policies and programmes that those in the sector recommend. Explaining how public–private partnerships work to effectively address homelessness may achieve this goal, but more research is needed to find effective frames for cracking people's sense that nothing can be done. This is one of the most important challenges to address in future work.

Recommendation #9: Talk about how systems are designed – and can be redesigned.

To combat *Fatalism*, the sector needs to tell stories that make clear the intentionality and mutability of systems – that the systems we have are the result of choices we make, and thus that we can remake them through different choices. Without practice in thinking that systems can change, people will remain stuck

in a deep sense of fatalism about any issue that requires the reform of public and social systems. This is particularly true of how the sector talks about the economy. Research is needed to understand how the sector can explain how public policies can restructure economic relations in ways that can reduce and prevent homelessness. This is a truly fundamental task. It is necessary both to increase the salience of homelessness and build support for solutions.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Ask members of the public about homelessness, and you'll likely get answers that focus on individuals. You'll hear about causes of homelessness like addiction or violence in the home, and consequences like depression, illness and injury or the inability to finish school and get a job. Ask who is to blame, and again you'll hear about individuals and their 'bad' choices, 'weak' morals or inability to get through tough times. The media echo and amplify this individualistic story, strengthening its power in the public mind. What the sector wants instead is discussions about the systemic and structural forces that experts say underlie homelessness.

Unlike the public, members of the sector argue that the consequences of homelessness go far beyond individuals and affect communities and society as a whole. They don't blame individuals so much as the policies and conditions that structure their experiences, and they have different understandings of who is homeless. Members of the public most often think of the person sleeping rough – the prototypical person affected by homelessness, who they imagine is middle-aged and addicted to drugs or alcohol – while experts tick off many different populations at risk of homelessness, such as people on low incomes, women with dependent children, young adults and others. Because they understand homelessness in different ways, experts and members of the public arrive at different solutions to it. Members of the public often think of the need for more clean beds in shelter facilities, hot meals, job training, education and health care, whereas experts have a much more expansive view; in addition to more robust direct services, they call for a collective policy response, a greater emphasis on prevention and more government coordination – ultimately adding up to political, cultural and social change.

It is important to note that the sector alone cannot end homelessness. The main challenge for groups working to address homelessness, however, is to bring systemic thinking to the foreground of the public's mind. But here's the rub: current practices, especially in critical absences, are inadvertently reinforcing an individualistic story of homelessness. Only one-third of the sector's communications materials advance a systems view on homelessness. The sector misses opportunities to explain consequences and solutions. Groups working to address and prevent homelessness, in other words, are *not* communicating why the public must take collective action or explaining how and why society will benefit if they do. And because the media do not tell the systemic story either, there is no organised narrative to counter the individualistic story that people tell themselves.

The good news is that organisations working to address and reduce homelessness have the power to change course by changing their story. Using the recommendations outlined above, they can begin to reframe homelessness and tell more systemic stories. Doing so will counter the individualistic narratives in public thinking, encourage the media to tell a fuller, more systems-orientated story and build public will for all manner of solutions – both direct services and policy and social change. This research is a first step towards that goal. The second is designing and testing communications tools that have the proven power to redirect thinking so that it better aligns with expert views. The potential for change is great. The literature on social movements suggests that when a field unites around an effective frame, it is able to build momentum for meaningful, durable change. We believe this will be the case with homelessness in the United Kingdom, and are grateful to support this important work.

About the FrameWorks Institute

The FrameWorks Institute is a nonprofit think tank that advances the nonprofit sector's communications capacity by framing the public discourse about social problems. Its work is based on Strategic Frame Analysis®, a multi-method, multidisciplinary approach to empirical research. FrameWorks designs, conducts, publishes, explains, and applies communications research to prepare nonprofit organizations to expand their constituency base, to build public will and to further public understanding of specific social issues – the environment, government, race, children's issues and health care, among others. Its work is unique in its breadth – ranging from qualitative, quantitative and experimental research to applied communications toolkits, eWorkshops, advertising campaigns, FrameChecks® and in-depth FrameLab study engagements. In 2015, it was named one of nine organizations worldwide to receive the MacArthur Foundation's Award for Creative & Effective Institutions. Learn more at www.frameworksinstitute.org.

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Appendix A: Expanded Expert Story

The untranslated expert story of homelessness in the United Kingdom is organised around several broad questions:

- What is homelessness and how should it be measured?
- Who in the United Kingdom is at the highest risk of homelessness?
- What are the causes of homelessness in the United Kingdom?
- What are the consequences of homelessness in the United Kingdom?
- What are potential solutions to homelessness in the United Kingdom?

In addition to the nuanced points in the sections below, the narrative addresses the *overall* picture of homelessness to the extent that the causes of homelessness are common across all four UK countries (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland). However, this story is also sensitive to the impact of devolution and policy decisions that have driven differences in the availability of services and levels of homelessness across the United Kingdom.

What is homelessness and how should it be measured?

- **The lack of affordable, stable and secure accommodation; the lack of a *home*.** Experts define homelessness as much more than 'rooflessness' or lack of physical shelter, but more broadly as a lack of a *home*. A home in the expert view is an affordable place to live where occupation can be stable over a period of time, where a person is safe from harm and where everyone has reasonable personal space. An individual or family lacking any of these may be considered homeless.

- **Homelessness can be both visible and hidden, and exists on a continuum in which people can experience homelessness of different types at different points in time.** Experts emphasise that while living on the streets is the most visible form of homelessness, there is a wider population experiencing homelessness. Households living in temporary short-term accommodation, such bed and breakfasts, night shelters or short-term hostel placements, are viewed as homeless. There are also people who are hidden from both the public and sometimes local authorities. For instance, many people experiencing homeless may 'sofa surf' – staying with friends or family members but with no expectation of stability.

- **Homelessness can be transitory or long-term and can be experienced multiple times.** The length of time for which people are homeless varies considerably. Those who immediately qualify for statutory homelessness assistance or have stronger support networks and financial resources may experience only one brief period of homelessness, while others repeatedly experience homelessness and some spend very long periods of time without any secure accommodation. There is also evidence that people who experience homelessness at a young age are more likely to experience chronic homelessness. Even temporary homelessness can be extremely disruptive to

individuals' health and wellbeing, and the negative individual consequences and social costs increase the longer one experiences homelessness.

- **Official statistics need to include accurate measures of prevalence**. Although experts believe that official statistics are valuable sources of data on the prevalence of homelessness, they also think these data could be improved to accurately capture all types of homelessness. One way of achieving this goal is if data is shared across other areas such as health, criminal justice and welfare. Experts argue that this data should be supplemented by national survey data and local administrative data to fully capture the broad range of issues of homelessness in the United Kingdom. Experts noted that because homelessness is often transitory, and because many homeless people do not present to local authorities, official statistics underestimate the true extent and diversity of people experiencing homelessness. In addition, homelessness assistance varies by country, and these variations lead to differences in the reported prevalence of 'statutory' homelessness in official statistics.

Who in the United Kingdom is at the highest risk of homelessness?

- **People living in poverty**. People already living in poverty are at risk of becoming homeless. Experts outlined several ways in which poverty can lead to homelessness. First, people living in poverty are already in precarious financial positions and are therefore more vulnerable to loss of accommodations due to rising housing costs. Unemployment, low wages, benefit cuts or loss of benefits may also tip a financially struggling individual or family into homelessness. Second, people living in poverty often lack social networks that can provide them with temporary housing or additional financial resources that would help them secure stable housing. Third, living in poverty is extremely stressful, and constant worry over finances can destabilise familial relationships, lead to mental health problems such as depression and to drug and alcohol misuse as a coping mechanism for anxiety, all of which are risk factors for homelessness.

- **Young single adults aged 16-25**. Experts emphasised that young people are currently at the highest risk of homelessness, for several reasons. First, young adults are expected– and may be forced – to leave home, but often lack the financial, social and emotional resources to live independently. This is especially true for young adults who were previously 'in care' and face both a legacy of childhood trauma and extremely limited social networks. Second, low wages (and lower minimum wage entitlement), temporary work contracts, the lack of responsiveness of the welfare system and rising housing costs disproportionately affect young adults, making it difficult for them to afford adequate housing. Third, young single adults are often not eligible for housing benefits or other forms of assistance under the current welfare system – despite being disproportionately affected by the economic downturn and the restructuring of the labour market, which has led to lower wages and less secure employment.

- **Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups.** Experts noted that BAME groups are generally at a higher risk of homelessness than the majority white, native-born population.

Among BAME populations this is particularly true for Bangladeshi, Pakistani and African Caribbean groups, and is linked to higher rates of poverty in these communities.

- **Economic migrants**. Economic migrants from Eastern Europe are more likely to sleep rough, according to experts, because many have no rights to homelessness assistance from the UK government, leaving them with few options when they are unable to secure housing independently. Recent policy changes to define people sleeping rough as being in breach of their Treaty rights might also discourage migrants from engaging with services or seek help.

- **LGBT people**. The LGBT community often faces social stigma, which limits their social support networks and makes them vulnerable to discrimination in employment and housing. This discrimination can damage emotional and mental wellbeing, increasing the risk of homelessness. Older LGBT children and young LGBT adults may also be at greater risk of being forced from their homes due to stigma.

- **People with physical or long-term developmental disabilities**. Experts noted that because the threshold for homelessness assistance or adult social services is high, many people don't receive assistance, increasing their risk of becoming homeless. In addition, many homelessness services are also not designed with their needs in mind in terms of access, communication and living environment.

- **People exiting institutions such as state-sponsored care, prison, the military and the hospital**. Those transitioning out of institutions that provide ongoing accommodation – but not a home – are also at increased risk for homelessness, for several reasons. First, there is limited social housing designated for these groups, and private landlords may discriminate against them. Second, there are ineffective pathways and support in place for these groups. Discharge planning from hospitals, prisons and detox facilities often does not include adequate provision for sustainable housing. Young adults coming out of care often have very limited social support networks and life skills and have usually suffered adverse childhood experiences, both of which put them at high risk for homelessness. Former prisoners are also likely to have limited social and financial resources, may have experienced trauma, poor mental health and addiction and may face discrimination in housing. Military veterans may also be at higher risk of homelessness due to experiences of violence and trauma either before or during their service.

- **Men and women are at equal risk, but homeless men tend to be more visible.** Experts emphasised that while men are more likely to be represented among the most visible type of homelessness – people who sleep rough – women are equally at risk of homelessness. However, women are less visible, for several reasons. First, they are more likely to have dependent children, which means they are more likely to receive homelessness assistance and reside in some form of temporary accommodation. Second, because they are more vulnerable to violence on the street, women are more likely to sofa surf, obtaining a place to sleep either because their social networks

are loath to let them sleep on the streets or by making personal compromises to secure a place to sleep indoors.

What are the causes of homelessness in the United Kingdom?

- **Lack of adequate services to effectively prevent homelessness**. Experts noted that there are barriers to accessing homelessness assistance, such as restrictions on eligibility criteria, gatekeeping services or services not being available in the local area. Even when people are able to access them, time-limited or poor-quality services can lead to repeat homelessness.

- **Rising housing costs and loss of quality, long-term affordable housing options**. All of the experts interviewed cited the high cost of housing as an important driver of homelessness throughout the United Kingdom, which is most prevalent in London and the South East of England. Many areas are suffering housing shortages of the right type of housing for their population, resulting in high housing prices and increasing rents even as wages have stagnated. This problem is compounded by the shortage of social/council housing, which historically provided free or low-cost housing for people living in poverty, and difficulties accessing the private rented sector for people on low incomes and in receipt of housing benefit. The lack of affordable housing pushes people in precarious financial positions into insecure temporary accommodation, poor-quality housing or overcrowded quarters in the increasingly expensive and unstable private rental market.

- **Inadequate and overly complicated social welfare programmes**. Experts also noted that the restructuring of the social welfare system has led to an increase in homelessness in recent years in some parts of the United Kingdom. This restructuring has decreased housing benefits and added sanctions, including loss of housing assistance and/or benefits income, when people do not conform to welfare rules. In addition, the housing benefit system now prioritises investment in housing benefit rather than house building, leading to higher rents. Overall, the social welfare system is inadequate and poorly matched to people's needs, and has become overly complicated and punitive. There is also ineffective welfare provision for migrants and refugees, which leads to homelessness and destitution among this group.

- **Violence, trauma and adverse childhood experiences.** Experts noted that experiences of violence and trauma are important risk factors for homelessness. For instance, domestic abuse can create unsafe, unstable living conditions for women in particular. Similarly, child abuse may force young victims to leave home before they can secure new, safer accommodations. And child abuse and other traumatic events experienced during childhood – such as parental mental illness or drug abuse and or/removal from the parental household – can have long-term negative effects on one's health and wellbeing, which can in turn significantly increase the risk of homelessness.

- **Poor health – particularly mental health – and addiction**. Experts also noted that poor health – particularly poor mental health – and drug and alcohol addiction often contribute to

homelessness because they tend to destabilise a person's life and relationships. Mental illness and drug and alcohol addiction can make it difficult for individuals to maintain employment or stable familial relationships. Individuals with these problems therefore may not be able to afford rent or may be forced out of their homes by other family members. Alternately, people may decide to leave home when other family members are suffering from mental health or addiction problems and then find it difficult to find affordable alternative accommodation.

- **Relationship breakdown**. Experts emphasised that one of the main drivers of homelessness is relationship breakdown. For instance, a married or cohabiting relationship may dissolve and one partner may find him or herself homeless. Another common example cited by experts is a child being forced to leave home due to a breakdown in the parent–child relationship. Relationship breakdowns may be the consequence of the financial hardships and stress associated with poverty, domestic violence, child abuse, mental illness and/or drug and alcohol addiction. Homelessness itself also puts considerable strain on personal relationships and can lead to further dysfunction in relationships.

What are the consequences of homelessness in the United Kingdom?

- **Causes and consequences of homelessness are interconnected**. Experts emphasise that the causes and consequences of homelessness are interconnected and often reinforcing. For instance, unemployment may lead to homelessness but may also be the result of becoming homeless, as homelessness itself can curtail employment opportunities. Similarly, drug and alcohol addiction may lead to relationship breakdowns and loss of stable housing but may also be a result of homelessness, as individuals may use substances as a way of coping with the experience of being homeless.

- **Poor health and higher rates of mortality.** Homelessness has a particularly negative effect on health and wellbeing. People experiencing homelessness often suffer from depression and anxiety. Homelessness can also affect physical health: rough sleeping in particular is damaging to physical health, leading to higher rates of morbidity and mortality. Homelessness also constrains people's abilities to lead healthy lives by making it difficult to access healthy food and recreation. Children who experience homelessness can suffer long-term negative consequences due to disruptions in their physical, mental and cognitive development. In addition, homeless people – particularly people who sleep rough – are more vulnerable to crime, leading to further adverse health effects. Experts also explained that the longer a person experiences homelessness, the more damaging it is to his or her health and wellbeing.

- **Poor education and employment outcomes**. Homelessness has detrimental effects on children's educational outcomes, because they often have to change schools, have no place to do homework and may suffer from trauma and stress, which lead to behaviour and concentration problems. Similarly, homelessness makes it difficult to find and keep employment. Several experts also noted

that employers may discriminate against homeless people and refuse to hire people who give addresses that are known to be temporary accommodation.

- **Stigmatisation and social exclusion**. People experiencing homelessness are sometimes stigmatised as being personally responsible for their situation and are viewed as lazy and prone to alcoholism, addiction and criminal activity. Experts noted that many people, particularly families with children, will go to great lengths to hide the fact that they are homeless. People experiencing homelessness are more likely to be victims of crime and often face harassment and even violence from the public. The stigma of homelessness can also prevent people from seeking social assistance.

- **High economic costs and loss of community cohesion**. The cost of services for homeless people can be high: in addition to housing, those who experience chronic homelessness often need extensive physical and mental health services and assistance with education, training and jobs. Even short-term homelessness can lead to increased health-care costs. And because homelessness has a negative impact on educational attainment and employment, there are long-term negative impacts on individuals' productivity and their ability to make economic and social contributions. In addition, communities that experience high rates of homelessness have more transient populations, and individuals and families who are homeless may have to move far away to obtain accommodation, cutting them off from supportive social networks. This churn prevents people from becoming active participants in their neighbourhoods and can undermine community cohesion. The lack of local social connections can also create a sense of alienation, decrease empathy and depress support for social services.

What are potential solutions to homelessness in the United Kingdom?

- **Regulate the housing market and help people on low incomes to navigate it**. Experts agreed that rising housing costs were a significant driver of homelessness and called for interventions in the housing market to make housing more affordable. These interventions included changes in regulations to make it easier to increase the housing supply, rent control to stabilise costs in the private rental market, provisions like rent deposit schemes that encourage landlords to rent to tenants with less stable housing histories and implementing requirements for longer tenancy contracts so people have access to more stable long-term housing.

- **Build more affordable, accessible and permanent housing solutions, and improve the condition of and access to existing housing stock.** Most experts advocated for the government to build more high-quality social housing and ensure that a sufficient supply of a range of housing. They also noted that in some places there is available housing that is empty and could be used to provide additional affordable or subsidised housing to those in need. Housing supply solutions also need to be tailored to local needs.

- **Implement the Housing First approach across the United Kingdom to address homelessness among those with high support needs**. Experts notes that there is evidence that the Housing First approach, which provides permanent, affordable housing as quickly as possible and then provides support services and connections to the community-based supports, is the best model for addressing homelessness among people with complex needs. Housing First should be commissioned on a larger scale and integrated with current supported housing pathways for those with high support needs, to provide wraparound personalised support.

- **Strengthen and improve prevention services and make in-tenancy support personalised and flexible**. In addition to social housing, experts emphasised that the support available to people across all tenures needs to be improved and should match the needs of the people receiving it. At the primary prevention stage, there should be improved coordination across a wide range of services that interact with homelessness risks – such as welfare benefits, Jobcentres, social services and primary and secondary health services – to identify people at risk of homelessness and provide them with support at an early stage. Improved public education and signposting would also create greater awareness of rights and services. At the secondary prevention stage, in-tenancy support should be available to help people stay in their homes and prevent homelessness from happening or reoccurring. The duration of this support should be based on the needs of the individual.

- **Build social capital for people who have experienced and are at risk of homelessness**. Helping people who are or who have experienced homelessness build social networks and rebuild relationships with friends and family can in some cases help prevent repeat homelessness. Especially if someone is relocated to a new area, engagement with the local community and wider society can help to build resilience and social mobility (alongside housing and employment support).

- **Abolish priority need and other restrictions on access to homelessness services across the United Kingdom**. Experts noted that due to devolution the current legislative frameworks in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland differ and each country provides different types and levels of support. Experts agree that abolishing priority need and other restrictions would help prevent and address homelessness across the United Kingdom.

- **Prevent homelessness by addressing the immediate causes**. Experts recommended identifying those *at risk* of homelessness (and offering them and their families services before homelessness occurs). Several experts noted that social services, doctors and teachers should be trained to identify at-risk families or individuals for counselling or other early interventions. Several also advocated for prevention programmes that give individuals considering leaving home information about the housing benefits they qualify for and offer them assistance with non-housing/homelessness services, such as employment advice, mental health services and family mediation. Programmes should also be designed to target those most at risk, such as care and

prison leavers. Others praised efforts to provide extended housing and homelessness support and other assistance to young adults who were previously in care.

- **Improve coordination across government agencies and implement a joint government strategy to tackle homelessness**. Given that homelessness is correlated with other social problems, experts recommended that country governments implement joint strategies across all departments encompassing solutions. This includes thinking about how polices in other departments may exacerbate homelessness. Coordinating strategies at the local level should be implemented to bring together housing and homelessness services with other local statutory and voluntary agencies, as well as the NHS and the police, to prevent and address homelessness.

- **Create a national government outcomes framework to evaluate commissioned services and interventions.** Experts noted the need for a national government framework to promote evidence-based programmes and provide guidance for measuring the effectiveness of new interventions.

Appendix B: Methods

Expert Interviews

To explore and distil expert messages on homelessness, FrameWorks researchers conducted 15 one-on-one, one-hour phone interviews with scientists, policy experts, and advocates in the United Kingdom with expertise on the subject. These interviews were conducted in July and August 2016 and, with participants' permission, were recorded and transcribed for analysis. FrameWorks compiled the list of interviewees in consultation with Crisis UK. The final list was designed to reflect the diversity of disciplines and perspectives involved in efforts to address homelessness.

Expert interviews consisted of a series of probing questions designed to capture expert understandings about homelessness, its causes and consequences, and effective ways to prevent and address homelessness. In each interview, the interviewer went through a series of prompts and hypothetical scenarios designed to challenge expert participants to explain their research, experience and perspectives, break down complicated relationships and simplify concepts and findings from the field. Interviews were semistructured in the sense that, in addition to preset questions, interviewers repeatedly asked for elaboration and clarification and encouraged experts to expand on concepts they identified as particularly important.

Analysis used a basic grounded theory approach.[vii] Common themes were pulled from each interview and categorised, and negative cases were incorporated into the overall findings within each category. This procedure resulted in a refined set of themes that synthesised the substance of the interview data. A penultimate draft of the expert story was revised in response to a feedback session conducted with experts in October 2016. This process resulted in the distilled expert story homelessness presented below.

Cultural Models Interviews

The cultural models findings presented in the report are based on 20 in-depth interviews with members of the public in London, Manchester, Glasgow, Belfast and Aberyswyth in October 2016. Cultural models interviews are one-on-one, semi-structured interviews that last approximately two hours. These interviews allow researchers to capture the broad sets of assumptions, or 'cultural models', that participants use to make sense of an issue or concept.

Interviews covered thinking about homelessness, its relationship to housing issues more generally, the causes and consequences of homelessness and what might be done to address homelessness. The goal of these interviews was to examine the cultural models that participants use to make sense of these issues, so researchers approached each interview with a set of topics to cover but gave participants the freedom to follow topics in the directions they deemed relevant. All interviews were recorded and transcribed with participants' consent.

Recruiting a wide range of people, and facilitating talk about concepts introduced by both the interviewer and the interviewee, allowed researchers to identify cultural models that represent shared patterns of thinking within the United Kingdom. Participants were recruited by a professional marketing firm and were selected to represent variation along the domains of gender; race/ethnicity; age; residential location (inner city, outer city and regional/rural areas up to three hours from a city centre); political views (as self-reported during the screening process); educational background (as a proxy for class), religious involvement and family situation (married, single, with children, without children).

Data gathered from cultural models interviews were supplemented with an additional 30 ten-to-fifteen minute 'on-the-street interviews' conducted on pavements and squares in London and Glasgow in October 2016. All participants in these interviews signed written consent and release forms, and interviews were video recorded by a professional videographer. Efforts were made to recruit a broad range of participants, in terms of age, race/ethnicity and gender. Interviews included a short series of open-ended questions designed to gather information about people's top-of-mind thinking about homelessness, why it happens and what should be done about it. These interviews were analysed along with cultural models interview data

To analyse the interviews, researchers used analytical techniques from cognitive and linguistic anthropology to examine how participants understand issues related to the homelessness.[viii] Researchers identified common, standardised ways of talking across the sample to reveal assumptions, relationships, logical steps and connections that were commonly made, but taken for granted, throughout an individual's talk and across the set of interviews. In short, the analysis concerns patterns discerned from both what was said (how things were related, explained and understood) as well as what was not said (assumptions and implied relationships). In many cases, analysis revealed conflicting models that people used to think about the same issue. In such cases, one of the conflicting ways of understanding was often (though not always) found to be dominant over the other, in the sense that it more consistently and deeply shaped participants' thinking.

Analysis centred on ways of understanding that were shared across participants. Cultural models research is designed to identify common ways of thinking that can be identified across a sample. This research was not designed to identify differences in the understandings of different demographic, ideological or regional groups (this would be an inappropriate use of this method and its sampling frame). We hope, in subsequent research phases, to examine differences in opinion and in the use of cultural models across different groups.

Sector Frame and Media Content Analysis

This part of the research was designed to answer four questions:

- What stories and framing strategies are third-sector agencies currently using to communicate about homelessness?
- How is the media currently framing homelessness?
- What are the similarities and differences between the stories that third-sector organisations and

the media are telling?

- How can the third sector shift media narratives to expand public understanding and build support for policies and programmes designed to address homelessness?

Stage 1: Identifying Samples of Media and Organisations' Materials

The media sample comprised 250 articles from newspapers and transcripts of television and radio broadcasts. Using LexisNexis, FrameWorks researchers searched and downloaded media documents using a strategy designed to capture a broad range of topics related to homelessness.

Media Materials: Print sources were selected based on circulation levels and included *The Daily Mirror*, *The Guardian*, *The Evening Standard*, the *Metro* and *The Daily Mail*. Transcripts were drawn from public service broadcasters (BBC and Channel 4). Duplicate articles and those that did not deal substantively with homelessness were removed from the analysis, resulting in an analytic sample of 172 documents.

Third-Sector Materials: In collaboration with programme staff at Crisis, FrameWorks researchers compiled a list of third-sector agencies working on issues related to homelessness. These included:

- Centre for Housing Policy
- The Welsh Government
- St. Basils
- Shelter (Scotland and Wales)
- London Housing Foundation
- Heriot Watt University
- Housing First Europe
- Housing Rights
- Homeless Link
- Homeless Action Scotland
- Department for Communities and Local Government
- Council for the Homeless Northern Island
- Centrepoint
- Cymorth Cymru
- Mungos
- Housing Executive
- Shelter

We then randomly sampled a number of public-facing communications materials from each organisation, including press releases, reports and 'About Us' webpages. The sample comprised 165 documents, of which four were removed for being unsuitable (for example, not dealing with homelessness). Thus, the final analytic sample consisted of 161 documents.

Stage 2: Content Selection and Coding

Each media and organisational document was coded to identify the presence or absence of each of the following narrative components:

Narrative Component	Description	Examples of Codes
Story Type	Are organisations/the media using episodic or thematic stories?	Stories about individuals Stories about social systems
Topic or Plotline	What is the problem or issue?	Prevention of homelessness Prevalence of homelessness Need for more affordable housing Homeless youth
Causal Story	Why did the problem occur?	Rising housing costs Loss of social housing Cuts to welfare programmes Individual mental health issues Individual substance abuse Relationship breakdown
Consequence	What happens as a result of the issue?	Poor economic outcomes Lack of community cohesion Individual exposure to violence Decreased education outcomes for individuals
Value	Why should the British public be concerned about the problem?	Ending homelessness will lead to economic development and future prosperity Individuals will be able to experience financial/educational success if they are not homeless
Solution	Who or what should address the issue?	Greater regulation of the housing market Creation of more social housing Strengthening welfare benefits Improving other social services Providing short-term/direct services to homeless populations
Types of Homelessness	What does homelessness mean? Who is mentioned as being homeless?	Homeless youth Homeless women Homeless men Rough sleeping Squatting Sofa surfing

Stage 3: Latent Class Analysis

In the last stage of the analysis, we used a statistical method called Latent Class Analysis (LCA) to identify mutually exclusive subgroups (or 'classes') within a population. LCA is commonly used to discover whether a sample of cases (in this case, media or third-sector organisations' articles) can be divided into a smaller number of distinct groups based on multivariate categorical data (in this case, the presence or absence of our codes). Here, we can think of the term 'class' as referring to a specific kind of narrative being told about homelessness.

In our analysis, we first examined the prevalence of each code for media and organisations' articles. Codes with less than 10 per cent prevalence were omitted from the analysis to improve the stability of the model, or collapsed with other thematically related codes. To select the appropriate number of classes, a two-class model was fit first and then compared to successive classes to determine the best model fit (up to five latent classes) separately for media and organisations' articles. Bayesian Information Criterion and Akaike's Information Criterion, as well as the interpretability of each solution, were used to guide the final selection of classes. Using posterior probabilities, each article was assigned to a class based on the highest probability of class membership.

Endnotes

i On cultural models, see Quinn, N. & Holland, D. (1987). Culture and cognition. In D. Holland & N. Quinn (Eds.). *Culture and Cognition: Cultural Models in Language and Thought* (pp. 3–40). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

ii While expanding public understanding about the scope of a social problem is generally valuable for communicating about effective solutions, messaging about homelessness requires a cautious approach. Messages that broaden the scope of homelessness may also decrease the public's sense of efficacy about addressing this issue. Research must be done to make sure that expanding understanding doesn't backfire and lead to fatalism.

iii Organisation. (2014, October). *Home is…safe, warm and happy – Steve's Story*.

iv Volmert, A., Gerstein Pineau, M. & Kendall-Taylor, N. (2016). *Talking About Poverty: How Experts and the Public Understand Poverty in the United Kingdom*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.

v Volmert, A., Gerstein Pineau, M., & Kendall-Taylor, N. (2016). *Talking About Poverty: How Experts and the Public Understand Poverty in the United Kingdom*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.

vi See Volmert, A., Gerstein Pineau, M., & Kendall-Taylor, N. (2016). *Talking About Poverty: How Experts and the Public Understand Poverty in the United Kingdom*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute; Lindland, E. & Kendall-Taylor, N. (2013). *'I Have No Idea How That Works or What You Would Do About It': Mapping the Gaps Between Expert and Public Understandings of Child Maltreatment in the UK*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.

vii See Glaser, B.G. & Strauss, A.L. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing; Strauss, A.L., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

viii See Quinn, N. (Ed.). (2005). *Finding Culture in Talk: A Collection of Methods*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.