



# I·SPHERE

## The Right to Housing and How Homelessness Responses Can be Reshaped

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## Introduction

- 50 years since 'Cathy Come Home'...landmark TV drama by Ken Loach on plight of homeless families
- In 1977 – national legislation to provide permanent solutions for homeless families
- Against the odds, this unique safety net has survived almost 40 years of Conservative, Labour and Coalition Governments
- But is it still fit for purpose? Can and should it be reshaped?

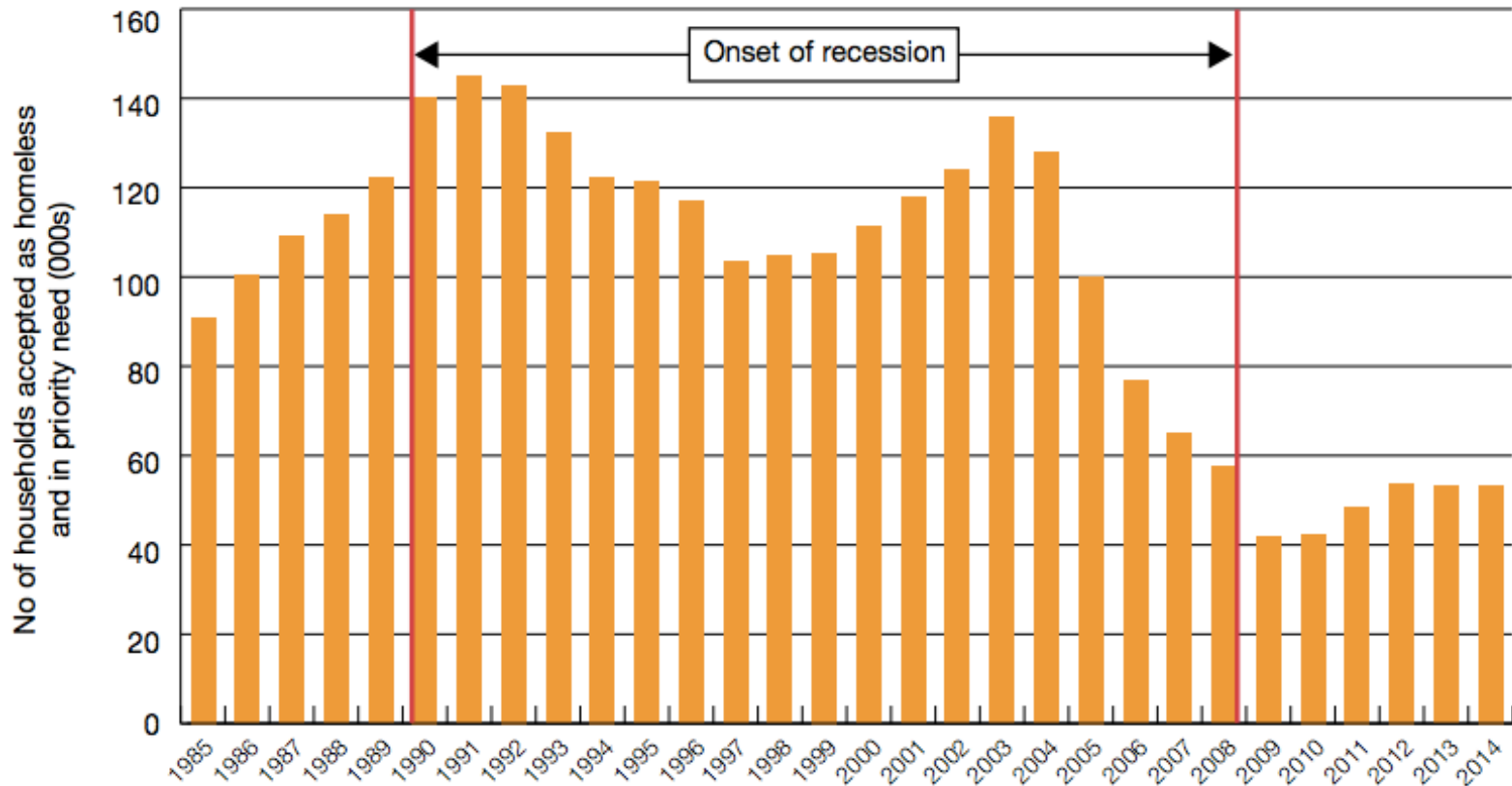
## Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977

- Rights to long-term rehousing; 'need' over 'desert' in allocations
- Internationally unique: wide definition + emphasis on enforceable rights
- Single people excluded (including rough sleepers)

## How Did it Survive?

- *The Conservative years*
  - reviewed three times
  - Housing Act 1996 weakened rehousing duties, but had limited practical impact
- *The New Labour Years*
  - Reversed 1996 Act + homelessness strategies
  - But rising house prices, sharp drop in social lettings = over 100,000 households in temporary accommodation by 2004; introduction of 'Housing Options' led to 70% drop in homelessness acceptances 2003-2010

# Statutory homelessness (England)



## But Did it Work?

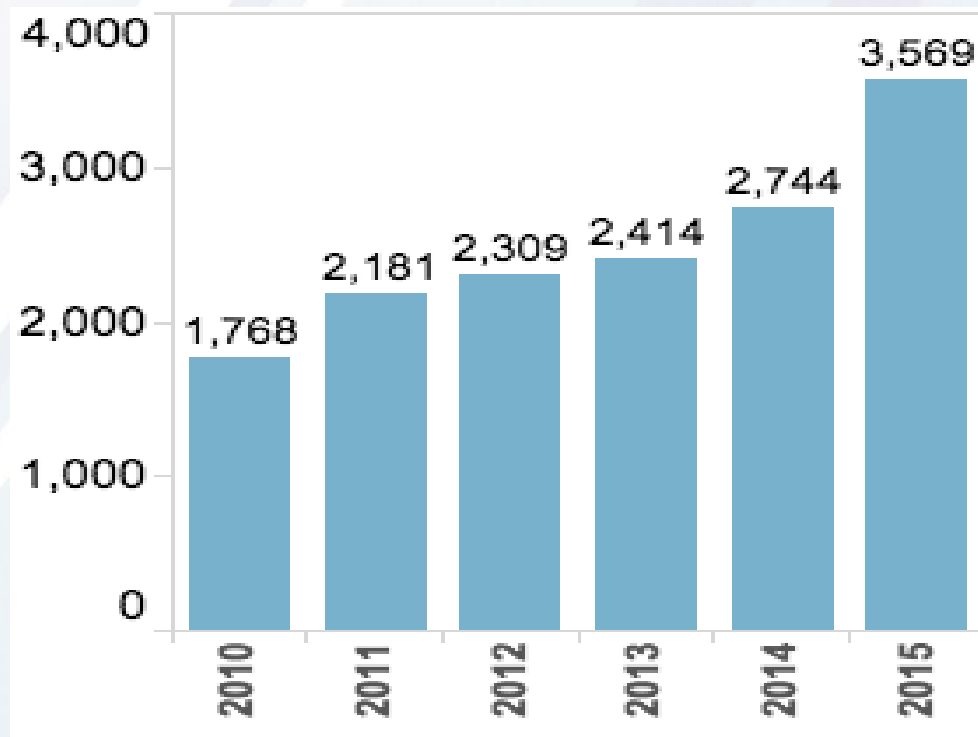
- Yes! For those protected by the safety net.
- A major survey of over 2000 statutorily homeless families in England in 2005 found:
  - substantial (net) improvements in quality of life reported by adults, children and young people rehoused
  - especially large gains once in settled (overwhelmingly social) housing, with evidence that security of tenure pivotal in this; but overall positive results even for those still in temporary accommodation
- But:
  - very different experience in different parts of the country – system under extreme pressure in London
  - single people excluded



## The Coalition years

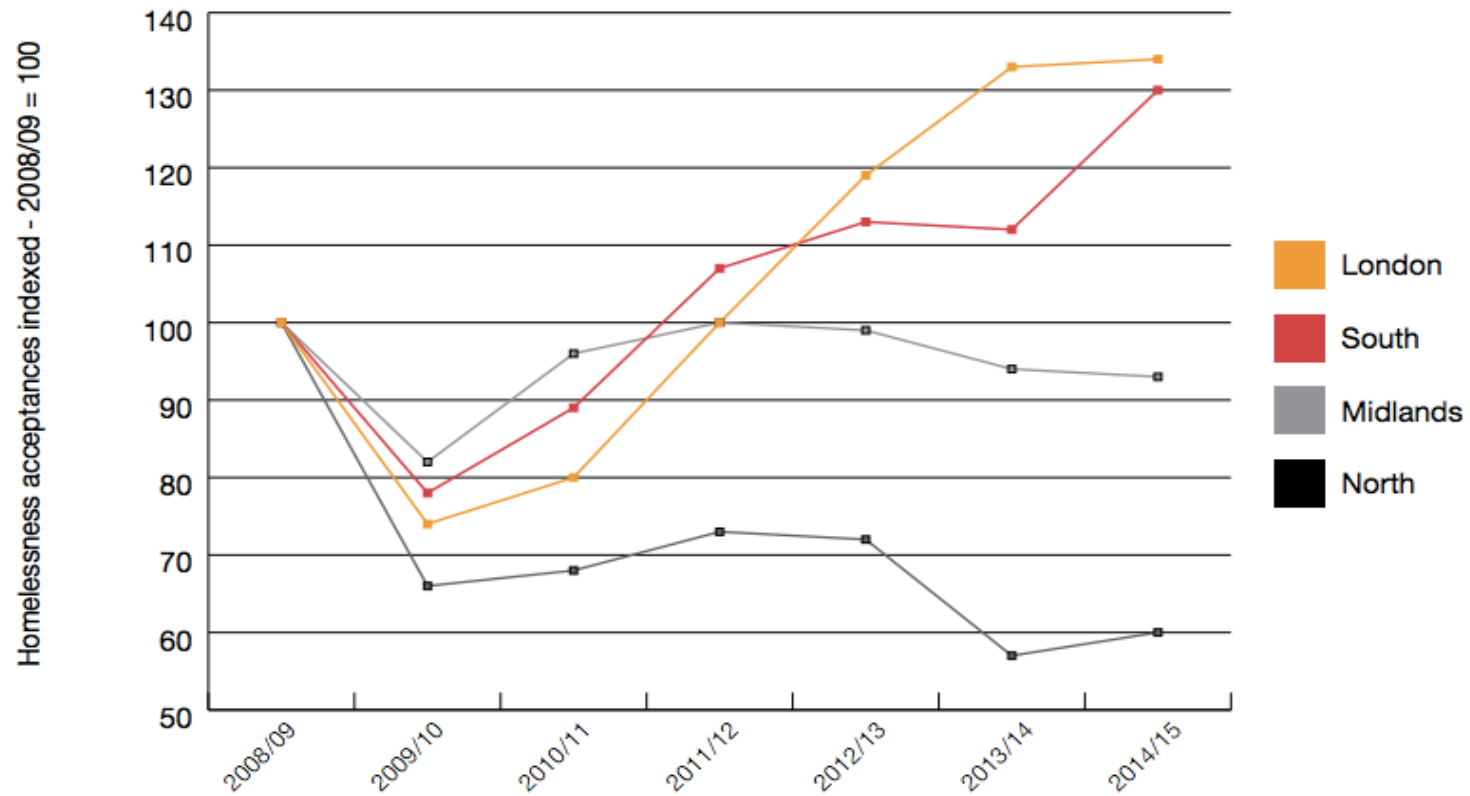
- Radical new welfare and housing reform agenda
- Homelessness has escalated considerably as a direct result of policy decisions and weakening of welfare safety net
  - Tight housing markets + Housing Benefit restrictions
  - 93% (London) v 49% (North) say benefit cuts have increased homelessness
  - Targeted initiatives but Supporting People slashed by 56%

# Rough sleeping has doubled...

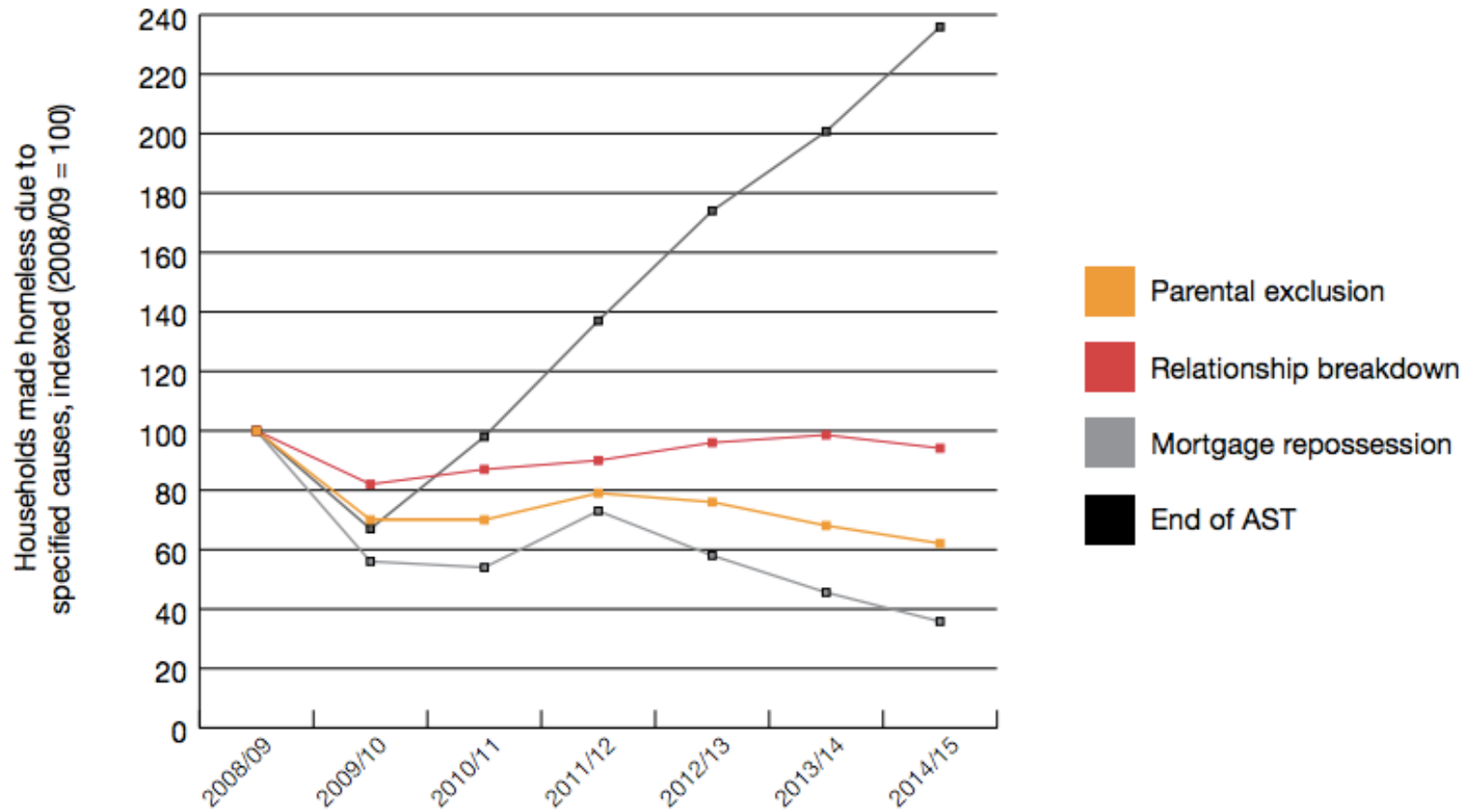




# Highly contrasting regional trends ...



# The causes have shifted dramatically...



## Scotland and Wales

- *Scotland*: abolition of priority need (by 2012) flagship of young Scottish Parliament; but expansion in temporary accommodation = introduction of Housing Options from 2010 and dramatic reduction in acceptances
- *Wales*: Housing (Wales) Act 2014 tackles two key weaknesses: single people excluded + poor fit with Housing Options
  - Focus on prevention (threatened within 56 days) + meaningful assistance to all (reasonable steps)
  - Came into force in April 2015 - early days; but goodwill/positive culture change; early statistics encouraging; evaluation awaited

# Time to Reshape Responses in England?

- Crisis independent review panel has recommended a reshaped framework based largely on the ‘Welsh model’ – universal duties to take ‘reasonable steps’ to prevent and relieve homelessness
- Ministerial statement in December that will ‘consider legislation’
- Cross-party support and backed by a majority of English local authorities in Homelessness Monitor survey
- Keen interest in results in Wales and focus now on resources to implement

## Conclusions

- The 'Right to Housing' encompassed in the statutory homelessness system has been pretty effective for those protected – the link with access to secure social housing has been crucial
- But its time to address the exclusion of single people, and to take account of the realities of Housing Options + welfare reform + shortage of social housing
- The 'Welsh model' will not 'fix' the housing and welfare pressures faced by local authorities, especially in the tightest housing market areas, but can help make the most of the resources they have
- Ending security of tenure for social tenants will not help homeless people and is a very retrograde step!

