

# Donna Ockenden

Local news coverage of the ongoing challenges facing the homeless and the volunteers who are helping them.



## South East now matches London for homelessness after huge spike

Charity and voluntary services are overrun as more and more people find themselves on the streets or desperate

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The South East now matches London as having the highest number of rough sleepers out of every region in the country. That is according to national government figures, which show a 16 per cent rise in numbers in the region from 2015 to 2016, following a 36 per cent rise the year before.

Charity Stonepillow says this year's rise is around the 30 per cent mark. Exact figures are difficult to get, they come from local authorities either estimating or head counts from a single night.

There are many more 'hidden homeless' (living in squats, sofas, remote areas) so the numbers are thought to be significantly higher, and nationally they have been rising year-on-year since 2010 (figures from Homelesslink).

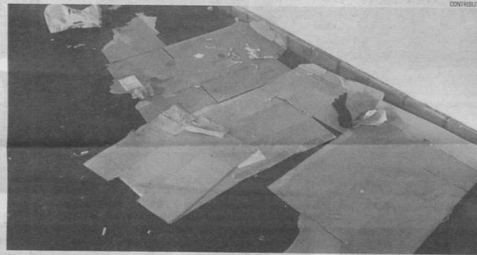
In Bognor Regis and Chichester town centres the increase has been visible. There are often people sleeping in tents in the churchyard of Midhurst Parish Church. Homeless charity Stonepillow runs day centre huts and ten-bedroom hostels in both Chichester and Bognor (Bognor's is expanding to 14 next year).

People are given a 28-day place at one of the hostels so they have a chance of stability, and Stonepillow offers a range of services to help them, eventually find work.

Stonepillow's 88 beds are often full, so despite this essential charity's work across the Chichester and Arun districts, some still find themselves on the streets.

**I've been homeless on-and-off for 13 years'**

A man recently housed in Bognor, having been homeless in Brighton, has shared his



Stonepillow says the number of rough sleepers in the region has shot up by 30 per cent

experience of how hard it is to get off the streets.

Rob has been found shared accommodation through the Bognor Housing Trust and has been volunteering at community support shop Grandad's Front Room.

He said: "I've been homeless on-and-off for 13 years. I was living in Brighton and was offered a place in Bognor and because I don't know anyone here I've come for a fresh start."

"I've had a drinking problem for a long time. I got sober in Brighton while I was still homeless and was seeking accommodation, which isn't easy over there. I've gone eight months without a drink, so far so good, I feel like things are looking up for me."

"I've been in Bognor for six weeks now and the first week I walked past Grandad's Front Room. I went back to where I'm living, found them on Facebook and got in touch."

"I've been volunteering as much as I can, it's something to do and it's building a social life over here so it's been good for me."

Last week homeless people in Chichester said they feel safer on the streets than living in hostels, and Rob said: "I've been in a lot of hostels over the years, and to put it bluntly a lot

of people don't give monkeys, they have no concept of being quiet, of personal hygiene and you have to share with these people so it's a challenge."

Brighton and Hove has the second highest number of rough sleepers in the country, and asked if he'd seen the numbers rise, Rob said: "Yes and it's only going to get worse, it's not easy getting yourself off the streets."

Speaking about the reasons many are homeless, he said: "I have travelled all over the south east as a homeless person and I'd say around a quarter of the people I've met have had some kind of mental

health problem.

"If that has led you to being on the streets then you're very likely to develop a drink or drug problem."

"From my experience the services ask people to be sober for three months before they'll house you which is ridiculous, it's just fobbing you off."

Rob said since coming to Bognor he's seen around 12 homeless people regularly in the town centre.

Danny Dawes, who runs Grandad's Front Room in West Street, said: "Rob's come to Bognor for a fresh start and in six weeks he's helped me help so many people in this community it's untrue."

### COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Volunteers at Grandad's Front Room have been collecting blankets, warm clothes, socks and food for those facing a freezing winter outside.

Together with Olive Tree Cottage in Felpham, the shop has recently established a link with national food enterprise FairShare Foodcloud to collect surplus food from local Tesco stores to redistribute it to people who need it.

In Chichester, a small group of volunteers called the Four Streets Project ventures out



Four Streets Project members Bethan Norvell, Donna Ockenden and John

every single night to hand hot food, water and blankets

The recent wet weather has led to a shortage of dry sleeping bags, and the first of several collection events was held on Saturday, October 21.

Four Streets member John Tubertfield said: "Many thanks to all of those who have donated essential items to the Four Streets project."

"We're committed to making sure that the homeless in Chichester have the essentials they need to keep as warm and dry as is possible throughout the year."

"Your donations will be a huge help in achieving this. Every evening throughout the year and throughout this winter, Four Streets volunteers will be out in pairs meeting the homeless in the city centre."

The churches are also lending their support. St Pancras runs a breakfast club on Mondays, Revelation a hot lunch on Tuesdays and Chichester Baptist Church put on Sunday lunch twice a month.

**MANY ON THE BREADLINE**

Evidence shows it's not just those physically homeless who are struggling.

Foodbanks are helping an increasing number of families they say are close to crisis.

Over the summer holiday, lunches handed out to children who normally received free school lunches shot up at foodbanks in Midhurst, Bognor and Chichester.

More and more people are said to be in fuel poverty and struggling to earn enough to heat their homes.

And Chichester and Arun Citizens Advice is warning that when Universal Credit is fully rolled out in April, more people will need its services.

The closure of The Foyer, a 60-bed homeless shelter in Chichester, will only increase pressure on housing services, many are warning.

### VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

The Four Streets project is looking for more volunteers.

People should visit the group's Facebook page ([Facebook.com/fourstreetsproject](https://www.facebook.com/fourstreetsproject)), call or text 07940 990627.

The group is hosting a vintage tea room at St Pancras Church, Chichester on Saturday, November 18, 11am to 4pm, all proceeds going to the Monday breakfast club.

**69**  
The problem is only getting worse, it's not easy getting yourself off the streets

**ROB**  
Formerly homeless



Turbefield collecting food and blankets for Chichester's homeless. Volunteers are being sought.

## Stonepillow's range of services

Stonepillow's recent Big Sleepout raised an incredible £24,000 for the charity's work with people who are homeless across the area. Over the last six months, the charity has helped 78 people into the various accommodation it provides. Stonepillow says it is 'here to support people who want to make positive changes in their lives and find independent accommodation they can call home'.

### Stonepillow services:

**Chichester and Bognor hubs (open 9am to 4pm)**  
Day centres providing support and advice, the first point of contact for people accessing its services.

**Stonepillow Hostels - Chichester & Bognor** (each ten-bed)

**Stonepillow Lodge - Chichester**

Accommodation for people who are discharged from hospital or require medical treatment and would otherwise be on the streets.

**Stonepillow Recovery Service - Bognor**  
Abstinence accommodation and support for people dealing with substance misuse and addiction.

**Stonepillow Supported Accommodation - Chichester, Bognor Regis, Barnham, Littlehampton**

Supported accommodation offering 39 beds to prepare people for independent living.

To contact Stonepillow ring 01243 537934.



The annual Stonepillow Big Sleepout in October saw people sleep in cardboard shelters in Chichester