



More than 2,000 Church of England congregations will be running or supporting night shelters this winter as homelessness projects expand to cope with rising demand.

Night shelters supported by churches are reporting increases in capacity with some adding extra beds and others opening for longer during the week.

This follows a series of reports this year indicating a rise in homelessness and rough sleeping.

In Manchester, the Greater Together Manchester (GTM) Night Shelter, a project run by Greater Together Manchester, part of Church Urban Fund's Together Network, saw an increase in volunteers as winter got under way.

The shelter provides 12 beds every night for six months of the year with the provision due to expand later this month with a second night shelter funded through the 'A Bed Every Night' scheme, set up by the Greater Manchester Mayor's office. Nine out of the 10 venues used for the two shelters are Church of England buildings.

Guests, who would otherwise be rough sleeping, sit down with volunteers to eat a hot meal every night and are supported during the day to find new accommodation and access benefits.

Lily Axworthy, Development Officer for Greater Together Manchester, a joint venture between Church Urban Fund and the Diocese of Manchester, said: "Last year people were staying in the shelter for a shorter period of time, because their 'move on' was managed more quickly. However, the number of people sleeping rough has carried on increasing.

"What has been really heartening this year has been seeing an increase in the number of volunteers. We have more than 200 volunteers already. People really want to do something practical to help and something they feel will make a difference, particularly where they have experienced walking past people on the streets. By volunteering their time, they can make that practical difference."

In south London, The Robes project provides beds for 35 guests a night over five months during the winter season. The night shelter uses a network of 30 church venues - 23 of them are Church of England - in Southwark and Lambeth and is supported by more than 1,000 volunteers. The project started as a pilot scheme in 2007 and now employs advisers who work closely with guests.

George Martin, chair of Robes, who is part of the congregation at Southwark Cathedral, said: "More people are on the streets than ever before. Last year we looked after 81 guests and we moved 44 into accommodation. We work with our guests all year round, we have a fantastic Wednesday lunch club catering for up to 20 people a week. I think it is the most successful ecumenical project in the diocese and it has brought the different churches together."

In King's Lynn, Norfolk, a pilot shelter open for two nights a week last winter in response to a rise in rough sleeping in the town is now open for seven nights a week until March. The shelter is providing places for 20 guests and working in partnership with different agencies. The ecumenical project has received a council grant and is supported by Imagine Norfolk Together, a joint venture between Church Urban Fund and the Diocese of Norwich. More than 100 volunteers are working with the shelter, drawn from across the town and surrounding villages.

Andrew Frere-Smith, Development Worker for Imagine Norfolk Together, said: "The shelter has been fantastic at bringing people together from different church denominations in the town as well as people from the wider community."

The Rt Rev James Langstaff, Bishop of Rochester, who is also Chair of the Christian housing charity, Housing Justice, said: "The reasons why people end up on the streets are complex, with many facing mental ill-health, many having been in care as children, and a good number having been released from prison.

"Behind the distressing rise in numbers, we must remember that behind each statistic is a person, a human being made in God's image and thus worthy of dignity.

"I join others in praying that one day such shelters will not be necessary. But while they are, I give thanks for all those who work tirelessly to serve those who live on our streets or in other unstable settings. Their work is a valuable reminder to us all of God's priority for the vulnerable and marginalised and of the value of every human person."

Notes

Figures published by the Church of England from its [Statistics for Mission 2017](#) show that 2,347 churches report either running or supporting night shelters in England.

Source URL: <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/church-england-parishes-set-support-winter-shelters>