



## **Title: Working Definition of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion Framework for the Isle of Man**

### **1. Introduction and Background**

Homelessness exists across the world. It is a complex social challenge that has profound implications for communities, services, organisations, governments, as well as the individuals at risk of or experiencing it. What has become the stereotypical image of individuals experiencing homelessness, is that of people sleeping on the streets, this is a very visible form of homelessness, however, it is widely understood that homelessness goes beyond this image and has many other forms. Homelessness can be hidden, such as sleeping on a friend's sofa, living in unsuitable or unsafe accommodation, or individuals facing eviction for example. Recognising and understanding each form of homelessness, its complexities, acknowledging the various factors, circumstances, and individual experiences that contribute to homelessness is essential for developing effective policies, interventions, and support systems that will address the root causes of homelessness as well as helping towards housing stability and social inclusion.

The Isle of Man is not exempt from having people who are facing homelessness within its community. On our island there are people who are sofa surfing, some in safe spaces, others not, people sleeping in their cars, or camper vans, or staying in short term emergency accommodation within B&B's and hotels and there are others, who on occasion, may sleep rough. During the cross-government strategic review, commissioned by the Housing and Communities Board, it was learnt of the difficulty understanding which support services people required, where and when and calculating if the support system was worsening, stable or improving due to the fact of how challenging it was to identify data and associated trends required to inform us of the current scale of homelessness, this was mainly due to multiple data collection sources that did not interact with each other, as well as different recording methods and criteria used, making the task of learning about a single source of the truth almost impossible.

In December 2023, the islands very first [Homelessness Strategy 2023-2028](#), went before Tynwald and was approved. The strategy is designed to address complex issues associated with homelessness and housing instability. It includes a set of coordinated actions aimed at preventing homelessness, providing immediate assistance to those experiencing it and offering long-term solutions for housing stability. This strategy involves a collaboration between government agencies, third sector organisations and individuals with lived experiences of homelessness. The strategy comprises of five focus areas:

- 1) Clear Pathways - Easy access to support services,
- 2) Legislation - Long lasting Statutory legacy,
- 3) Core Data - Ensure core data to support provision to services,
- 4) Needs Assessment - Process to review the needs of those who require support,
- 5) Prevention - Evidence informed.

The strategy aims to gain clearer understanding of the types of homelessness experienced within the island context, the factors that are contributing to, and exacerbating peoples housing situations and instability, and to create ways to collect data that is reliable across the different government departments and stakeholder organisations. To assist stakeholders across the island who provide frontline homeless services and gather data on homeless communities, it is important to refer to a national definition of homelessness. Until now, the Isle of Man has not established a working or legal definition of homelessness.

In recognition of the need for an immediate and adaptable response, and in the absence of a legal definition, which will be developed at a later stage of the homelessness strategy, the Homelessness Strategy Action and Implementation Plan, includes a key action within it to *'Establish a working definition of homelessness for the purpose of developing eligibility criteria'* with the hoped outcome of *'focusing on practical criteria and eligibility for accessing services, assistance and support.'* Establishing a working definition framework will help with addressing the immediacy of homelessness, providing clarity for stakeholders involved in interventions, as well as paving the way and creating building blocks for a more comprehensive legal framework in the future. A working definition of homelessness will also bring a standardisation of language, and ensure terminology is clear, creating a common language and understanding which will be used for different purposes such as when creating new frameworks and policies, data collection and for monitoring purposes.

Whilst looking to apply a definition within the island, it could have been tempting to look to neighbouring jurisdictions and simply just adopt their definitions, such as the UK, however, we needed to be careful that any definition applied is right for our unique island and encompassing enough to capture all the different circumstances and cohorts of people now and into the future. The hope is that this working definition will help guide the creation of the legal definition that will follow later.

The working definition of homelessness set out in this document provides a conceptual framework for homelessness in the Isle of Man that will:

- Enable common data to be collected between organisations ensuring there is a core data set that provides intelligence on what support needs require which services.
- Provide guidance for homelessness services for their eligibility criteria levels in the absence of a legal definition.
- Inform government departments when making policy and funding decisions relating to homelessness.

- Help promote public awareness and understanding of the types of homelessness and housing exclusions happening within in the Isle of Man

The Stakeholders who were involved in considering this definition landed upon a four-tiered framework definition of homelessness, which is [ETHOS](#), European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion.

## **2. Working definition of homelessness vs Legal definition**

A working definition of homelessness and a legal definition serve different purposes and are constructed with different objectives in mind:

### **Working Definition of Homelessness:**

- A working definition of homelessness is typically used by organisation, researchers, or policymakers to guide their understanding and actions regarding homelessness.
- It may encompass a broader range of situations and factors that contribute to homelessness beyond what is strictly defined by law.
- Working definitions often include not only those individuals who are living on the streets or in shelters but also those who are marginally housed, living in inadequate or temporary accommodations, or at risk of homelessness.
- The purpose of a working definition is to provide a flexible framework for addressing homelessness comprehensively, taking into account various nuances and dimensions of the issue.

### **Legal Definition of Homelessness:**

- A legal definition of homelessness is typically enshrined in laws or regulations at various levels of government (local, national) and serves as the basis for determining eligibility for statutory services, benefits, or protections.
- Legal definitions are often more narrowly defined and may vary depending on, the specific legislation, or program requirements.
- The purpose of a legal definition is to establish criteria for accessing resources or support services, determining eligibility for housing assistance programs, or implementing policies related to homelessness.

While both working and legal definitions of homelessness aim to address the issue, they differ in scope, flexibility, and purpose. Working definitions are broader and more adaptable, intended to guide understanding and action, whereas legal definitions are specific and often tied to eligibility for statutory services or benefits.

### 3. Stakeholder Engagement

To ensure this definition reflects the diversity of perspectives from a variety of stakeholders, this definition was workshopped by the Homelessness Strategic Partnership.

The Homelessness Strategic Partnership is a sub- working group, established by the Housing and Communities Board, to work together to tackle and end homelessness on our island. It was set up in March 2023, and is a collaboration between third sector organisations and the Isle of Man Government. The partnership includes:

Housing Matters, Salvation Army and Praxis Care from the third sector and Cabinet Office, Public Health, Department of Health and Social Care, Department of Home Affairs, Department of Infrastructure and Manx Care from Government Departments and commissioned services.

The Strategic Partnership had a workshop on the working definition of homelessness in November 2023 and this definition was first presented as an option. In February 2024 this definition was brought back to the Partnership for further discussion and consideration after comprehensive research was conducted. This definition was agreed in principle with the agreement that it would be discussed one more time and then it would be presented to the Housing and Communities Board. In April, the Housing and Communities Board considered and approved this working definition framework for the island.

A meeting with Social Security took place in March 2024 to see if the introduction of this definition would have an impact on the current benefit system to take this into consideration. During this meeting, it was reported that the definition being considered would have no impact on the benefit system or to those accessing benefits.

### 4. Definition

In November 2020, Jersey published a [homelessness strategy](#). One of the actions within this strategy was to produce a [working definition of homelessness](#). Jersey based their strategy on ETHOS typology, although they made some minor additions to the ETHOS categorisation which reflects their local circumstances.

Guernsey at the time of publishing this paper is yet to propose a national working or legal definition of Homelessness. However, in 2021, The Guernsey Community Foundation commissioned by a local Guernsey charity, Maison St Pierre, conducted research looking at the prevalence of homelessness in Guernsey. From this a [comprehensive report](#) was produced of their findings along with recommendations. Within this report, due to the absence of a national definition of homelessness to guide their research, they created their Guernsey Community Foundation model of homelessness and housing exclusion, which also uses ETHOS as a starting point when developing their own definition of homelessness.

ETHOS was developed by [FEANTSA](#), European Federation of Organisations working with the people who are homeless This Frameworks is both a definition and a typology of homelessness that classifies living situations that constitute homelessness or housing exclusion. This definition

is conceptually based and is 'widely accepted and frequently quoted in almost all European countries' ([Busch-Geertsema, 2010, p.21](#))

ETHOS attempts to cover all living situations that amount to homelessness:

- **Rooflessness** – without shelter of any kind, sleeping rough and includes those sleeping in places not intended for human habitation
- **Houselessness** – with a place to sleep but temporarily in institutions or shelters –Although referred to as short-term, to clarify, often people are placed within this accommodation as a short-term option, however, due to lack of other next step options, the stay is longer than intended
- **Living in Insecure Housing** – Threatened with exclusion because of insecure tenancies, eviction, or domestic abuse
- **Living in inadequate housing** – In caravans or illegal campsites, in unfit housing or in extreme overcrowding.

The roofless and houseless categories together define homelessness and insecure and inadequate are categories of housing exclusion.

This ETHOS typology for the Isle of Man, also, like Jersey, has some minor additions/changes to the ETHOS categories to reflect the local community in which it will be used on the island. The ETHOS typology that is being applied to the Isle of Man, is included in **Appendix A**, and it will be used to define and categorise homelessness on the Isle of Man.

**Approved by The Housing and Communities Board**

**May 2024.**

## Appendix A: ETHOS – European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (Adapted version for Isle of Man)

		Operational Category	Living Situation	Generic Definition
	Roofless	1. People living rough	Public space or external space	Living in the streets or public spaces, without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters
		2. People in emergency accommodation	Night Shelter	People with no usual place of residency who make use of overnight shelter, low threshold shelter
		3. People sleeping in their cars, open fishing boats etc	Spaces not built for sleeping in.	
	Houseless	4. People in short term accommodation providing a place to sleep	Temporary accommodation including B&B's and Hotels  Transitional supported accommodation	Where the period of stay is intended to be short-term  Including but not limited to Domestic Abuse
		5. People in accommodation for migrant workers	Temporary accommodation  Migrant workers' accommodation	People in short-term accommodation due to their residential status  Including but not limited to modern day slavery and human trafficking
		6. People due to be released from Institutions	Prison and Tromode House (Bail Hostel)  Medical institutions- includes drug rehabilitation institutions, psychiatric hospital etc.  Care leavers	No housing available prior to release. Stay longer than needed due to lack of housing. No housing identified (e.g. by 18 <sup>th</sup> birthday)
		7. People receiving long-term support due to homelessness	Residential care for older homeless persons  Supported accommodation for former homeless persons	Long-stay accommodation with care for formerly homeless people (normally more than one year)

	Insecure	8. People living in insecure accommodation	Temporarily with family/friends (AKA: sofa surfing)  No legal tenancy  Illegal occupation of land  Non-qualified households	Living in conventional housing but not the usual place of residency due to lack of housing  Occupation of dwelling with no legal tenancy or illegal occupation of a dwelling  Occupation of land with no legal rights  Households with under five years' residency status on island
		9. People living under threat of eviction	Legal Orders enforced (rented)   Re-possession orders (owned)	Where orders for eviction are operative   Where mortgage has legal order to repossess
		10. People effected by Poverty/experiencing Financial Hardship	Inability to meet rental or mortgage costs	Interest rate increase which impacts on mortgage repayments and due to rental market increase beyond what can be afforded, impacting those on below average income streams most.
		11. People living affected by abuse	Police recorded incidents	Where police action is taken to ensure place of safety for all victims/witnesses/perpetrator (men, women or children) of domestic abuse
	Inadequate	12. People living in temporary/non-conventional structures	Mobile homes/camping grounds  Non-conventional building  Temporary structure	Not intended as place of usual residency and not on holiday  Makeshift shelter, shack or shanty  Semi-permanent structure, hut or cabin
		13. People living in unfit housing	Occupied dwellings unfit for habitation	Defined as unfit for habitation by national legislation or buildings regulation
		14. People living in extreme over-crowding conditions	Highest national norm of overcrowding	Defined as exceeding national density standard for floor-space or usable rooms