



# Evaluation of the StreetLink project

A report by Crisis Research & Evaluation team  
for Homeless Link

April 2018



**Together**  
we will end  
homelessness

## About Crisis

Crisis is the national charity for homeless people. We help people directly out of homelessness, and campaign for the social changes needed to solve it altogether. We know that together we can end homelessness.

## About the authors

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## Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Homeless Link for commissioning this study which seeks to evaluate StreetLink in England and Wales. Our particular thanks go to Caroline Bernard and Gareth Thomas for their guidance and input in the development and completion of the study. We must also thank the stakeholders in England and Wales and staff working in the six case study areas who gave up their time to take part in the interviews and workshops. Finally, we must thank those who have experienced homelessness and members of the public for their participation in the evaluation and their feedback on the experience of using StreetLink.

**Disclaimer:** All views and any errors contained in this report are the responsibility of the authors. The views expressed should not be assumed to be those of Homeless Link.

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# Executive summary

## Introduction

There has been a marked increase in rough sleeping across Great Britain in recent years – in England levels have increased by 60 per cent between 2011 and 2016 and by 50 per cent in Wales in the same period.<sup>1</sup> The need to address rough sleeping and prevent homelessness is recognised by all, including the Government. Whilst there has been homelessness prevention legislation implemented in Wales through the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 and a shift to prevention activity through the Homelessness Reduction Act in England, rough sleeping continues to persist and the interventions and funding to address it vary across England and Wales.

StreetLink, the service designed to help the public to connect a person sleeping rough with local services, was launched in England in 2012 and introduced into Wales in 2016. Funded by grants from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), the Greater London Authority (GLA) and the Welsh Government, StreetLink is run in partnership between Homeless Link and St Mungo's.

StreetLink is designed to help the public to connect a person sleeping rough with local services, with the objective to improve the response to individual rough sleepers, and the wider local systems that support rough sleepers off the streets.

## Evaluation questions

Based on the four main objectives of StreetLink, the aim of this evaluation is to assess the extent to which StreetLink:

- Provides the public with a means to take appropriate action when they see someone sleeping rough
- Provides early intelligence to local homelessness services about new rough sleepers
- Helps get rough sleepers off the streets faster
- Highlights good practice and to improve systems for dealing with rough sleeping

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<sup>1</sup> Bramley, G. Homelessness projections: Core homelessness in Great Britain Summary Report, Crisis: London [https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/237582/crisis\\_homelessness\\_projections\\_2017.pdf](https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/237582/crisis_homelessness_projections_2017.pdf)

In addition, the evaluation will seek to address the following broad questions:

- How is StreetLink currently working for different stakeholders and audiences – the general public, homeless people, local authorities and homelessness services?
- What impact is StreetLink having in addressing and reducing levels of rough sleeping?
- How might StreetLink be improved to deliver an even more effective platform to meet its goals of providing the public a channel to take action, delivering early intelligence to homelessness services, and getting rough sleepers off the streets faster?

Finally, a series of recommendations are set out which have been informed by participants and workshops conducted through the evaluation process.

## Methodology

The evaluation has used a mixed methodology and was conducted in five stages:

**Stage 1 – Literature review and interviews with key informants.** This includes a rapid evidence review to examine UK and international evidence on use, effectiveness and impact of social and digital platforms to engage the general public to act, or report an issue relating to homelessness. The second part of the scoping stage involved interviews with ten stakeholders from five national organisations responsible for the strategic leadership and operational delivery of StreetLink, to examine the extent to which StreetLink meets its strategic objectives at a national level.

**Stage 2 – StreetLink and rough sleeping data analysis.** StreetLink data on usage, outcomes and referrals were analysed to look at broad trends and detailed insights on the ten local authority areas in England which had the most referrals between October and December 2016, and to look at trends in StreetLink usage in Wales. This quantitative data fed into the selection of the six case study areas and supported the design of interview topic guides and workshop discussions.

**Stage 3 – Online surveys with StreetLink users, local authorities, and street outreach teams.** Three online surveys were conducted to understand the effectiveness, satisfaction levels and challenges of using StreetLink amongst different users. Response rates varied between 23% and 50%; only two responses from Welsh outreach teams were received so the results were not used as part of the evaluation due to the sample size being too small.

**Stage 4 – Focus on case study areas.** Six local authority case study areas were identified through StreetLink and statutory homelessness data to reflect the

different operating contexts in which StreetLink works. The case study areas are Birmingham, Brent, Cardiff, Cornwall, Tower Hamlets, and West Lindsay.

**Stage 5 – Review and ideation workshops.** Three ideation workshops were convened in London, Cardiff and Manchester which brought together different homelessness professionals, people with experience of homelessness, and members of the public to discuss how StreetLink might be improved to deliver a more effective platform. The results from the workshops have directly informed the recommendations included in the final chapter of the report.

## The digital landscape

There has been increasing use of digital technologies to enable people to engage with urban challenges in their neighbourhoods through the use of civic apps. Known as ‘civic tech’, it enables individuals to participate in services run by government and local government and generate content themselves relating to local areas, political activism and campaigning for change.

Part of the debate has concentrated on those groups which are regarded as socially excluded; homeless people are assumed to fit into this category. Whilst in some cases homeless people struggle to engage with digital technology, it is an oversimplification to assume this is always the case. Research has shown that this group does own and have access to devices and services such as computers, mobile phone and the internet. There has also been a growth in the targeting of digital and online services to address homeless people’s needs, and in engaging members of the public to raise money for and help refer homeless people to outreach services and support teams both in the UK and internationally.

The rapid growth in the market of digital platforms has been accompanied by limited success, mainly due to low or short-term uptake, and design which limits the engagement of the user. Evidence shows that civic tools need ongoing development to remain sustainable and relevant for a rapidly changing environment. Reviews of civic apps also pointed to key principles that are more likely to determine success: clear goals; identification of who influences the app; an understanding of the needs and expectations of those using it; appropriateness of the choice of technology; knowledge of the effects the app can have; and attribution of the impact of the technology. These principles are useful to bear in mind when examining the role and effectiveness of StreetLink and the extent to which it meets these criteria. One of the gaps identified in the literature is that, whilst there is extensive evidence on what apps and other technologies do, there is very little about their effectiveness. The evaluation of StreetLink offers an opportunity to share learning among a range of stakeholders and fill this gap in evidence.



## The goals of StreetLink

The goals of StreetLink are to:

- Provide the public with a means to take appropriate action when they see someone sleeping rough
- Provide early intelligence to local homelessness services about new rough sleepers
- Help get rough sleepers off the streets faster
- Highlight good practice and to improve systems for dealing with rough sleeping

National stakeholders agreed that StreetLink was developed and established from a desire to provide a swifter means to help rough sleepers, and to enable members of the public to take action. A secondary goal was to provide more intelligence about the local rough sleeping situation through introducing a new medium for the public to notify authorities about rough sleepers.

The impetus came from money that was made available by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and an existing partnership between Homeless Link and Broadway which was tasked with setting up an initiative to develop a mechanism nationally to collect information about people rough sleeping and connect them to local services.

The original idea came from the ministerial level and was driven by an eagerness to channel the existing motivation amongst the public to help rough sleepers they encountered. By providing a new means to identify rough sleepers it would get help to them sooner.

With more 'eyes and ears on the ground' and an increase in referrals of rough sleepers, another benefit anticipated of StreetLink was its ability to help improve (or even introduce) the service offer that a local authority can provide to rough sleepers.

## Evaluation question 1:

**To what extent does StreetLink provide the public with a means to take appropriate action when they see someone sleeping rough?**

The majority of members of the public who have used StreetLink in England and Wales have a positive overall impression of it, and believe that it is a quick and easy way for them to connect a rough sleeper with relevant local services. Those

who had received feedback about their referral were more likely to think that it is an effective service than those who had not received feedback.

There was general consensus across different stakeholder groups regarding a lack of awareness about the existence of StreetLink amongst members of the public and others (businesses, community groups, etc.). Limited marketing budget and limited resource to respond to spikes in referrals have prevented the organisations which run StreetLink from actively promoting the service more. However, more awareness and advertising were by far the most frequent suggestion for improvement from StreetLink users – members of the public, homeless people, local authorities, commissioned outreach teams and other homelessness services.

Outreach teams and homelessness services emphasised the need for creating more targeted campaigns which aim to increase the understanding of members of the public about rough sleeping, and thereby improve the quality of StreetLink referrals. There is potential for partnerships with companies and local services to play a useful role, with StreetLink providing standard materials and templates to achieve a consistent message regarding when and how to use StreetLink.

There has been a marked increase in the use of StreetLink by members of the public in recent years. As the use of StreetLink by members of the public reached its greatest peak in winter 2016-17 in England and Wales, this was accompanied by an increase in referrals of people begging or involved in 'street activity' rather than rough sleeping. While outreach teams may not respond to these 'inaccurate' referrals, processing them can result in an additional administrative burden for both them and the StreetLink team.

StreetLink is being used regularly by a variety of different groups in addition to members of the public for whom it was originally designed, including rough sleepers themselves to self-refer, by homelessness organisations to refer their clients, by other organisations where homeless people may present (e.g. food banks), and even by local authority Housing Options teams to refer people who present as homeless to them. This has led to suggestions that different iterations of StreetLink could be developed to cater to the various needs and expectations of these different groups.

Members of the public using StreetLink generally expect a minimum level of feedback about their referral, and ideally to know what difference it has made, whether for the individual rough sleeper they had referred or through evidence demonstrating the impact that StreetLink referrals are having on rough sleeping in their area. There was found to be inconsistency in the extent to which feedback had been provided to members of the public, and the level of detail included. This inconsistency has led to frustration among users and in some cases deterred people from using StreetLink again.

There appears to be a relationship between the type of referrer and the referral outcome. If referrals are made by a rough sleeper themselves rather than by someone else, it is *more* likely to result in the person being moved into accommodation, *more* likely that they are not found, and *less* likely to result in no action being taken. This was found to be the case in both England and Wales. These findings suggest that self-referrals may have a greater impact on the workload of outreach teams to fulfil these outcomes, but that this effort is justified given that it results in positive outcomes being achieved.

The perception of StreetLink amongst those homeless people who have used it to self-refer in England and Wales is less positive than among members of the public. They were found to be more likely than members of the public to have a negative overall impression of it, and less likely than members of the public to believe that is a quick and easy way for members of the public to connect a rough sleeper with relevant local services.

## Evaluation question 2:

### To what extent does StreetLink provide early intelligence to local homelessness services about new rough sleepers?

As per its original intended audience, StreetLink is used mainly by members of the public to refer rough sleepers. While referrals submitted by other groups have remained relatively stable over time, there has been a marked increase in the use of StreetLink by members of the public in recent years. There have been ever greater spikes in referral activity from members of the public each winter since 2014-15 in England, and since winter 2016-17 in Wales.

Since it was introduced in England, the StreetLink website has been the predominant channel for referring rough sleepers. Recent usage figures have reflected the decision by StreetLink to promote the mobile app and discourage the use of the phone line. In Wales the mobile app has been the predominant referral channel, with some use of the website and no phone referrals. This is due to the conscious decision to focus attention on the website and app and not advertise the phone line when it was launched in Wales.

There appears to be a relationship between the type of referrer and the referral outcome in England. If referrals are made by members of the public rather than other groups, they are *less* likely to result in accommodation, *less* likely to result in the individual engaging with services, *less* likely not to be found, *more* likely to result in a refusal from the individual to engage with services, *more* likely to be in an identified begging hotspot, and *more* likely to be already known to services.

The extent to which local authorities use StreetLink to direct their work varies greatly between local authority areas. This ranges from outreach teams being commissioned to be largely directed by StreetLink referrals, to outreach teams using their own freephone number to receive referrals, which they feel is more effective than using StreetLink.

Where local authorities do use StreetLink, there is inconsistency between them in terms of the feedback they provide to the StreetLink team on referral outcomes. Some do not respond to requests for updates from StreetLink, despite the expectation that outcome data should come back to StreetLink from local authorities within ten days.

Outreach teams which use StreetLink in England consider it to be effective in enabling them to find and support *new* rough sleepers, and the majority of both outreach teams and local authorities feel that StreetLink is providing them with early intelligence about new rough sleepers.

The main challenges with using StreetLink for outreach teams and local authorities are poor quality referrals (including duplicate referrals), insufficient information with which to be able to find people, and the fact that the majority of StreetLink referrals are not found. These all have implications for the resource that local authorities and outreach services are allocating to processing referrals and to finding people who have been referred.

### Evaluation question 3:

## To what extent does StreetLink help get rough sleepers off the streets faster?

### The role of StreetLink as a preventative intervention to address homelessness

It was difficult to ascertain from the evidence derived through the evaluation the extent to which StreetLink was a preventative intervention as well as tackling street homelessness. Given that the system is designed to be used by members of the public when they see someone sleeping rough as opposed to someone at risk of homelessness, this would suggest that members of the public would not be able to use StreetLink as a way of preventing that person from sleeping rough, at least not for the first night. Whilst national stakeholders recognised the importance of prevention measures, this could not be achieved through StreetLink alone. There were questions raised by homeless people who had used StreetLink to refer themselves which indicated that they were unsure whether they could alert StreetLink at an earlier stage in their homelessness journey, i.e. before sleeping rough.

## Whether StreetLink helps get rough sleepers off the streets faster

The data required to robustly ascertain whether StreetLink helps to get rough sleepers off the streets faster was not available. This is for the following reasons:

- In order to assess the *speed* of StreetLink referrals getting rough sleepers off the street, the date differential between each incoming referral and the date the individual was accommodated would need to be analysed. However, the outcome of 'into accommodation' does not provide a date of accommodation, only the dates of report completed and of feedback provided. This was not considered to be reliable enough to be used as a proxy for the day the individual was accommodated.
- In order to assess whether StreetLink referrals are *faster* at getting rough sleepers off the streets than other referrals, a meaningful comparison group is required. The CHAIN data provided for this evaluation only included individuals recorded on CHAIN who had a StreetLink referral; thus, there was no comparison group of rough sleepers who had moved into accommodation but had *not* been referred through StreetLink.
- Even with the full CHAIN dataset, it would not be possible to isolate those rough sleepers who had been referred through StreetLink through those identified via other channels, e.g. outreach. This is because many people identified through outreach may then go on to have a StreetLink referral, or vice versa. Again, this prevents a meaningful comparison group to be identified, against which StreetLink referrals can be compared.

The effectiveness of StreetLink at getting rough sleepers off the streets faster, from the perspective of national stakeholders, was difficult to ascertain. While it was generally recognised that StreetLink did provide a means to identify new rough sleepers, whether it resulted in them getting off the street quicker was less clear.

## The role of StreetLink for homeless people and early intervention

Homeless people's motivation to use and engage with StreetLink was generally to seek support, often where they had failed to get help through other organisations and statutory services. Many talked about StreetLink as a first step away from homelessness and felt it was a tangible action that could be taken to help them make that step towards seeking and accepting help.

Experiences of being referred by StreetLink to other services and further assistance were mixed. Positive experiences were linked to being found quickly, and to the referral leading to meaningful engagement with services in their area. Where experiences were viewed as negative, this was mainly concerned with rough sleepers not being found, outreach teams taking a long time or numerous attempts to find them, and a negative outcome at the end of the experience. Homeless people described how difficult and dangerous it was to remain in the same spot for hours or days at a time while waiting for an outreach team to find them, and suggested that designated waiting areas or ways of outreach teams calling back rough sleepers to identify their location would be improvements on the current system.

## StreetLink in local areas

The six case study areas demonstrated different ways in which StreetLink is used and linked to wider homelessness strategies in the local area. The diversity gives an insight into the way in which StreetLink is adapted for homelessness contexts and operational markets, each with their own opportunities and challenges.

Cardiff, which has seen a rise in rough sleeping levels, has a target in its rough sleeping strategy to ensure there are clear routes for members of the public to refer rough sleepers to an outreach team, and StreetLink is part of this. The outreach team views StreetLink as a source of early intelligence, especially for rough sleepers who are not known to them. There have been challenges, including the outreach team receiving large numbers of referrals when StreetLink was first set up, and the quality and duplication of referrals. Suggestions for improvement were mostly linked to awareness raising as many people still do not know what StreetLink is.

The mainly rural and large geographic spread of Cornwall means that StreetLink is viewed as a vital part of identifying rough sleepers, whom the team of five outreach workers would otherwise be unable to locate. The local authority and homelessness organisations actively promote StreetLink and this is reflected in the rapid increase in referral numbers since quarter three of 2016, driven by large increases from members of the public. Feedback from the local authority suggests that StreetLink does have and could have an even greater role in raising awareness and improving understanding of rough sleeping.

West Lindsey is an area that has very low levels of rough sleeping but there have been more instances of rough sleeping in the last 12 months. West Lindsey has its own local phone line for members of the public to report rough sleepers, which is commissioned alongside its outreach services. As rough sleeping numbers are low, capacity to deal with reports to the phone line is manageable. Both the local authority and the outreach team feel that referrals received through the local

phone line are preferable to those which come via StreetLink due to their quality, and the ability to respond in a more personalised way.

Two London boroughs (Tower Hamlets and Brent) were selected as case study areas due to the high levels of rough sleepers and the prominence of several of these in the top ten StreetLink referral areas, based on StreetLink data. The outreach team in Tower Hamlets views StreetLink as a mechanism to help members of the public to identify rough sleepers the team is not finding on its regular routes. The outreach team is commissioned directly to respond to StreetLink referrals and also has targets to respond to these within a specific timeframe. By operating in this way they do identify more rough sleepers, but the fact that the majority of rough sleepers are not found means that StreetLink referrals do place an additional burden on the workload of the outreach team.

Brent, being an outer London borough, has a large geographical area to cover through its outreach provision. Again, the local authority commissions the outreach team to use StreetLink as one of its referrals routes and places importance on StreetLink as an early intelligence tool. Unlike some areas, homelessness services in Brent are encouraged to report people via StreetLink and this is reflected in the higher than average proportion of homelessness professionals recorded as using StreetLink in the area. There is also a high proportion of self-referrals from rough sleepers in Brent.

The local authority in Birmingham, whilst not an early adopter of StreetLink in 2012, has since actively promoted StreetLink through its website and set a target response time for the outreach team of 48 hours. In a similar way to in other case study areas, StreetLink has been viewed as a valuable tool to alert outreach teams to rough sleepers of whom the outreach team would otherwise not have been aware. One of the challenges they have faced is the inefficiency of referrals being communicated between Birmingham and the StreetLink team in London, which adds to their response time. Consequently, Birmingham City Council is currently working with Homeless Link to set up StreetLink Birmingham, which will effectively be a copy of the national system but specific to Birmingham. The launch was planned for January 2018.

## Good practice and opportunities for improved service delivery

The evaluation has demonstrated that StreetLink is understood and is implemented in a range of ways across different operational markets. The impact of this is that the effectiveness of the platform is reliant on the extent to which it is advertised and promoted in local areas, how StreetLink interacts with commissioned outreach services, local authority strategy and practices, and how it is used by people experiencing homelessness and other homelessness services.

One of the main findings of the evaluation is that StreetLink is currently used and means different things to different people, and is being used beyond the scope of its original stated aim of being a referral route for members of the public.

Namely, it is being used as a channel for rough sleepers to refer themselves to services because they do not know where to go to seek advice or assistance or have been refused help by homelessness services (statutory and non-statutory). The evaluation has also highlighted that StreetLink has drifted from its original aim by also becoming a vehicle for homelessness professionals to report rough sleepers, and signpost rough sleepers to StreetLink to enable them to be found and helped by outreach teams in their area. In looking at how StreetLink can be improved and recommendations for future service delivery, it is important to address these in the context of how the platform has evolved over time and the diverse ways it is used in local areas.

The evaluation has highlighted four broad areas of good practice present in some localities which can help inform future delivery of StreetLink across England and Wales. These are:

- Having a timely and good quality feedback mechanism for members of the public - providing timely, tailored and meaningful feedback to members of the public made the difference between positive and negative feedback about StreetLink, including the motivation to use StreetLink again
- Local StreetLink portal - the case studies and online surveys demonstrated that StreetLink is being used as a local portal or interface which accumulates all referrals, including those identified by commissioned outreach services. This helped to streamline referrals and help identify new rough sleepers not already known to services
- Effective partnerships - the formal arrangement with Biffa is an example of an effective partnership and meaningful engagement with a national business that is able to provide funding for StreetLink but also accurately promote the service amongst its staff and customers
- An intelligence tool - in many of the case study areas, StreetLink is viewed as an intelligence tool that can help the local authority and commissioned outreach services to identify new rough sleepers or those hidden from view about whom they would otherwise not be aware.

The interviews, surveys and ideation workshops showed that there is a huge appetite to maximise the potential of StreetLink and improve and develop current service delivery. The evaluation has found that the funders, members of the public and statutory and non-statutory services show huge support for the concept of StreetLink and were keen to engage with the evaluation questions about practical ways in which this could be improved. The recommendations set out below have focused on the areas of StreetLink which have not recently been changed subsequent to the evaluation being commissioned.



- **Recommendation 1:** Maximise the collection and use of data collected through StreetLink channels, including publishing data about StreetLink outcomes and success rates in local areas to encourage use, help members of the public to understand the role and impact of StreetLink, and contribute to awareness raising campaigns. Data collection should also link to other national and local data systems to help improve knowledge of new and repeat rough sleepers in their areas and potentially work as a prevention tool.
- **Recommendation 2:** Increase budget and capacity for local and national level awareness raising campaigns, linked to resources to deal with additional traffic generated by proactive campaigning.
- **Recommendation 3:** Explore further fundraising potential and partnerships with national and local businesses.
- **Recommendation 4:** Separate StreetLink as a tool for members of the public only and develop an additional phone line (or lines) for homelessness professionals and homeless people to self-refer.
- **Recommendation 5:** Improve the StreetLink locating mechanism and access to rough sleepers for outreach teams. The evaluation has highlighted issues with the quality of referrals and the high numbers of outcomes as 'person not found'. Some small but meaningful changes could be made to the feedback loop between a referral being made and the person being located by an outreach team.
- **Recommendation 6:** Galvanise large volunteering networks already in existence in national and local organisations to volunteer for the helpline and become local ambassadors for StreetLink to promote the service to local businesses, community groups and services.
- **Recommendation 7:** Offer StreetLink (at appropriate cost) more widely to local areas as a bespoke system that can be designed to respond to local issues and rough sleeping strategies and help prevent duplicates and low quality referrals.
- **Recommendation 8:** Use StreetLink as a way of advertising local homelessness services to members of the public, thereby using the platform to raise awareness about homelessness services available in their area while improving their understanding of the referral process.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

There has been a marked increase in rough sleeping across Great Britain in recent years – in England levels have increased by 60 per cent between 2011 and 2016 and by 50 per cent in Wales in the same period.<sup>2</sup> The need to address rough sleeping and prevent homelessness is recognised by all, including the Government. Whilst there has been homelessness prevention legislation implemented in Wales through the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 and a shift to prevention activity through the Homelessness Reduction Act in England, rough sleeping continues to persist and the interventions and funding to address it vary across England and Wales.

StreetLink, the service designed to help the public to connect a person sleeping rough with local services, was launched in England in 2012 and introduced into Wales in 2016. Funded by grants from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), the Greater London Authority (GLA) and the Welsh Government, StreetLink is run in partnership between Homeless Link and St Mungo's.

StreetLink is designed to help the public to connect a person sleeping rough with local services, with the objective to improve the response to individual rough sleepers, and the wider local systems that support rough sleepers off the streets. This report examines the extent to which StreetLink has achieved its four primary aims (set out below) and how it is working for different audiences who engage with it. Finally, a series of recommendations are set out which have been informed by participants and workshops conducted through the evaluation process.

### 1.2 Evaluation questions

Based on the four main objectives of StreetLink, the aim of this evaluation is to assess the extent to which StreetLink:

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- Provides the public with a means to take appropriate action when they see someone sleeping rough
- Provides early intelligence to local homelessness services about new rough sleepers
- Helps get rough sleepers off the streets faster
- Highlights good practice and to improve systems for dealing with rough sleeping

In addition, the evaluation will seek to address the following broad questions:

- How is StreetLink currently working for different stakeholders and audiences – the general public, homeless people, local authorities and homelessness services?
- What impact is StreetLink having in addressing and reducing levels of rough sleeping?
- How might StreetLink be improved to deliver an even more effective platform to meet its goals of providing the public a channel to take action, delivering early intelligence to homelessness services, and getting rough sleepers off the streets faster?

## 1.3 Methodology

The evaluation used a five-stage mixed-methods approach to provide an in-depth understanding of each of the evaluation questions:

### Stage 1 – Literature review and interviews with key informants

Given the short timescales for the evaluation, a rapid evidence review was conducted to provide context to the environment in which StreetLink is operating. The review focused largely on the use, effectiveness and impact of social and digital platforms to engage the general public to act or report an issue. The review protocol included:

- Keywords to identify evidence from across the UK and internationally, exploring the private, statutory and third sectors; insight into current practice and effectiveness to inform ideas for the future of StreetLink, and feed into the development of evaluation tools
- Collecting evidence from the past 5 years
- Search of peer reviewed and grey literature; much of the material on use of digital and social platforms comes from non-academic sources

- English language evidence only
- As part of this initial evidence gathering, ten stakeholders from six national organisations responsible for the strategic leadership and operational delivery of StreetLink were interviewed to examine the extent to which StreetLink meets its strategic objectives at a national level, and current practice to inform future service delivery:
- Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)
- Homeless Link
- Greater London Authority (GLA)
- Welsh Government
- Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA)
- St Mungo's

## Stage 2 – StreetLink and rough sleeping data analysis

Access to the following data was provided by Homeless Link, which enabled a full data analysis of the StreetLink referrals since its inception in 2012:

- StreetLink usage reports by quarter from 2012 –2016
- StreetLink outcome reports by objective and by quarter
- Key statistics 2012 –2016, including number of contacts by month, referrals by type, region and outcomes
- StreetLink referrals linked to CHAIN (Combined Homelessness and Information Network) data from St Mungo's
- Referrals for Wales (data collected between January 2016 until June 2017).

NOTE: The three referral datasets do not match in terms of fields and categories, so could not be combined into one table. For this reason, Welsh statistics are run separately to the English statistics.

The data analysis served four purposes:

- 1. To 'drill down' into the top ten local authority areas** for referrals between October and December 2016 along with three additional local authority areas (one rural area, one Welsh city, and one area with low numbers of rough sleepers).
- 2. To analyse broad trends** in the use of StreetLink and the outcomes recorded since it was established in 2012. This looked at yearly and monthly trends of number of referrals, referral type (i.e. who made the referral, channel type, capacity) and recorded outcomes. It also

established trends on where most referrals are coming from in terms of channel, capacity and geography and if there are any patterns in outcomes, and formed the basis for further drilling down and understanding as part of the qualitative evaluation.

- 3. To select case study areas:** additional local authority areas outside of the top 10 referrals between October and December 2016 (12 areas in total) were examined and six case study areas were selected, including one with low numbers of rough sleepers to ascertain the extent to which StreetLink works with limited commissioned services, one rural area, and finally a Welsh city.
- 4. To provide additional information to inform the development of evaluation tools** (surveys, topic guides and workshop discussions) for subsequent stages of the evaluation.

The findings are presented separately for England and Wales. Given the proportionally greater numbers of StreetLink referrals received in London compared to other areas of England, some findings for London only are presented separately.

### Stage 3 – Online surveys with StreetLink users, local authorities, and street outreach teams

**StreetLink users:** StreetLink was designed to help members of the public connect a person who is sleeping rough to local services. Analysis of data on the capacity in which StreetLink referrals were made has identified that self-referrals comprise almost a quarter of these cumulative referrals (23%). A short online survey was developed to understand the extent to which members of the public understand the purpose of StreetLink and feel it is effective, as well as their experience of using StreetLink. This was sent with an explanatory letter to a sample of 6,000 StreetLink users (including 3,000 who had used StreetLink to refer someone, and 3,000 who had used StreetLink to self-refer); contact details were provided by Homeless Link. The survey was also promoted on social media (Twitter) by Crisis, Homeless Link and St Mungo's. Analysis of the responses has enabled insight into how users understand and currently use StreetLink and if this matches the intended objectives of the service. There were 397 responses received to the user survey (a response rate of 7%), 269 from England, and 39 from Wales; 90 respondents did not state whether they were in England or Wales.

**Local authorities:** To capture the views and understand the extent to which local authorities find StreetLink useful, two short online surveys were developed; one for local authorities in England, and one for those in Wales (with slight variations between the two). The surveys were sent with an explanatory covering letter to Housing Options team contacts provided by Homeless Link. There were

95 responses received from local authorities in England (29% response rate), and 11 from local authorities in Wales (50% response rate).

**Outreach teams:** Outreach teams may be commissioned to respond to StreetLink referrals, or non-commissioned outreach services may use StreetLink referrals as part of their strategy for responding to rough sleeping. To understand how they currently use StreetLink, two short surveys were developed; one for outreach services in England and one for outreach services in Wales. Questions focused on current use, targeting and success of awareness raising campaigns, effectiveness overall, partnership working, examples of good practice and future improvements to StreetLink. These surveys were sent with an explanatory covering letter to outreach team contacts provided by Homeless Link, along with additional contacts identified by Crisis. There were 72 responses received from outreach teams in England, and 2 from outreach teams in Wales.

Respondents to all surveys were invited to opt-in to participate in a telephone interview and/or participate in a workshop. Permission to follow up was then used to recruit participants for telephone interviews and participation in ideation workshops. StreetLink users were informed that they would receive a £10 voucher as a thank you for their time for participating in the interview or the workshop.

## Stage 4 – Focus on case study areas

Six local authority case study areas were identified and agreed in conjunction with Homeless Link where the evaluation would explore the use of StreetLink in greater depth in a variety of different operating contexts.

Analysis of StreetLink data compared StreetLink referrals against the MHCLG rough sleeping counts and estimates<sup>3</sup> to highlight the top 50 local authorities in terms of referrals, and compared the results to the counts and estimates. Additional data including CHAIN and population size were also looked at and the findings were used to select the following six case study areas:

### Cardiff (Welsh city)

Since StreetLink Wales was introduced, Cardiff has had a high number of referrals recorded (635 compared to 90 in Swansea, the next highest in Wales). Comparing this to the rough sleeping data collected by the Welsh Government for 2016, Cardiff recorded 85 rough sleepers in two weeks in October (Swansea recorded 23). Cardiff was selected to understand how the high level of referrals relate to the local response to rough sleeping.

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<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), Rough sleeping statistics England autumn 2016: Tables 1 and 2 available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness#rough-sleeping-tables>. Whilst we are aware of the constraints of the counts and estimate figure they are able to provide point in time data and analysis of trends over time.

### **Cornwall (Rural local authority)**

The average rough sleeping level across England is 12.68 people. Of the top 50 areas for StreetLink referrals, 41 of them had above average levels of rough sleepers. These local authorities were then classified by type, according to recent research on rural homelessness from the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR)<sup>4</sup>.

Cornwall is the only area in this list described as mainly rural. Cornwall has also seen a significant increase in rough sleeping since 2010 (52%). It is also a local authority area with a number of large local homelessness services, including St Petrocs (which also has a helpline), and Shelter.

### **West Lindsey (Local authority with low levels of rough sleeping)**

Analysis of StreetLink data compared StreetLink referrals against the MHCLG rough sleeping counts and estimates to highlight the lowest quartile local authorities in terms of referrals between October and December 2016, and compared the results to the counts and estimates in 2016. There were 38 areas featuring in both lists; West Lindsey was selected from these due to its mix of urban and rural populations.

### **Tower Hamlets (London local authority in top ten StreetLink referrals, Oct-Dec 2016)**

Tower Hamlets features in the top ten referral areas across all three months and has the third highest rough sleeping count in London, recorded on CHAIN.

### **Birmingham (Non-London local authority in the top ten StreetLink referrals, Oct-Dec 2016)**

Of the areas outside of London, Birmingham had the highest number of referrals between Oct-Dec 2016 (790) and a higher than average rough sleeping counts and estimates figure (55).

### **Brent (Outer London Borough)**

Brent is in the top 50 StreetLink referral areas in England (294) and, according to CHAIN, is one of the 10 boroughs with the highest levels of rough sleepers recorded during 2016/17.

In addition to drilling down into the StreetLink data about these six areas, in-depth interviews were conducted with users and stakeholders of StreetLink in these areas. The aim was, for each area, to interview:

- Member(s) of the public who has used StreetLink to refer a rough sleeper
- Current or formerly homeless people who had used StreetLink to self-refer

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.ippr.org/files/2017-06/1498563647\\_right-to-home-a4-report-170627.pdf](https://www.ippr.org/files/2017-06/1498563647_right-to-home-a4-report-170627.pdf)

- Local authority staff
- Local outreach team/homelessness service

In some areas, particularly where StreetLink is not widely used, it was more challenging to recruit interview participants. This was particularly the case with StreetLink users. Given that StreetLink was designed to help members of the public connect rough sleepers with local services, and that StreetLink is also used by rough sleepers to self-refer, it was considered vital to engage with these people. Therefore, the recruitment strategy was extended to a wider geographical area and a number of interviews were conducted with members of the public and self-referrers outside of the six case study areas. A total of 32 interviews were conducted; the breakdown is presented in Table 1.1.

**Table 1.1 Interviews conducted in case study areas**

Local authority area	Local authority	Outreach team/ Homelessness service	Member of public	Self-referrer	TOTAL
Birmingham	1	2	1	0	4
Brent	1	1	1	1	4
Cardiff	1	0	2	0	3
Cornwall	1	2	0	0	3
Tower Hamlets	1	2	0	1	4
West Lindsey	1	1	0	0	2
Other	0	1	7	4	12
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>32</b>

These interviews were conducted primarily over the phone with several conducted face to face, covering the following areas, with emphasis on different aspects of the service depending on the type of participant being interviewed:

- Experience of using StreetLink – process, perception, and effectiveness
- Success and experience of awareness raising and local campaigning of StreetLink
- Understanding of rough sleeping through StreetLink
- Extent to which StreetLink helps rough sleepers
- Interaction of rough sleeping with begging sites
- The perceived success of StreetLink
- The role of StreetLink with wider homelessness interventions including prevention
- Improvement in future service delivery



## Stage 5 – Review and ideation workshops

For the final stage of the evaluation, three ‘ideation’ workshops were convened in London, Manchester and Cardiff, bringing together mixed groups of StreetLink stakeholders (members of the public, self-referrers, local authorities, outreach teams, and national stakeholders), to focus on this question:

- How might StreetLink be improved to deliver an even more effective platform to meet its goals of providing the public a channel to take action, delivering early intelligence to homelessness services, and getting rough sleepers off the streets faster?

The content of the workshops was developed based on insights drawn from data collected through the literature review, data analysis, online surveys, and in-depth interviews with StreetLink users and stakeholders. The workshop activities used human-centered design techniques which facilitated the participants to work together to identify challenges and opportunities presented by StreetLink, and develop solution-focused prototypes, which are presented in the final section of this report. It is recommended that these prototypes are tested by Homeless Link and St Mungo’s as part of their service improvement.

# Chapter 2

## The digital landscape: Literature review

### 2.1 Streetlink: a link in the chain to end homelessness?

In recent times there has been increasing use of digital technologies to enable people to engage with urban challenges in their neighbourhoods through the use of civic apps. These are digital tools that facilitate the communication among citizens, and between government and citizens. This development sits within the wider context of the rise of the world-wide web and the manner in which it has been co-opted to enable new forms of political activism and attempts at engagement that circumnavigate the traditional forms of - and routes to - political power and change.<sup>5</sup>

This rise and use of digital technology for tackling social issues lies within a broader a move to Web 2.0 in which the producer-audience model of mass communication is upended as citizens and users come to produce and generate the content themselves which contests the hegemony of traditional media (and political) players.<sup>6</sup>

This focus and development of digital means to connects citizens and institutions has come to be called 'civic tech'. It encompasses the new technological means that enable greater participation in government or services run by government and local organisations. They are used to attempt to assist those agencies in delivering services and strengthen ties with the public and reinforce democratic processes.<sup>7</sup> From humble origins of just using technology to better connect individuals with their parliamentary representatives, civic tech is now being used across the world to enhance institutional responses to everything from natural disasters to dog-fouling on pavements.<sup>8</sup>

There has been discussion about who is included and excluded from being able to access and use these new technologies. There is genuine concern about a division emerging between those affluent enough to afford the technologies that open up access to new digital platforms and those that do not. One obvious

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<sup>5</sup> <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsereviewofbooks/2016/01/04/book-review-networks-of-outrage-and-hope-social-movements-in-the-internet-age-by-manuel-castells/>

<sup>6</sup> Koc-Michalska, K., Lilleker, D, G. and Vedel, T. (2016) Civic political engagement and social change in the new digital age in *New Media & Society*. Vol. 18 (9): 1807-1816 accessed 2 Aug 2017

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.govtech.com/civic/What-is-Civic-Tech.html>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.mysociety.org/files/2017/05/civic-tech-cities.pdf>

group often be assumed to fall into exclusion from digital technologies is homeless people. While there is evidence to support this, there is also evidence for the widespread use of mobile phones (including smartphones) by homeless people as well as them also being able to access computers via support organisations they use, and friends or family.<sup>9</sup>

## 2.2 Who uses civic tech – a digital divide?

The digital age has radically transformed how individuals communicate, work and conduct friendships and relationships. Access to and use of digital technology has become ubiquitous and is often seen as a prerequisite for social inclusion and connection. Yet, as with many other valued social resources in society, inequality and exclusion exists with the use of and access to digital technology. This is often coined as a 'digital divide' and refers to the unequal access to technology that can exist between different individuals and groups.<sup>10</sup>

A recent examination of the relationship between digital exclusion and social exclusion concluded that those who are socially excluded are less likely to use the internet and benefit from internet applications that may help them tackle their exclusion. Secondly, this digital exclusion can exacerbate social exclusion.<sup>11</sup>

There is currently little evidence to show who uses civic tech and the types of individuals they are. What research there has been, specifically exploring users of civic tech that linked citizens and national government and/or local government, shows that in the UK and US the users of civic tech tend to be composed of older, educated and affluent white males who are considered to have high political and personal efficacy in both an online and offline capacity.<sup>12</sup>

## 2.3 Civic tech and homelessness

While a digital divide does exist, it is an oversimplification to assume that homeless people automatically fall in with those excluded from digital technology. While many homeless people may struggle with digital literacy and accessing the increasing number of opportunities to find work, transport and housing that can be found online, homeless people do own and access digital technology devices such as computers, mobile phones and the internet.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Harmony Rhoades, Suzanne L. Wenzel, Eric Rice, Hailey Winetrobe & Benjamin Henwood (2017) No digital divide? Technology use among homeless adults in *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless* Vo. 26, Issue 1. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10530789.2017.1305140?journalCode=ysdh20>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.lemosandcrane.co.uk/resources/LemosandCraneDigitalEmpowerment.pdf> p.1

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/carnegieuktrust/wp-content/uploads/sites/64/2016/09/LOW-2697-CUKT-Digital-Participation-Report-REVISE.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.mysociety.org/files/2015/10/demographics-report.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.lemosandcrane.co.uk/resources/LemosandCraneDigitalEmpowerment.pdf> p.1

Research from the US found that rates of mobile phone ownership within a cohort of the Los Angeles homeless population were slightly higher than in the general population, as was the rate of accessing the internet via mobile phones.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, there has been a growth in specific targeting of digital and online services that seek to address homeless peoples' needs. With these developments, homeless people can now get access to information about locations where they can eat, sleep and acquire necessities during extreme weather conditions, maps of service locations, and many other types of information that can make homeless people's lives that bit easier.<sup>15</sup>

There also exists an ever-growing range of digital platforms that seek to help homeless people by either engaging members of the public, raising money, helping refer them to outreach and support teams, as well as being a source of information for directing homeless people to services and organisations they might need to use.

Digital technology enables homeless people to become socially connected and creates the opportunity to share their experiences, come together around common causes and inform policy change. Social media such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Meetup, for example, as well as blogs, can be important tools for spreading messages and establishing links, enabling those without the experience of homelessness to gain new insight into the lived realities of it. Homelessness service providers have also become accustomed to using digital technology to improve their service offer but also to enable homeless people to get information more quickly and more easily.<sup>16</sup> Table 2.1 below summarises some of the civic tech-apps that have been developed specifically with attempts to address homelessness.

**Table 2.1 Summary of civic tech apps to address homelessness**

Name	Location	Aim	Link
Arrels Locator	Barcelona	Citizens can warn of people sleeping on the streets in order to improve the assistance given to them, and also to detect more cases, quantify them etc.	<a href="http://www.arrelsfuncacio.org/es/una-app-para-que-los-ciudadanos-avisen-de-una-persona-durmiendo-en-la-calle/">http://www.arrelsfuncacio.org/es/una-app-para-que-los-ciudadanos-avisen-de-una-persona-durmiendo-en-la-calle/</a>

<sup>14</sup> Harmony Rhoades, Suzanne L. Wenzel, Eric Rice, Hailey Winetrobe and Benjamin Henwood (2017) No digital divide? Technology use among homeless adults in *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless*, 26: 1 73-77

<sup>15</sup> Striano, M. (2016/17) Digital Inclusion and Homelessness in *Homeless in Europe Winter 2016-2017*. Brussels: FEANSTA.

<sup>16</sup> Striano, M. (2016/17) Digital Inclusion and Homelessness in *Homeless in Europe Winter 2016-2017*. Brussels: FEANSTA

Ask Izzy	Australia	Ask Izzy can help you (homeless person) to find the services you need, right now and nearby. It is free and anonymous, and you can search over 350 000 services to find housing, meals, healthcare, counselling, legal advice, addiction treatment and a whole lot more.	<a href="https://askizzy.org.au/">https://askizzy.org.au/</a>
A little change	UK	Givers can help someone they've met or passed using our app's geo-location and bluetooth technology.	<a href="https://www.alittlechange.co.uk/#">https://www.alittlechange.co.uk/#</a>
BEAM	UK	Using technology, data and a sophisticated operational layer, to transition individuals out of welfare dependency so that they have the confidence, ability and networks to help them lead fulfilling lives.	<a href="https://www.wearebeam.org/">https://www.wearebeam.org/</a>
Donate Locate	UK	Donate Locate app will enable users to donate a small amount of their choice (£1, £3 or £5) directly to the charity when they see a homeless person, whilst simultaneously using geo-location technology to notify the charity of the location of the homeless person.	<a href="http://soul.london/project/connections-app/">http://soul.london/project/connections-app/</a>
Entourage	France	Entourage connects residents with each other, helping them rebuild a benevolent circle around homeless people in their neighbourhood.	<a href="http://www.entourage.social/">http://www.entourage.social/</a>
Homeless Connector	Boston, USA	Homeless Connector is a web-based smartphone version of 100,000 Homes' "Vulnerability Index," a survey that records data regarding the age, health, institutional history (i.e., military, hospital, jail, prison), and length of homelessness of homeless Americans.	<a href="http://www.homelessconnector.org/">http://www.homelessconnector.org/</a>
London Homeless Footpath	UK	London Homeless Footpath target is to make easier each day struggle for homeless people, by placing information about daily soup kitchens and shelters. It is a mobile app which can help homeless people to find food, shelters and day centres.	<a href="http://www.londonhomelessfootpath.org/">http://www.londonhomelessfootpath.org/</a>
Homeless - OurCalling	Dallas, US	The OurCalling app gives access to information on hundreds of service providers for the homeless and	<a href="https://www.ourcalling.org/app-2/">https://www.ourcalling.org/app-2/</a>

		impoverished throughout Dallas County in Texas.	
Homeless SMS	Eindhoven, Holland	The purpose of Homeless SMS is to develop a support system to service socially isolated people. The philosophy behind the project is, to make simple mobile technology accessible to homeless people because, this allows them easy to build a formal and informal support network – with is the first step into re-intergration into society.	<a href="https://homelessms.wordpress.com/">https://homelessms.wordpress.com/</a>
Homeless Plus	France	Homeless people are able to geolocate themselves thanks to the smartphones recovered and distributed by Homeless Plus. They will then be connected to local services	<a href="https://play.google.com/store/apps/detail?id=fr.homelessplus.app">https://play.google.com/store/apps/detail?id=fr.homelessplus.app</a>
Reconnect - Cloud Solidarity	France	Losing identity papers or having them stolen also means losing access to rights and, eventually, not even being recognised by social services anymore. This is not only a problem for the individual but also for social workers, who spend 30 percent of their time helping users to reapply for their documents that might end up lost again. Reconnect developed a service that scans people’s identity papers. The copy counts either as proof of the existence of the original document, or at least makes the procedure to apply for a new original much easier.	<a href="https://www.reconnect.fr/">https://www.reconnect.fr/</a>
StreetChange	Scotland and US	Members of the public can donate funds towards homeless people who host their profile and reason for seeking money on the website.	<a href="https://streetchange.org.uk/">https://streetchange.org.uk/</a>
Street Support	Manchester, UK	Street Support Network connects people experiencing homelessness, charities, voluntary groups, businesses and kind-hearted folk to work together to end homelessness. You can find support services for people experiencing homelessness, and DO something to help - offering your time, money or resources to local organisations.	<a href="https://streetsupport.net/">https://streetsupport.net/</a>

Virtual Backpack	UK	An online “virtual backpack” allowing homeless people to store personal information, such as their national insurance number, securely.	
WeShelter	USA	WeShelter's mission is to use mobile technology to allow everyone to contribute to ending homelessness. When subscribers tap the app, a sponsor donates directly to a homeless organisation. They can also alert authorities to someone sleeping rough.	<a href="http://weshelter.org/">http://weshelter.org/</a>
WIN: What I need	USA	Enables homeless or resource-insecure youth, ages 12-25, to locate 11 types of free supportive services. With the goal of empowering unaccompanied homeless youth to find and connect to the services they know they need to rebuild an independent life.	<a href="https://www.ourchildrenla.org/win-app/">https://www.ourchildrenla.org/win-app/</a>

Due to the often transient and unstable nature of many homeless people’s living conditions, the use of smartphones and the internet can be especially crucial for maintaining social and support service contacts. However, there is a more critical take that argues that the development of new apps – civic tech – specifically focused on homelessness can come to replace the support networks and social connections that would enable a homeless person to *get off* the street with social connections that enable them to *survive on* the street.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.cc.gatech.edu/~keith/pubs/chi2008-homeless.pdf>

### ***Case study: Street Support***

*Street Support Network is a central online resource and network around homelessness. Started in Manchester, it is now available in Leeds, Bradford, Bournemouth, Portsmouth and Liverpool.*

*The initial reason for starting Street Support was to make it easier for rough sleepers and homeless people to get the help they need. According to the co-founder of Street Support, their inspiration for starting it came from their own personal experience of trying to help a rough sleeper whom they regularly encountered. They felt powerless and did not know how to help. Through conversations with local homelessness organisations in Manchester it became clear that these organisations would welcome a way to understand what they are all doing, i.e. where, when and what services are available. With a background in digital technology and the charity sector, the co-founder saw an opportunity to help these organisations connect and use digital technology to support the work that they do to help homeless people. It was a means to be, "helping the helpers and making it easier for people who want to help". This does not foreclose the website being used by homeless people themselves.*

*After a period of researching and speaking with local organisations, enough of them felt that an online resource would be valuable so an early prototype of the website was created and launched. It quickly started to be used, and more and more organisations signed up to become members. As there has been no marketing budget for the website it has grown organically through existing member organisations spreading the word and using social media to raise awareness.*

*The website works through two distinct pathways: one is 'Find Help' and the other is 'Give Help'. Clicking on 'Find Help' enables the user to find and search a directory for particular forms of help or services (i.e. drop in services, meals or employment support). Clicking on 'Give Help' directs users to where and how they can help from a list of requests for help from local homelessness organisations. Users can post what they can offer, i.e. particular skills they have, or time they can volunteer. One of the challenges faced by Street Support is to make sure that as many organisations as possible post their needs and that more of the public check this list. The co-founder explained that it was about channelling the goodwill towards where the actual needs were, rather than focusing on those forms of support or needs the public are attached to or think homeless people have.*

*This has been one of the ongoing challenges since the website and app launched in January 2016. While it has been relatively easy to get local organisations to sign up to Street Support, re-directing public good will towards the site has been harder and that is something they are working to improve.*

[continued...]



*So, while a strength of Street Support has been to listen to what the sector needs and find a way to respond to that, thereby creating and developing a network of like-minded organisations, the challenge has been fulfilling the potential of such a network when capacity is limited. Alongside stretched capacity is the need to be able to robustly demonstrate outcomes when applying for funding that could address the capacity which is a problem when working with a network and a digital product that acts more as a go-between than actually delivering the help itself.*

*Street Support's co-founder identified one key aspect of the success of the initiative as being the use of an app. Having an app helps to add an element of excitement and enable the public to have a sense of ownership and commitment when they download it to their phone. Street Support is also having other cities and organisations get in contact, wanting to replicate the network within their region. The Street Support team feels that this is testament to the strength of the digital product and network model underpinning it.*

While there has been an exceptional rise in the development and use of civic tech and digital platforms more widely, not all are successful. Reviews have shown that many have failed because of low or short-term uptake by citizens and design choices that limit engagement opportunities.<sup>18</sup> An examination of five civic tech apps used by municipal governments in the US found that, while they were popular with users and could be effective, they remained 'ad-hoc', niche and vulnerable to personnel and budgetary changes.<sup>19</sup> Civic tech tools need ongoing development in order to grow new features and remain relevant to users. Digital tools that become unused or unusable due to poor maintenance are likely to reduce the confidence of citizens in the effectiveness of the tools and the commitment they have towards them.<sup>20</sup>

What emerges from reviews of civic tech and apps as elements more likely to increase the likelihood of their success are, firstly, a low threshold for engagement, i.e. the app is simple and quick to use. Secondly, some feedback or response is needed back to the user. More generally it is argued that some type of gratification mechanism can help make civic apps more sustainable. By this is meant a sense of personal competence that a user can gain from using the app that addresses a particular issue or connects them to or helps influence others. Central then to the sustainability of a civic app is:

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<sup>18</sup> <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2017/01/25/engaging-with-citizens-online-civic-apps-must-offer-dynamic-interactions-in-order-to-be-truly-effective/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.mysociety.org/files/2017/05/civic-tech-cities.pdf> p. 13

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

- *Visibility of change*: can the app user see the change that they are making or contributing to?
- *Visibility of engagement*: can the app user receive feedback or interact in some way with other users/citizens?<sup>21</sup>

Further analysis of guides to reviewing and understanding digital citizenship engagement suggest that one way to begin to assess how successful a particular form of civic tech is to examine:

1. Does it have clear goals which the project/app is designed to achieve?
2. Who exerts most influence over and within the particular civic tech and what are the implications of this, if any?
3. Who participates in the initiative and is this in line with their needs and expectations?
4. Is the choice of technology appropriate to the issue being addressed?
5. What effects does the civic tech have and can this impact be attributed to the technology?<sup>22</sup>

With specific regard to technology and digital platforms that homelessness service providers may seek to develop, it has been suggested that, for civic tech aimed at addressing homelessness, it would pay to be mindful of the myriad intersecting vulnerabilities (e.g. physical/mental health conditions, cognitive issues, trauma) that may complicate an individual's ability to effectively engage with technology.<sup>23</sup> These considerations include:

- Recognising that the high turnover of phones/phone numbers may impact long-term connectivity as well as mean that users may need to re-learn basic functionality of new phones
- The onset of aging or related health problems start on average much earlier for homeless people compared to housed counterparts. Many of these can impact their ability to use and understand new technology therefore easy to use digital platforms are required
- Smartphone programmes may be most effective if on the Android operating system as this is most commonly used among the homeless population.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2017/01/25/engaging-with-citizens-online-civic-apps-must-offer-dynamic-interactions-in-order-to-be-truly-effective/>

<sup>22</sup> DEET (2016) *Evaluating Digital Technology Engagement: A Practical Guide*. Washington: World Bank Group. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/23752/deef-book.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> p. 34-35

<sup>23</sup> Harmony Rhoades, Suzanne L. Wenzel, Eric Rice, Hailey Winetrobe and Benjamin Henwood (2017) No digital divide? Technology use among homeless adults in *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless*, 26: 1 73-77

<sup>24</sup> Harmony Rhoades, Suzanne L. Wenzel, Eric Rice, Hailey Winetrobe and Benjamin Henwood (2017) No digital divide? Technology use among homeless adults in *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless*, 26: 1 73-77

## 2.4 Healthcare and use apps

Outside the area of homelessness and civic engagement, in the world of health care there has been a rapid growth in medical apps that people can use to maintain a healthy lifestyle or manage an existing health condition. While still in its relative infancy some work has been done on trying to understand and assess the impact and effectiveness of such technological interventions.

There are over 250,000 health related smartphone apps commercially available.<sup>25</sup> They have been hailed as a revolution in healthcare because of the manner in which they are argued to empower ordinary people to have knowledge and say in medical decisions impacting on their lives.<sup>26</sup> In the US in 2015 it was found that over half of smartphone users had downloaded a health-related mobile app. Fitness and nutrition were the most common categories of health apps used, with most using them at least daily.<sup>27</sup> Key to this has been the ability of individuals to collect and have made visible their own personal health data. While it is still a relatively recent development, there is interest in the healthcare field in terms of the impact of these new apps.

In a recent review of current evidence, the majority of studies explored showed statistically significant effects in terms of targeted (positive) behaviour change. A range of mechanisms were used to encourage change: self-monitoring, feedback provide on monitored performance, along with tailored messages. Some apps related to addressing addiction problems used motivational enhancement therapy along with principles of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy.<sup>28</sup>

Practical features of apps that were deemed critical functions were self-monitoring, goal setting, feedback, and social networking features. It was also found that tailored information, real-time feedback, and expert consultation are the app functions that might be most acceptable and useful to participants. In turn, it is likely that these features could result in maintaining higher retention rates and enhancing intervention effectiveness. The review indicates that apps with a simple interface and that make better use of app design and technology may reduce the time required for users to participate in the intervention and improve retention.<sup>29</sup> Where individuals had been found to have downloaded health-related mobile apps onto their phone but then discontinued using them, the most frequent reasons were it taking too much time to enter data, loss of interest, hidden costs, apps were confusing to use and they did not like the data sharing aspect.<sup>30</sup> To enhance and improve retention of users, health apps are

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<sup>25</sup> <https://medcitynews.com/2017/11/what-factors-drive-adoption-of-health-apps/>

<sup>26</sup> <https://ymedialabs.com/future-of-healthcare/>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4704953/>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5295827/>

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4704953/>

recommended to be as interesting and as easy to use as possible. They also need to connect emotionally with their users.<sup>31</sup>

## 2.5 Chapter 2 summary: Key points

There has been increasing use of digital technologies to enable people to engage with urban challenges in their neighbourhoods through the use of civic apps. Known as 'civic tech', it enables individuals to participate in services run by government and local government and generate content themselves relating to local areas, political activism and campaigning for change.

Part of the debate has concentrated on those groups which are regarded as socially excluded and homeless people are assumed to fit into this category. Whilst in some cases homeless people struggle to engage with digital technology it is an oversimplification to assume this is always the case. Research has shown that this group does own and has access to devices and services such as computers, mobile phone and the internet. There has also been a growth in the targeting of digital and online services to address homeless people's needs, engage members of the public with raising money, and help refer homeless people them to outreach services and support teams both in the UK and internationally.

The rapid growth in the market of digital platforms has been accompanied with limited success mainly due to low or short-term take up and design which limits the engagement of the user. Evidence and evaluation of the impact of civic tech is currently somewhat limited, especially in relation to attempts to work with or help socially excluded groups. The evidence that exists shows that civic tools need ongoing development to remain sustainable and relevant for a rapidly changing environment. Reviews of civic apps also pointed to key principles that are more likely to determine success: clear goals; identification of who influences the app; an understanding of the needs and expectations of those using it; some form of gratification or feedback mechanism for users; appropriateness of the choice of technology; and knowledge of the effects the app can have and attribution of the impact of the technology. These principles are useful to bear in mind when examining the role and effectiveness of StreetLink and the extent to which it meets these criteria. One of the gaps identified in the literature is that, whilst there is extensive evidence on what apps and other technologies do, there is very little about their effectiveness. The evaluation of StreetLink offers an opportunity to share learning among a range of stakeholders and fill this gap in evidence.

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<sup>31</sup> <https://medcitynews.com/2017/11/what-factors-drive-adoption-of-health-apps/>

# Chapter 3

## The goals of StreetLink

The literature review identified that having clear goals is one of the key principles that may predict the success of civic apps. Therefore, this section begins by setting out the goals of StreetLink and considering how and why StreetLink was set up, from the perspective of national stakeholders.

The goals of StreetLink are to:

- Provide the public with a means to take appropriate action when they see someone sleeping rough
- Provide early intelligence to local homelessness services about new rough sleepers
- Help get rough sleepers off the streets faster
- Highlight good practice and to improve systems for dealing with rough sleeping

The overarching consensus from national stakeholders for the reason behind the development and establishment of StreetLink was a desire to provide a swifter means to help rough sleepers, and enable member of the public to take action. Secondary to that was that, through providing a new medium for the public to notify authorities about rough sleepers, more intelligence would be gathered about local rough sleepers.

*The intention behind it was about making sure that the public had a tool to, when they see someone rough sleeping, tell someone about it so we can get help to them as soon as possible. We could avoid them spending any unnecessary nights on the streets. (St Mungo's representative)*

The impetus came from money that was made available by MHCLG and an existing partnership between Homeless Link and Broadway which was tasked with setting up something to meet the objectives of developing a mechanism nationally to collect information about people rough sleeping and connect them to local services.

*We had to come up with a name, we had to design the system, we had to talk to every local authority in the country, we had to build a website, we had to build mobile phone apps, we had to set up a phone line, hire staff, look at premises, do all the PR...and we had to launch it and make sure it worked. (Homeless Link representative)*

The original idea came from the ministerial level and was driven by an eagerness to channel the existing motivation amongst the public to help rough sleepers

they encountered. By providing a new means to identify rough sleepers it would get help to them sooner.

*It's really key in terms of identifying people who need help, and getting to them sooner, and reducing the length of time people spend on the streets... (St Mungo's representative)*

With more 'eyes and ears on the ground' and an increase in referrals of rough sleepers, another benefit anticipated of StreetLink was its ability to help improve (or even introduce) the service offer that a local authority can provide to rough sleepers.

*We could highlight...gaps in provision across the country. So, for example, if there was an area that gets a very large amount of StreetLink referrals but doesn't have an outreach service, then StreetLink would be a means of joining those dots together. (Homeless Link representative)*

*It will help again improve awareness of areas where we weren't aware of before...so, hopefully then you can say to boroughs, "Look, in the last few years we've had this many people seen sleeping rough or referrals from StreetLink, do you know much about this and would you consider having your own outreach team or can we part fund it?" (GLA representative)*

# Chapter 4

Evaluation question 1: To what extent does StreetLink provide the public with a means to take appropriate action when they see someone sleeping rough?

## 4.1 Awareness and 'correct' use of StreetLink

The general consensus from the national stakeholders interviewed was that StreetLink does provide a useful means to enabling the public to take action, but that there was significant room for improvement in terms educating the public to make the 'correct' referrals, i.e. genuine rough sleepers and not people begging or engaged in 'street activity'.

*It's mainly about the public and the way we made that better again...just advertising and making sure people know where to call and what the referral lines are, and also improve their knowledge about what's been done. (GLA representative)*

*But all the indications would be that, if it's made at midday, it's not really likely to be that person's sleep site, even if they are rough sleeping. So the team are trying to manage those referrals, and send through the most appropriate ones and filter out those which they deem to be inappropriate. (Homeless Link representative)*

Another issue felt by many, particularly those stakeholders in Wales, was that there is a significant lack of awareness about StreetLink among members of the public but also among businesses and community groups.

*I give lots of talks about StreetLink to businesses and to local groups and to people who are interested in the project and the number of people who have heard of StreetLink when I stand up and start speaking is normally five or ten per cent of the people I'm talking to. (Homeless Link representative)*

This lack of awareness was also echoed by other stakeholders, and is something of which the organisations running StreetLink are acutely aware. There is little marketing budget to promote StreetLink and, when there have been spikes in publicity (e.g. a celebrity Tweets about it), then the system is often overloaded.

*The first time that they publicised it locally, from one month to the next, I think they quadrupled the amount of reports they had. And that's possibly just because there wasn't that awareness there. We have had a very limited publicity budget. And luckily, particularly in the last year, we felt like we'd*

*be cutting off our nose to spite our face by publicising it until we've got a more robust system in place. (Homeless Link representative)*

The technological aspects of StreetLink were another area raised by stakeholders, which they felt could sometimes compromise the effectiveness of StreetLink to provide a means for the public to take appropriate action. These included the phone line, website and mobile app not always working in ways that they should.

*So, recently we've had some really positive developments in terms of technology...we did have some problems with the phone line and the app and the website not always working as well as they could do. (St Mungo's representative)*

Perhaps most alarming was the fact that, at times, the phone lines would not be functioning and calls to it would go straight through to voicemail.

*In what we had before there was quite a lot of flaws really because the website would often break...we had quite a lot of complaints about the app. And I suppose with the phone lines, all we could really have was a voicemail. (St Mungo's representative)*

There was also some discrepancy identified between the expectations of different StreetLink users as to who StreetLink is supposed to be used by.

While StreetLink was originally designed for members of the public to use to connect rough sleepers with local services, the data on who is using StreetLink, combined with findings from the case study interviews, identified that StreetLink is regularly used by rough sleepers themselves to self-refer, by homelessness organisations to refer their clients, by other organisations where homeless people may present (e.g. food banks), and even by local authority Housing Options teams to refer people who present as homeless to them.

Indeed, when respondents to the local authority survey were asked how StreetLink is used in their area, four local authorities in England (6% of respondents) reported that Housing Options teams refer their clients to StreetLink, and the same four local authorities reported that Housing Options teams give out StreetLink details to people approaching them for support. This reportedly happens in Brent, Barking & Dagenham, Southwark and Canterbury.

Indeed, a representative from the outreach team in Brent explained that StreetLink had called out the Housing Options team for contacting StreetLink and referring people presenting to them as homeless.

*I think the StreetLink team spoke with the local authority and said, "Well, it's not really acceptable for you, as a [Homeless Persons Unit], to be referring to this service, because they are coming to you to present as homeless, and you should be able to provide some kind of housing advice and answers..." (Outreach team, Brent)*



However, the result of this response from StreetLink was for the Housing Options team to change its approach and, instead of directly referring people to StreetLink, they would give the StreetLink number to people presenting to them as homeless and tell them to contact StreetLink themselves.

*However we noticed that they will do it by self-referral; so they will tell the client, "Here is the number you need to contact and provide a self-referral," instead of them saying, "Yes, it's coming from us". (Outreach team, Brent)*

It may be that StreetLink plugs a gap in the system that has been identified by these other groups of users. But the question remains whether StreetLink is the right tool for them to be using and, if so, whether it is fit for this purpose.

A member of the public from Brent who works for a food bank felt that StreetLink could play a slightly different role when receiving referrals through voluntary sector organisations rather than members of the public.

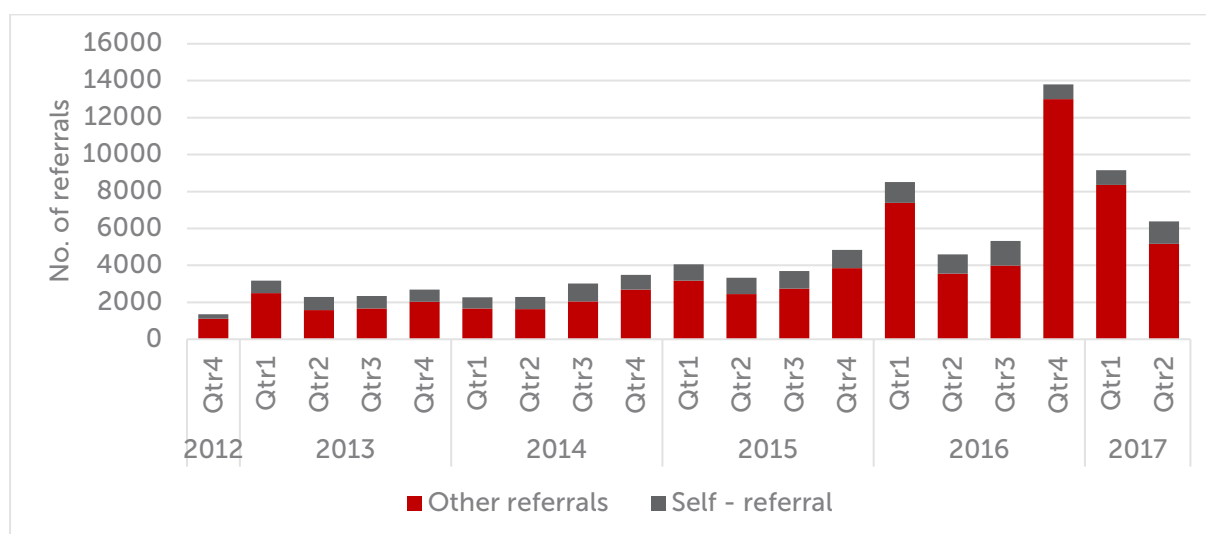
*I feel like the StreetLink system is tailored towards just individuals who want to refer someone they've come across on the street, but I don't know how well it works with a charity...There's voluntary organisations that are dealing face-to-face, on the frontlines with these individuals who are actually coming to ask them for help. So, it's one thing to refer someone who's on the street, but when it comes down to your organisation, looking for help, and when you've been told by all of the local organisations that specialise in this thing is to go through StreetLink, that's all you can do, so... it would be good if we could do more in that sense. (Member of public, Brent)*

## 4.2 Impact of different uses of StreetLink

### Impact of self-referrals

To understand how self-referrals contribute to the overall numbers of referrals, and thereby assess their impact on the workload of outreach teams responding to these referrals, the number of self-referrals over time can be considered, compared to overall referrals.

**Figure 4.1 Total number of self-referrals compared to all referrals (England)**



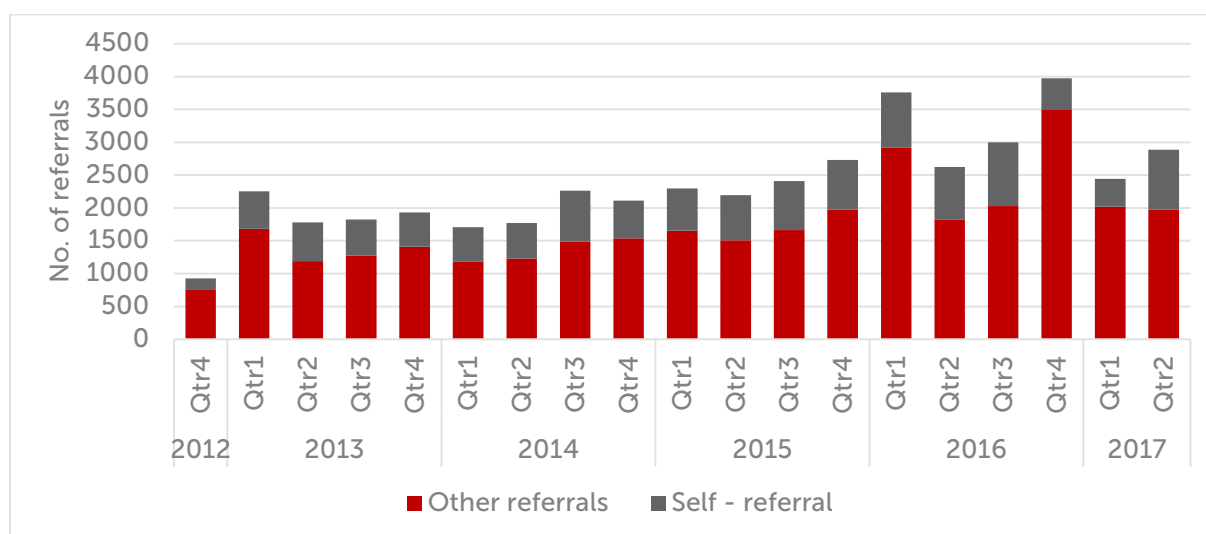
Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data

Figure 4.1 shows all referrals in England since the introduction of StreetLink in 2012, broken down into self-referrals and ‘other’ referrals (which includes businesses, friend or family, homelessness agency, members of the public, public/emergency services, and other).

Self-referrals appear to have maintained a relatively steady rate over time, whereas ‘other’ referrals rose significantly in 2016. This suggests that the number of self-referrals is not necessarily having a greater impact than other referrals on the workload of outreach teams; rather it is the number of referrals overall that may be driving their work.

As shown in Figure 4.2, in London the proportion of self-referrals compared to ‘other’ referrals is higher than for the whole of England, which may skew the overall self-referral figures. Again, self-referrals appear to have maintained a relatively steady rate over time, while ‘other’ referrals have risen. This suggests that self-referrals may have greater implications in terms of resource for outreach teams in London than for all of England.

**Figure 4.2 Total number of self-referrals compared to all referrals (London)**



Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data

It may be that the type of referral (self or other) has an impact on the outcome of the referral. Table 4.1 presents all outcomes recorded in England since StreetLink was introduced in 2012, colour coded according to StreetLink’s categorisation; green represents a ‘positive’ outcome and red represents a ‘negative’ outcome.

**Table 4.1 All referral outcomes recorded since StreetLink was introduced in England in 2012**

England	Referral type		Total proportion of outcomes over time
	Referral	Self-referral	
Person already known	20%	8%	18%
Other action taken	8%	14%	9%
Engaging with services	7%	7%	7%
Accommodation outcome	4%	10%	5%
Person found - unwilling to engage	2%	0%	2%
Person not found	33%	47%	36%
Local services did not respond	14%	7%	13%
Incomplete referral	6%	5%	6%
No action taken - identified hotspot	4%	0%	4%
Outcome not yet known	1%	1%	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data

This suggests a relationship between the type of referrer and the referral outcome such that, if the referral is made by a rough sleeper themselves rather than by someone else, it is:

- More likely that they are moved into accommodation (10% for self-referrals versus 4% for referrals)
- More likely that they are not found (47% for self-referrals versus 33% for referrals)

- Less likely that local services do not respond about the outcome (7% for self-referrals versus 14% for referrals)
- Less likely that no action is taken due to being in a 'hotspot'; a proxy for an inaccurate referral (0% for self-referrals versus 4% for referrals)
- Less likely that they are already known to services (8% for self-referrals versus 20% for referrals)

**Table 4.2 All referral outcomes recorded since StreetLink was introduced in London in 2012**

Referral outcome	Referral type		Total proportion of outcomes over time
	Referral	Self-referral	
Person already known	19%	7%	16%
Other action taken	11%	15%	12%
Engaging with services	5%	6%	5%
Accommodation outcome	6%	12%	8%
Person found - unwilling to engage	2%	0%	1%
Person not found	50%	55%	52%
Local services did not respond	2%	1%	2%
Incomplete referral	3%	3%	3%
No action taken - identified hotspot	1%	0%	1%
Outcome not yet known	0%	0%	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data

The findings for London referrals paint a similar picture to those for all of England (Table 4.2) However, there are some notable differences:

- While it is also *more* likely that the person is not found if they refer themselves than if they are referred by someone else (55% for self-referrals versus 50% for referrals), there is a much higher proportion of referrals resulting in the person not being found in London than for all of England (50% for London versus 37% for all of England)
- There is a much lower proportion of local services which did not respond in London compared to all of England (2% for London versus 14% for all of England) which could be a consequence of both a higher volume of services but also a more joined up approach to using StreetLink in London
- A slightly higher proportion of overall referrals resulting in an accommodation outcome was found in London (8% compared to 5% for all of England)

Table 4.3 presents all outcomes recorded in Wales since StreetLink was introduced in 2016, colour coded according to StreetLink's categorisation; green represents a 'positive' outcome and red represents a 'negative' outcome; those

with no colour coding are additional outcomes that have not been categorised by StreetLink.

**Table 4.3: All referral outcomes recorded since StreetLink was introduced in Wales in 2016**

Wales Referral outcome	Referral type		Total proportion of outcomes over time
	Referral	Self-referral	
Person already known	24%	8%	24%
Engaging with services	20%	0%	20%
Other action taken	3%	0%	2%
Person found - unwilling to engage	2%	0%	2%
Housing outcome	1%	10%	1%
Street activity, e.g. begging site	18%	10%	18%
Local services did not respond	16%	38%	17%
Person not found	13%	26%	13%
Inappropriate referral	1%	8%	1%
Person seeking advice - signposted to alternative services	0%	0%	0%
No entitlement to local services	1%	0%	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data

The table shows that there are slight variations in the outcome categories between England and Wales. If the referral is made by a rough sleeper themselves rather than by someone else, it is:

- *More* likely that they are moved into accommodation (10% for self-referrals versus 1% for referrals)
- *More* likely that they are not found (26% for self-referrals versus 13% for referrals)
- *More* likely that local services do not respond about the outcome (38% for self-referrals versus 16% for referrals)
- *Less* likely that they that they are already known to services (8% for self-referrals versus 24% for referrals)
- *Less* likely that no action is taken due to being in a 'begging site'; a proxy for an inaccurate referral (10% for self-referrals versus 18% for referrals)

One notable difference between the findings in England and Wales is that, whereas a self-referral in England is *less* likely to result in local services not responding about the outcome, in Wales a self-referral is *more* likely to result in local services not responding about the outcome.

Some of these findings are reflected in the feedback from outreach teams, for example that high proportions of referrals from members of the public (as opposed to self-referrals) are for people already known to services, or are inaccurate, i.e. begging or street activity rather than rough sleeping.

Indeed, outreach teams described that the level of detail received from rough sleepers referring themselves is often of better quality than in other referrals. Some also talked about providing a different response to self-referrals than to other referrals.

*But they're sort of quite specific, quite detailed information, we will try to get out to those straightaway and we've also lately had one or two that are self-referral through the mechanism, we've had at least one or two I think where people have said, "I am actually homeless," so they've actually used it to refer themselves. But then, we contact them straightaway, if they give us their phone numbers we contact them straightaway and we engage with them straightaway... (Outreach team, Cardiff)*

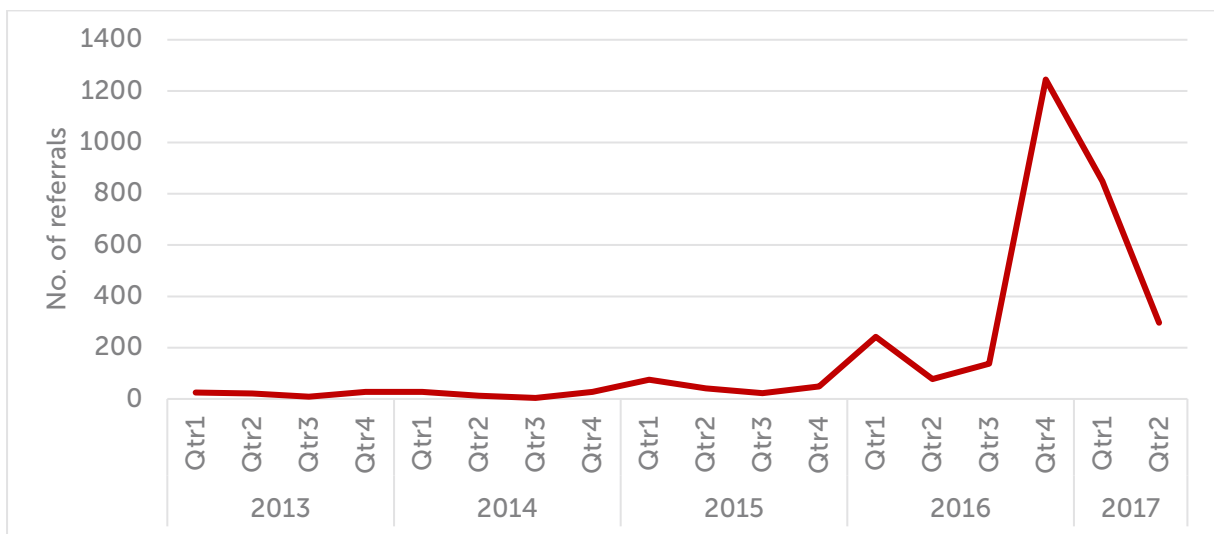
Linking back to the impact of self-referrals on the workload of outreach teams, these findings suggest that self-referrals may have a greater impact on workload given that they are *more* likely to result in the person being moved into accommodation, *more* likely that they are not found, and *less* likely to result in no action being taken. This could imply that more effort is required on the part of outreach teams to fulfil these outcomes, but that this effort is justified given that it results in positive outcomes being achieved.

## Impact of members of public referring beggars as rough sleepers

In England the proportion of all referral outcomes identified as being in a 'hotspot' (i.e. a begging site) is 4% (and only 1% in London), whereas in Wales it is higher at 18%.

Figure 4.3 shows the number of all referrals over time categorised by local authorities in England as 'no action taken – identified hotspot' or as 'street activity, e.g. begging site'. It shows that this category was historically low, but has been increasing since 2016, with a spike in winter 2016-17.

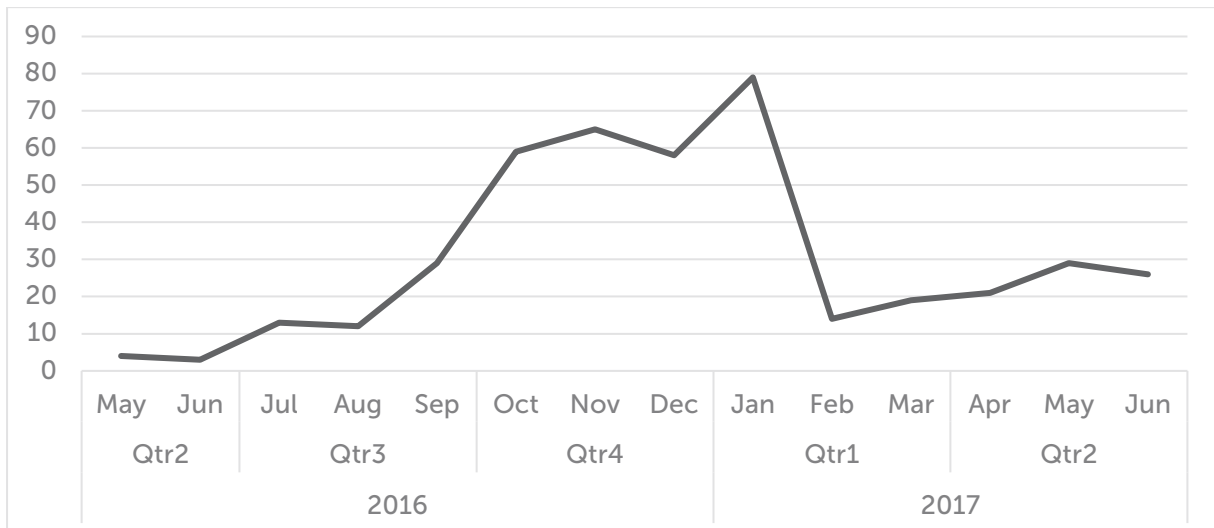
**Figure 4.3 Identified hotspot and begging site referrals over time (England)**



Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data

Figure 4.4 shows the number of all referrals over time categorised by local authorities in London as ‘no action taken – identified hotspot’ or as ‘street activity, e.g. begging site’. This outcome has only been systematically recorded in London since 2016 but, similarly to all of England, it peaked in the winter of 2016-17.

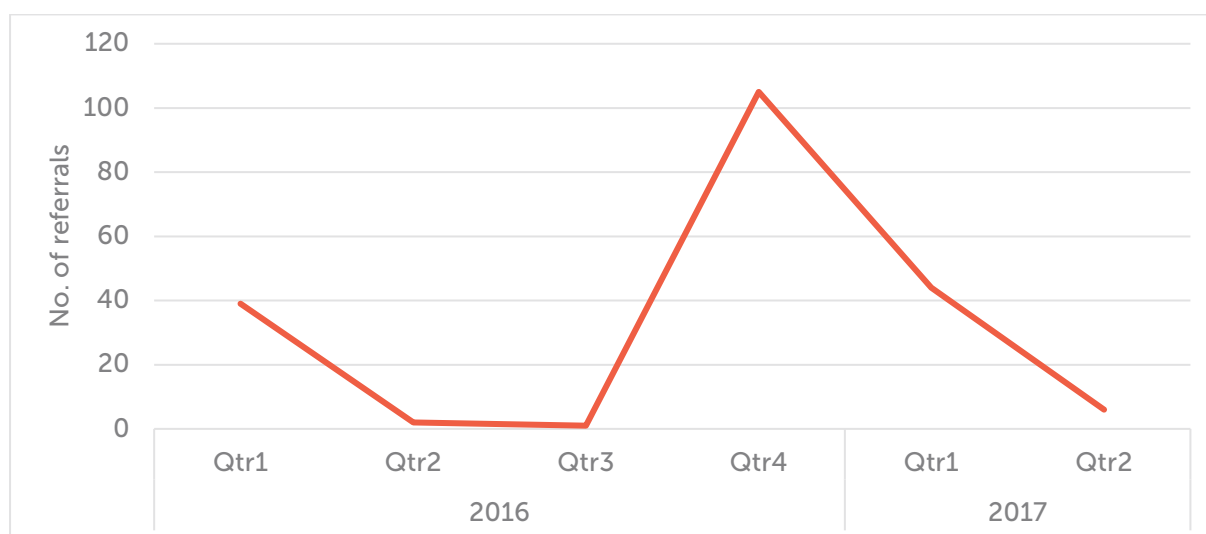
**Figure 4.4 Identified hotspot and begging site referrals over time (London)**



Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data

Figure 4.5 shows the number of all referrals over time categorised by local authorities in Wales as ‘Street activity, e.g. begging site’. It shows that there were initially a number of these referrals, which dipped and then spiked in winter 2016-17.

**Figure 4.5 Street activity including begging site referrals over time (Wales)**



Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data

Outreach teams and local authorities talked about receiving large numbers of referrals about beggars rather than rough sleepers.

*And we also found that there was a lot of referrals for street begging, people who are street begging rather than actually rough sleeping... (Outreach team, West Lindsey)*

*A significant number of referrals have insufficient information, or are of beggars rather than street homeless people. Outreach teams spend time looking unsuccessfully. (Local authority representative)*

It was suggested that this could be because members of the public are not always able to distinguish between someone who is begging and someone who is rough sleeping.

*What I found through giving presentations is your general member of the public cannot identify between a beggar and a rough sleeper. There is a Venn diagram for those two cohorts, there is a bit in the middle where they overcross, but we also know that there is two distinct groupings then as well. Not all rough sleepers beg, and not all beggars rough sleep. But a general member of the public perhaps wouldn't be able to identify those two different things. And why should they? (Homelessness service, Tower Hamlets)*

Receiving these 'inappropriate' referrals does not necessarily create additional work for outreach teams as they may not go out to find referrals who are considered to be in begging sites.

*So, obviously we'll close referrals if we know who they are or if we know it to be a begging site, we'll do that rather than going out and looking for them. (Outreach team, Tower Hamlets)*



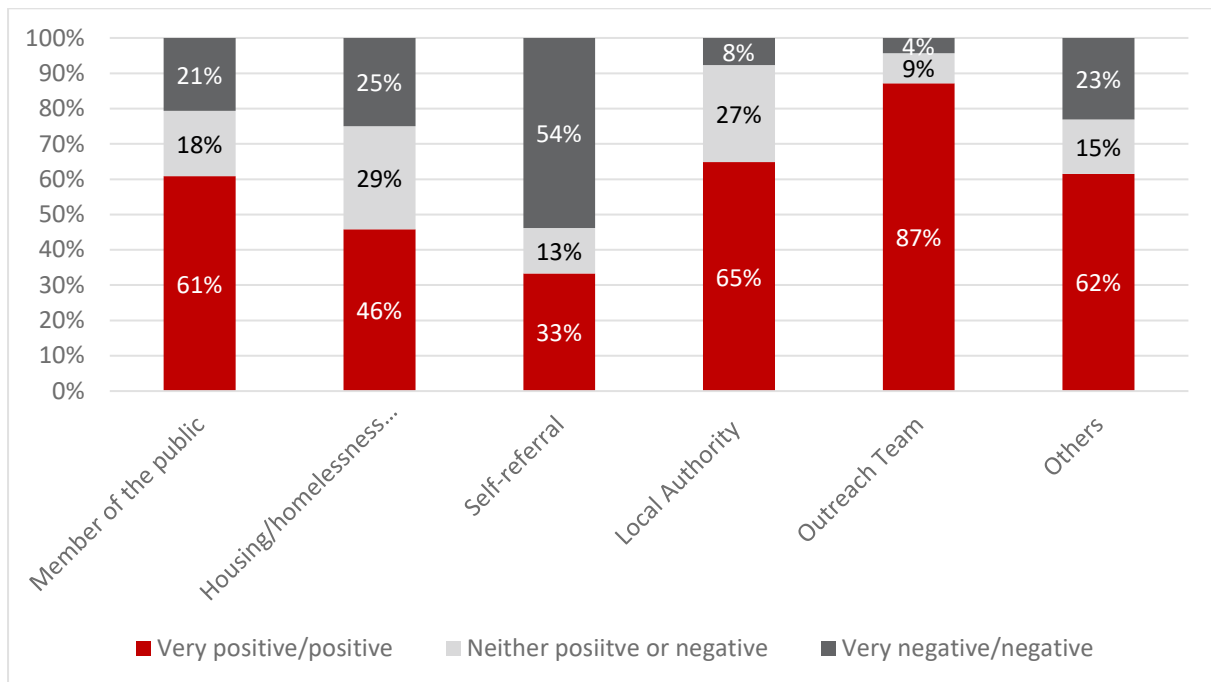
*We sometimes get referrals for people who are not homeless or rough sleeping. Generally, people begging and or looking disheveled. (Outreach team, Mendip District Council)*

However, if the referrals are provided by StreetLink to outreach teams, it does take time for outreach teams to process these referrals and decide what to do with them, which has an impact on their workload.

### 4.3 Perception of StreetLink

Respondents to the user, local authority and outreach team surveys were asked about their overall impression of StreetLink (Figure 4.6).

**Figure 4.6 How positive or negative is your overall impression of StreetLink? (England)**

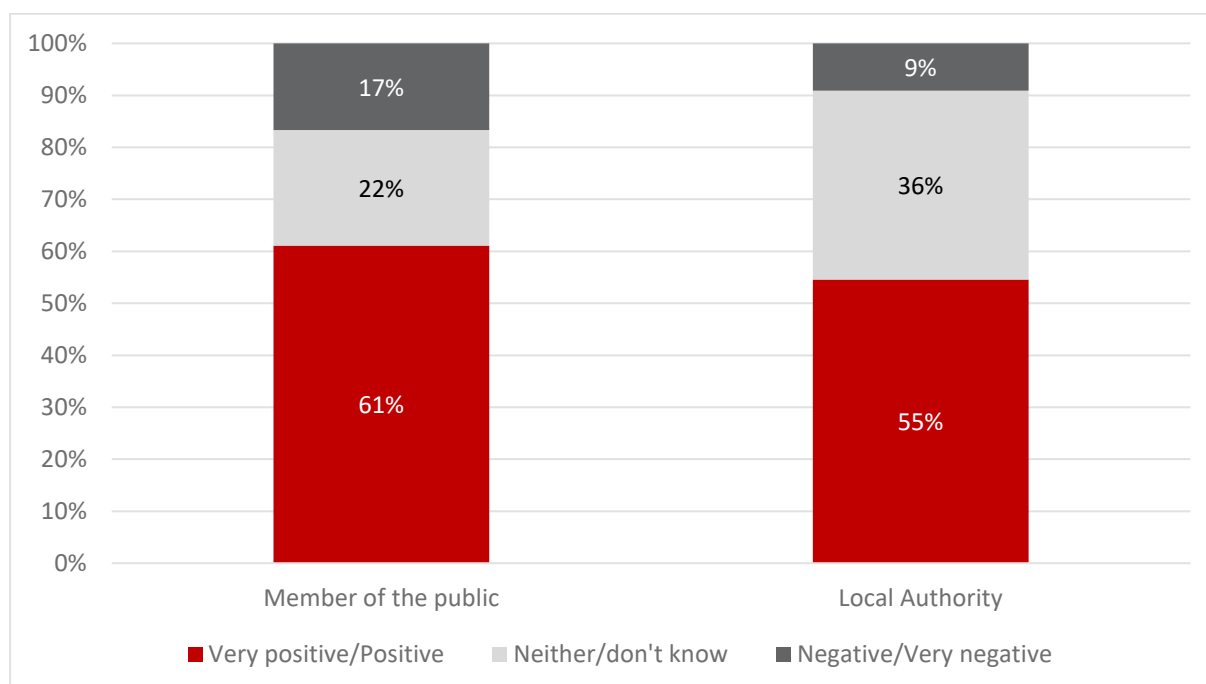


**Source: online surveys with StreetLink users, outreach teams and local authorities (n=24-179)**

Of the respondents in England, 61% of members of the public have a very positive or positive overall impression of StreetLink. Self-referrers have a worse impression of StreetLink, with over half of respondents (54%) having a negative or very negative overall impression of StreetLink.

Of the survey respondents in Wales (see Figure 4.7), the same proportion of members of the public have a very positive or positive overall impression of StreetLink (61%). Sample sizes were much smaller in Wales and there were no self-referral responses to the user survey in Wales and only two respondents to the outreach survey.

**Figure 4.7 How positive or negative is your overall impression of StreetLink? (Wales)**



**Source: online surveys with StreetLink users and local authorities (n=11–36)**

In terms of how they view StreetLink, some members of the public saw using StreetLink as an additional action they could take on top of things they had already done to try to help rough sleepers. Many members of the public interviewed had already taken some action to support rough sleepers, ranging from bringing them food, drinks and clothing, to volunteering for homelessness organisations. Others felt that using StreetLink was more of an immediate response to seeing someone sleeping rough, rather than part of a bigger picture.

*I'm not particularly a homeless champion, I'm just Joe Bloggs off the street...who came across it as a problem and needed to contact someone, and they were the people that I contacted. I mean, I'd love to be able to help, but... (Member of public, Bristol City)*

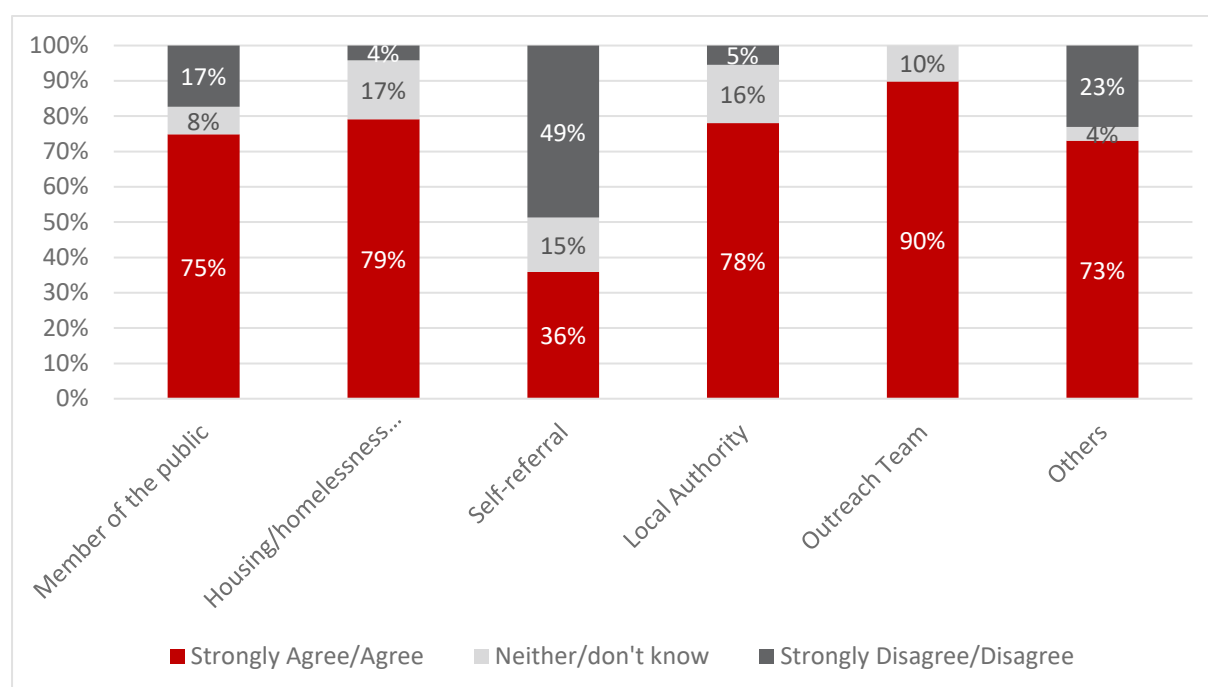
The motivation of members of the public was generally to feel that they are doing something about the homelessness situation.

*In Bristol I believe it's very bad, and I see it across the country. I'm pretty tuned into it, I think most people of my generation, but also of, particularly, my political standpoint, are very aware of it and the fact that it's getting worse... and it upsets me when I see homeless people. (Member of public, Bristol City)*

## 4.4 Perceived effectiveness of StreetLink

To establish whether they felt that StreetLink is effective in terms of meeting its stated aim (to help members of the public connect rough sleepers with local services), respondents to the user, local authority and outreach team surveys were asked to what extent they agree or disagree that StreetLink is a quick and easy way for members of the public to connect a rough sleeper with relevant local services (Figure 4.8).

**Figure 4.8 StreetLink is a quick and easy way for members of the public to connect a rough sleeper with the relevant local services (England)**



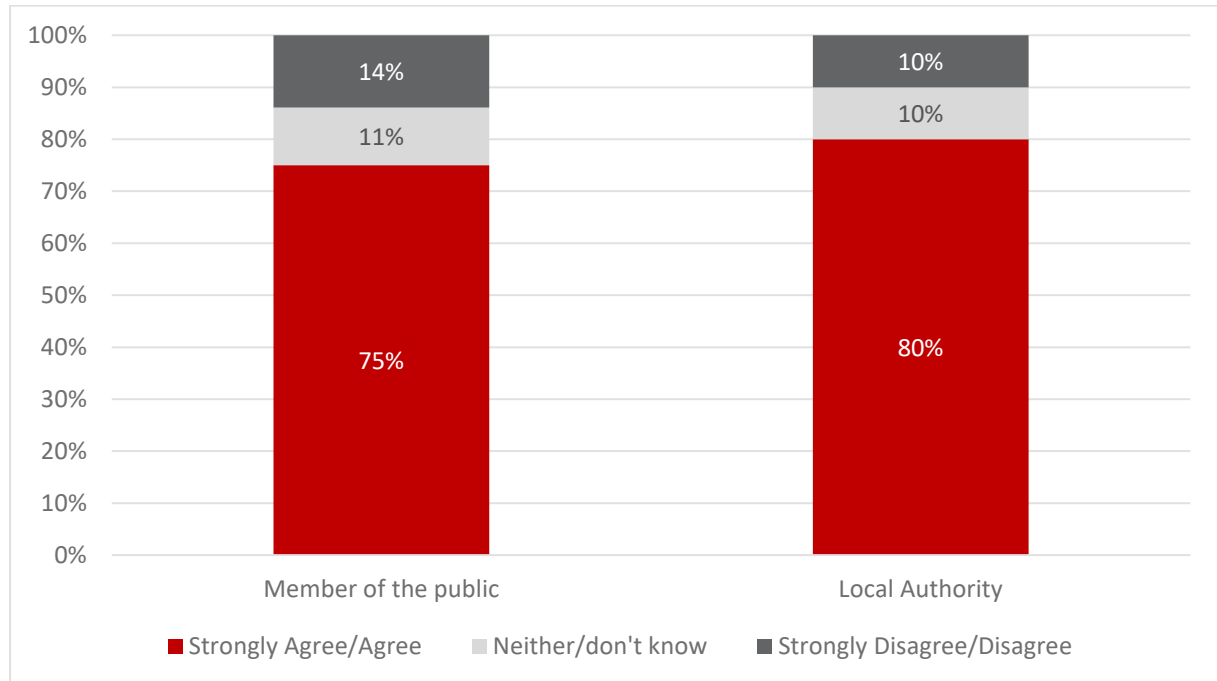
**Source:** online surveys with StreetLink users, outreach teams and local authorities (n=24–179)

Of the members of the public who responded to the survey in England, 75% agree or strongly agree that StreetLink is a quick and easy way for members of the public to connect a rough sleeper with relevant local services. This is mirrored by the proportion of positive responses from housing/homelessness professionals, local authorities, outreach teams and others (including health professionals, police officers and others). The proportion of self-referrers who disagree with this statement (49%) is notably greater than for the other categories of respondent.

Of the members of the public who responded to the survey in Wales (Figure 4.9), 75% either agree or strongly agree that StreetLink is a quick and easy way for members of the public to connect a rough sleeper with relevant local services. This is mirrored by the proportion of positive responses from local authorities. The number of responses from outreach teams and others (including health

professionals, police officers and others) was less than three and there were no self-referrals responses to the user survey in Wales.

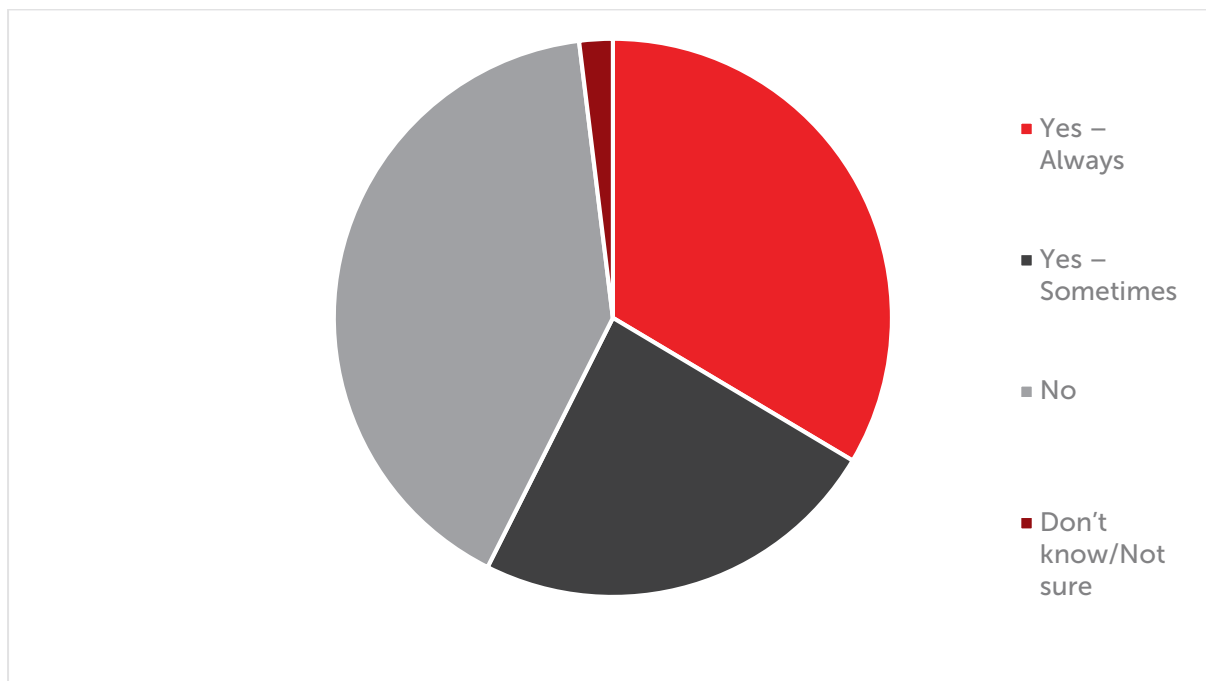
**Figure 4.9 StreetLink is a quick and easy way for members of the public to connect a rough sleeper with the relevant local services (Wales)**



**Source: online surveys with StreetLink users and local authorities (n=10-36)**

Interviews with members of the public suggested that their perception of the effectiveness of StreetLink was related to whether or not they had received feedback about the outcome of their referral. Figure 4.10 shows the regularity of the feedback received by respondents to the user survey after they had made a StreetLink referral; 24% always received feedback but 41% did not receive any information as a result of using StreetLink.

**Figure 4.10 Did you receive information about what happened as a result of your report to StreetLink?**



Source: online survey with StreetLink users

Those who had received feedback were more likely to think that it is an effective service.

*Someone actually goes out to them to give them information and support. I think that's a brilliant service, and then I think the fact that they go back to people who have made this kind of referral and do update them, is great, because people will probably do it again because they feel like they've made a difference and they know that something was actually done. It wasn't just gathering data or "thanks, we'll keep it on our records". Somebody actually went out to that person and tried to help them.  
(Member of public, Birmingham)*

Whereas those members of the public who had not received feedback about the outcome of their referral, or who felt that StreetLink should be providing more information about the difference they are making, tended to be less convinced about the effectiveness of StreetLink.

*I'd like to get feedback from the local authority but I'd also like to see stats from StreetLink as well to see how they think they have been successful really, and they need to get that feedback from the local authorities as well. Perhaps they do, I don't know. I don't really know how it works.  
(Member of public, Conway)*

Overall, satisfaction levels with the information received from StreetLink was positive – 60% of users who responded to the survey were either very or quite satisfied (n=55) but 23% were not satisfied (n= 21). Where respondents were not

satisfied with the information they received this was either because they were told that the rough sleeper had not been found, they didn't receive any information about the person as follow up, or they thought the information was very generic and did not tell them anything meaningful.

*Each time I have made a referral, the follow-up told me that by the time someone got to the area, there was no one there. It's disappointing because it suggests that this isn't passed on quickly enough and it's very likely a lot of rough sleepers would move around frequently, particularly as I reported these very early (before shops opened on main streets).  
(Member of public)*

When asked about the strengths of StreetLink in the user survey, the two most common responses were that it was quick, easy and accessible to use (30%) and that people felt it was a tangible thing they could do to address a visible problem about which otherwise they would not know what action to take (27%). Respondents suggested ways in which StreetLink could be made as effective as possible and suggestions were categorised under the following:<sup>32</sup>

- Increased advertising and awareness including stories about how and who StreetLink has helped (25%)
- Better feedback and communication about what has happened to referrals (9%)
- Quicker reaction to referrals to help rough sleepers quicker (5%)
- Improved links to accommodation and other services including offering more emergency accommodation (2%)
- More partnership working with local organisations including day centres and non-commissioned services (5%)

More awareness and advertising were by far the most substantial suggestion for improvement.

## 4.5 Public understanding of rough sleeping through StreetLink

Members of the public interviewed were asked whether they felt that they understood more about rough sleeping as a result of using StreetLink.

Reactions from members of the public were mixed, with many feeling that they had not learnt anything more about rough sleeping through using StreetLink. Where they felt better informed as a result of using StreetLink, they talked about understanding the homelessness system more as opposed to rough sleeping

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<sup>32</sup> Responses were open text answers and have been coded into broad categories

itself. Again, perceptions appeared to be linked to whether members of the public had received feedback about the outcome of their referral.

*The fact that the StreetLink assessment is kind of just a way to triage the person that you're meeting, into council services. Do correct me if this is wrong because I'm happy to keep learning! Yeah, I feel like before I was confused about who did the assessments, who run the services that were obviously approved, and linked into. And, I suppose when I first started using StreetLink, I assumed that the only services that people were linked to were like emergency accommodation. (Member of public, Coventry)*

Where members of the public wanted to learn more, the information they wanted was more about the process of what happens following a StreetLink referral, and what options are available to rough sleepers rather than a greater understanding of rough sleeping.

*It would be interesting learning what happens after that referral through to StreetLink, so I can kind of see what that process should be when someone's homeless, if that makes sense. For my own understanding and also for the understanding of these homeless individuals, so if they're asking while you're making a referral, "What's going to happen?" at least I have some more information for them. A bit more definitive than, "Someone's going to come from a local outreach team or whatever and help you." It's just, that doesn't sound very promising and probably makes them feel less likely that they're really in the place that they're supposed to be in to be picked up... (Member of public, Brent)*

*So, I knew they'd made contact, but I didn't really know the outcome of that, so I didn't really learn about what his options are. I still don't know how much a hostel costs, can you pay for somebody to go and stay in a hostel, are they guaranteed to get a place in a hostel, and I still don't know any of that stuff. (Member of public, Birmingham)*

One member of the public reported feeling motivated as a result of using StreetLink to go and seek this information out for themselves.

*It's quite good. I think it's using the website, then going away, because I'm one of these people, I'm quite curious, so I went away to do some research, spoke to different organisations, and people that I know who deal with this sort of thing. I went to speak to some hostels, to see what the situation was...I looked at it for myself. (Member of public, Bedfordshire)*

## 4.6 Expectations of StreetLink by different users

### Members of the public

*That made me feel really good that I'd done something and somebody had got back to me, actually, and said, "Yeah, we've found him and we've made contact with him." (Member of public, Birmingham)*

Members of the public were asked what they would expect to happen as a result of their referral. There seemed to be a general consensus that action should be taken to respond to their referral, in the form of someone going out and finding the person who had been referred. Once found, some felt that the person should be informed about what options are open to them, and what support is available, so that they could make a choice about what happens next.

*I know that not all of them are at a point where they're ready to accept help, but as long as that gentleman knew what services are available that could offer help and support him, that's as much as you could hope for, and that's what StreetLink provided. (Member of public, Cardiff)*

*I hoped somebody was going to go out to him and say, "Look, these are your options", because I think, sometimes, people might not want to change their situation, but I just wanted somebody to go out and say, "Look, if you need a hostel, this is where you can go, or if you need some food, we can get you food." I just wanted them to offer him some help and just make him aware of any options that were open to him, and I was just really pleased to get the feedback. (Member of public, Birmingham)*

Leading from this expectation, members of the public were frustrated when they discovered that the person they had referred had not been found. Indeed, some called for StreetLink to provide information on the process of what should happen once their referral has been made, so that they could understand what they might anticipate the outcome to realistically be.

Once action had been taken as a result of their referral, members of the public then expected some feedback to be provided to them by StreetLink, although there was some variation in the level of information expected in this feedback. Some were satisfied with knowing that their referral had received a response, whereas others wanted to know about the longer-term change in situation for the rough sleeper that they hoped would result from their referral.

*I think for them to come back to you and say, "Your referral has been picked up or has been found," is one thing, but to actually know what's the progress there. (Member of public, Brent)*

*Give long-term feed back to the people who use it, so that we can have a sense of progress with those we have tried to help. (Member of public, Cardiff)*

However, there was recognition from a number of members of the public that the need for confidentiality might prevent more detailed feedback being provided to them on the outcome of their referral.



*It would have been nice if somebody could have come back to me, and I'm sure there are reasons why they don't, if there are confidentiality issues and stuff, data protection. They probably can't go out and say, "Oh, he stayed in a hostel that night," but, if there was a way to say, "Actually, there's been some progress." I mean, "He's off the street," or "He doesn't want us to help him." A little bit more information would have been good. (Member of public, Birmingham)*

*So, did the outreach team find him? How long did it take for them to arrive? Were they linked up to services? I don't know how much of this is protected by confidentiality, but, kind of, which services? And, the absolute dream would be to have a follow-up sort of, two weeks, one month, three months down the line, to say, this is what's happened. But again, I imagine there is some confidentiality issues around that. (Member of public, Coventry)*

There was frustration from members of the public when no feedback was received, leaving them unsure about whether any response had resulted from their referral.

*I would like to know if the app actually works...I have reported multiple rough sleepers but have heard nothing back from StreetLink. I understand that you are very busy people so it is not a criticism, it's just I would like to know if the sleepers I reported were approached by the council/StreetLink. (Member of public, Durham)*

*I would have liked a follow up on the person I reported as I asked to find out what happened and never received any info so I don't know if they were helped. It would put my mind at ease if I could know that my report led to a response. (Member of public, City of London)*

*My frustration, it's not with the website, it's with the outcome...although I tick the box to say that I would like some feedback, I never do hear from the council regarding the feedback. And I know that the people I have referred are still in the same position, so I don't know really how I can help... (Member of public, Conwy)*

Some members of the public felt that, either instead of or in addition to feedback on their own individual referral, StreetLink should publish reports demonstrating its impact so that members of the public can understand the effectiveness of StreetLink and whether their referrals are making a positive difference to the rough sleeping situation in their area.

*It'd be good to get feedback, published feedback, from them to give their evaluation of referrals we've made. Because all I'm wondering is that once they've had the referral and then they pass that onto the local authority, is that the end of it? Do they get any feedback from the local authority? It's*

key that it is published so that you can see exactly if it is making a difference. (Member of public, Conwy)

I'm sure there's probably [data protection] stuff there that you can't give too much away, and it would be good just to know some successes. If StreetLink are out there doing stuff, they should be shouting about it to let people know. If people could see that they are going out and doing all this good work, people would be more inclined to make the referrals, to ring up or email if they see that they actually do go out to people. (Member of public, Birmingham)

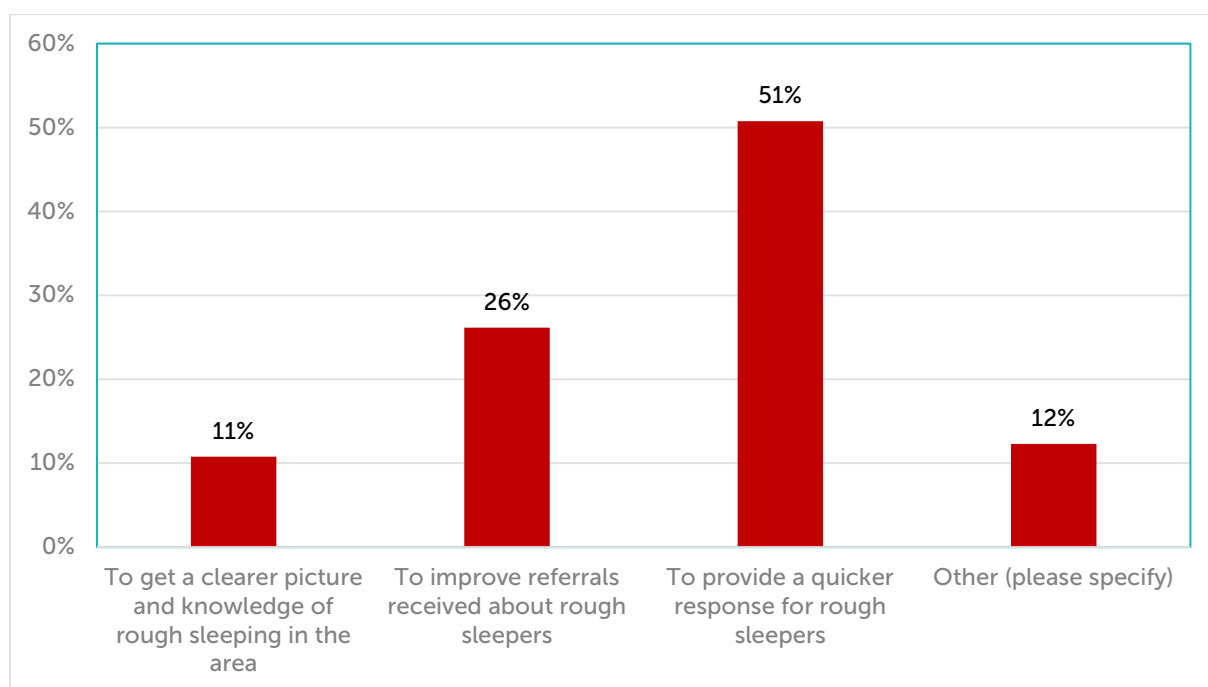
In the most recent iteration of StreetLink, launched in December 2017, a Frequently Asked Questions section has been introduced which details what referrers might expect to happen next after they have made a referral.

## Outreach services

Of the 72 respondents to the outreach survey in England, 59 are commissioned by a Local authority or City region to deliver the outreach service.

To understand what role outreach services expect StreetLink to play, respondents to the outreach team survey were asked about their main aim for using StreetLink (Figure 4.11).

**Figure 4.11 Main aim of using StreetLink by outreach teams (England)**



Source: online survey with outreach teams (n=65)

Of the 64 respondents to this question in the England survey, 32 (50%) said that they use StreetLink to provide a quicker response for rough sleepers, while

around a quarter (n=17, 27%) use StreetLink to improve referrals about rough sleepers, and 11% (n=7) use StreetLink to get a clearer picture of rough sleeping in the area. The one Welsh outreach team which responded to this question uses StreetLink to improve referrals about rough sleepers.

Of those using StreetLink to provide a quicker response for rough sleepers, 14 (44%) felt that this had fully enabled them to achieve this aim, with some outreach teams explaining that StreetLink referrals lead their response effort and enable them to respond quickly.

*We can instantly see StreetLink referrals on our smart phones or computer before or during a shift (Outreach team, City of London)*

*We have a team out every night and StreetLink referrals have enabled us to have a high response rate. (Outreach team, Westminster)*

However, 19 outreach team respondents (59%) felt that this aim had only been partly achieved, with some respondents explaining that challenges persist around the quality of referral information, in particular with regard to inappropriate referrals of beggars, and some delay in the time taken for StreetLink referrals to arrive.

*Referrals can be very hit and miss in terms of identifying actual rough sleepers, or beggars mistaken for a rough sleeping sighting. (Outreach team, Reading)*

*Referrals are received relatively quickly from StreetLink. There is sometimes a delay from when a member of the public tries to refer via phone. (Outreach team, Haringay)*

Of those aiming to improve referrals about rough sleepers, three outreach teams (18%) felt that StreetLink had fully enabled them to achieve this aim. Examples were shared of StreetLink providing easy access to referrals for the outreach team, and enabling rough sleepers to self-refer.

*We are a small team so often not in the office to take calls of referrals. This offers people an easy option to make a referral that the team can access on their shift. (Outreach team, Kensington and Chelsea)*

*StreetLink has been good at connecting rough sleepers with our services. (Outreach team, North Somerset)*

However, 14 outreach teams (82%) felt that this aim had only partly been achieved, some explaining that poor quality of referrals continued to pose a challenge.

*Whilst it is particularly useful to find rough sleepers in more remote areas who may be missed, referrals are not always clear and duplication creates extra work but this is definitely a price worth paying. (Outreach team, Gravesham)*

Indeed, the poor quality of referrals was the main reason why those outreach teams who responded to the survey but do not use StreetLink chose not to use the service.

Outreach teams were also asked about the extent to which Streetlink had improved the referral system for rough sleepers within the local area, meaning that rough sleepers are helped more quickly. Of the respondents, 64% agreed with this statement and 5% disagreed, with the remaining respondents neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

Some outreach teams said StreetLink helped them to find new rough sleeping spots and people they would not have otherwise found, especially in more remote areas.

*Good route for public to alert us to a rough sleeping site. (Outreach team)*

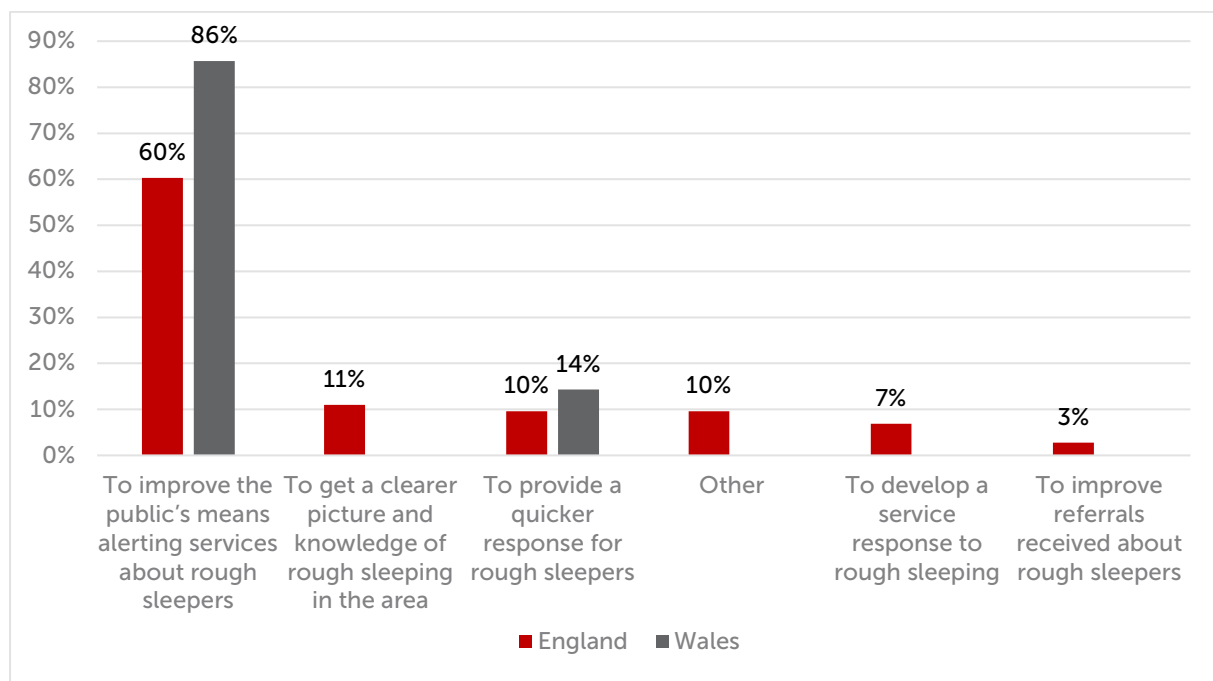
*StreetLink often helps us to locate rough sleepers we might otherwise not come across; it can be like extra pairs of eyes. (Outreach team)*

Outreach teams also noted that StreetLink was a good way to engage the public and local business so felt like they were doing something.

## Local authorities

To understand what role Local authorities expect StreetLink to play, respondents to the Local authority survey were asked about their main aim for using StreetLink (Figure 4.12).

**Figure 4.12 Main aim of using StreetLink by local authorities (England and Wales)**



Source: online survey with local authorities (n=73)

The main aim of the majority of the 71 local authorities in England who responded to the survey question (n=42, 60%) is to improve the public's means of alerting services about rough sleepers. This is also the main aim of all of the Local authority respondents in Wales.

*It's definitely helped Joe Public feel as though they aren't completely helpless and can do something. However, we feel that the referrals received often aren't particularly useful (e.g. 'rough sleeper outside shop down xxx avenue' doesn't give us a great deal to go on - xxx avenue is a huge street, doesn't tell us if they're male or female, nor what time they were seen. (Local authority respondent)*

Of these 42 respondents, 11 (26%) felt the StreetLink had fully enabled them to achieve this aim, and some explained that this was because they previously had no means of the public reporting rough sleepers, and because it had helped members of the public to alert them of new rough sleeping hotspots.

A further 28 respondents (67%) felt that StreetLink had partly enabled them to achieve this aim; some explained that the public's lack of awareness of StreetLink, and the public providing poor quality referral information represented barriers to its effectiveness.

The one respondent (2%) who felt that StreetLink had not enabled their local authority to improve the public's means of alerting services about rough sleepers explained that this was due to poor quality referral information being submitted.

*We have received multiple referrals for the same individual and sometimes the only information we receive contains 'male/female' and 'approximate age'. (Local authority, Fylde)*

The call for better access to data about StreetLink referrals, as expressed by some members of the public, was reflected in the expectation of local authorities that StreetLink should play a role in providing them with intelligence to inform their service delivery.

*Feedback from our outreach service is that StreetLink referrals received are generally ok, but that better information is provided when referrals are received to them directly, either via e-mail or phone. They very often have to ask for a lot more information when StreetLink referrals are received. (Local authority)*

Some local authority homelessness services have experienced challenges with receiving referrals, due to the limited capacity of StreetLink to process them. And there were also issues internally with processing referrals in time to be able to help the person get off the street.

*Unfortunately for us at the moment, by the time we've done referrals, about 70% of referrals are sent to No Second Night Out, the beds are full*

*because they close very early and it's a major problem... (Local authority, Brent)*

There were also issues with how rough sleepers can be supported due to cuts in funding for homelessness services. StreetLink can identify rough sleepers but there is still the issue of finding appropriate accommodation which also impacts on members of the public's expectations about what can be done to help rough sleepers.

*Through StreetLink we can establish the whereabouts of a rough sleeper, but since cuts to services we can only refer to available hostels which is normally out of the area whilst we work with them for a more suitable accommodation. (Local authority)*

Local authorities talked about the effectiveness of StreetLink when operating within a suite of interventions to address rough sleeping and felt that it should not be considered in isolation.

## 4.7 Discrepancy between expectations of different StreetLink users

Members of the public expect their referral to be responded to, and to receive information about what has happened as a result. Outreach teams explained the challenges with StreetLink referrals which may explain why the expectations of members of the public may not always be feasible to meet. This included their perception that members of the public may have unrealistic expectations about what will happen as a result of their StreetLink referral.

*I do sometimes think that there is an expectation on that person's part that we will just scoop them up off the street, because they are looking untidy or they are difficult or they are this or they are that - some people have an expectation of outreach that we have got a mask and a cape and a blue light, and we will just clean up that street! And that is not how it works, is it? So, I think sometimes people are disappointed, and also it is difficult due to confidentiality. So, people get frustrated and don't always see that there is a bigger picture happening, or appreciate that we are not enforcement, and we cannot do that. (Outreach team, Cornwall)*

They also identified capacity issues within StreetLink which could delay the processing of referrals and thereby take longer to provide a response to the rough sleeper and to inform the member about the public than they might expect.

*On the whole it works, but sometimes Street Link have put their hand up and gone, "There's a backlog." So that could be damaging; would people*

*then continue to use that if they haven't received the response? (Outreach service, Birmingham)*

## 4.8 Improved promotion of StreetLink to the public and the wider sector?

### Local campaigning and awareness raising

Of the 95 respondents to the Local authority survey in England, 71 (75%) currently use StreetLink and 6 (6%) used StreetLink in the past but do not currently. Of those which currently use or previously used StreetLink, 22 (31%) had implemented a public campaign to raise awareness of StreetLink. These included:

- Promotion on Local authority website
- Promotion on-site at the Local authority offices (e.g. on TV screens in reception, notice boards)
- News articles/press releases as part of wider campaigns about homelessness or rough sleeping
- Posters (near known rough sleeping sites or across the Local authority area)
- Social media
- Promotion to local businesses/at events
- Leaflets/flyers/StreetLink 'credit cards'/newsletters
- Promotion through other (commissioned) services/partner organisations

*It's also given us a platform off which to advertise around Christmas time, you know, things that people can be doing...for rough sleepers and homeless people, so it's helped us advertise at that point around not just them calling [StreetLink] but our other messages around rough sleeping. (Local authority, Tower Hamlets)*

When asked what impact they felt these campaigns had had on public awareness of StreetLink, 13 of the 22 local authorities (59%) felt that public awareness had increased, while 9 (41%) felt that public awareness had stayed the same.

Despite this, very few members of the public described having seen an awareness-raising campaign about StreetLink; only one had found out about StreetLink through social media.

*It was a chain Facebook post that came out. It was a few years ago; it was wintertime. So, it was kind of pushing the message that it's cold, that here is a service that you can use to refer rough sleepers...It just felt like a really practical intervention that I could use with members of the public, and I*

*think it was helpful that I saw that message in the winter because it felt, it felt really urgent. (Member of public, Coventry)*

Most members of the public interviewees described not initially knowing what to do when they saw someone sleeping rough, and then coming across StreetLink through an internet search.

*I didn't know who it would be, whether it would be Social Services, or anything, so I just got into work and did a Google search and eventually found StreetLink, and it seemed like the right people to go to when I read up about it. I'd never heard of StreetLink before. I'd never seen any advertising or any marketing for them, so when I found it on Google, I was quite pleasantly surprised because it exactly fitted the bill for what I was trying to do. (Member of public, Birmingham)*

Local authorities noted that one impact of awareness-raising campaigns had been receiving increased numbers of referrals, which also means increased numbers of referrers with expectations that action will be taken to respond to their referral. This could be a positive impact if the outreach provision is set up to be able to respond to these.

*I think we'll see the difference when it comes to the winter time; because there are more campaigns around StreetLink, the number of referrals increase...maybe because there's a lot of campaigns during the Christmas time, and people are more sensible: it's winter, it's cold, they want to do something to help the person. So, it has been quite helpful. (Outreach team, Brent)*

However, in areas where outreach provision is more limited or non-existent, this could result in referrer expectations not being met and rough sleepers not being helped.

*Social media campaigns in previous years however, this has raised expectations of what help can be provided as we have no outreach services. (Local authority, Wealden District Council)*

Several local authorities and many members of the public suggested that a national awareness-raising campaign could help to make StreetLink more effective. Some local authorities noted that they would be more inclined to consider a coordinated awareness-raising campaign if they felt that existing referrals were not capturing the majority of rough sleepers. One suggested that campaigns would be easier if some guidance or templates were provided by StreetLink.



The user survey results found that, when asked about how StreetLink could be made more effective, 29%<sup>33</sup> of users responded by saying that greater awareness raising or advertising could improve it as many people didn't know what it was:

*Further marketing - I'm not convinced it is widely known. (Member of the public)*

*Maybe more advertising - I found the service the first time through searching on the internet for advice/help and so knew it as a 'go to' when I wanted advice again. I've also told other people who have expressed similar concerns about people they have met and talked to as they weren't aware of it. (Member of the public)*

Some of the members of the public interviewed also suggested awareness-raising campaigns to promote StreetLink to the public.

*I think it needs a massive marketing campaign. It needs to be out there. A lot of people might walk past somebody that's homeless, and they've forgotten about it by the time they get to work or they get home. They might have forgotten about it, but if they've seen a poster to say 'Ring StreetLink' or 'Email StreetLink' we can do something. If they were aware of it and it was a bit more out there, I think more people would do it. (Member of public, Birmingham)*

*I think posters. I imagine the budget for this kind of thing is a bit stretched, but I really think advertising in public spaces, like posters and billboards, and things like that. (Member of public, Coventry)*

Local authorities, outreach teams and homelessness services talked about the need for creating more targeted campaigns which aim to increase the understanding of members of the public about rough sleeping, and thereby improve the quality of StreetLink referrals.

*I think that another big issue is the way people use StreetLink. For example, we do receive a high number of referrals where people are begging, or street activity, and I think that's probably more a campaign about, 'What is a proper rough sleeper?' because I think people just see someone sitting outside, and they will refer because they want to help, and the person is saying, "Yes, I'm homeless," but it doesn't mean they are rough sleeping... (Outreach team, Brent)*

*It may be that sometimes they're not being vetted well enough and people are actually begging and they're not rough sleeping or there might be those sorts of issues, but it's how a public helpline tries to motivate and engage the public in an issue. (Local authority, Tower Hamlets)*

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<sup>33</sup> The question was an open text answer so responses were unprompted

*Why isn't it advertised? It opens it up to a huge amount more referrals that aren't going to be very good. So, it can only be advertised with a lot of information behind it on how to use it and why to use it and when to use it. (Homelessness service, Tower Hamlets)*

In West Lindsey, where a local freephone number is more widely used than StreetLink, the outreach team representative explained that this kind of targeted campaigning and educating the public about the difference between rough sleeping and begging means that the freephone number does not receive many inappropriate referrals.

*I think maybe because we promote our freephone number locally and we are able to speak and explain to local organisations exactly what it is, and we try to do a lot of work locally around differentiating between the difference between street begging and rough sleeping. And helping to educate people I think on the differences. (Outreach team, West Lindsey)*

There was also recognition from local authorities and outreach teams that StreetLink needs to be adequately resourced in order to be able to respond to the increased number of referrals likely to result from awareness-raising campaigns.

*Okay, when it's been highly promoted – the latest one I can think of must have been a year and a half ago, when it was really promoted to the public and then they were swamped, overwhelmed with StreetLink referrals. So, basically, then they couldn't process them quick enough and, by the time a local outreach team got hold of them, a couple of days would have passed, and people may have moved on from rough sleeping. That was quite a big problem. I would get a complaint, somebody from the public would ring me and say, "Why hasn't this person been picked up or why hasn't somebody come back to me?" and I'd call the outreach team and they were like, "We've only just got the referral through". So that is one problem with the big promotion of it if you don't have enough funding and the capacity to actually service when they phone us. (Local authority, Tower Hamlets)*

Some local organisations have taken it upon themselves to inform the public of the action they can take if they see someone sleeping rough.

*The last time I presented to [name of company] in the City on homelessness, and part of one of my presentations is to mention StreetLink, and there wasn't a single person in a group of I think there was about 35 people in the room, there wasn't a single person that had StreetLink on their smart phones, and I made them all download it there and then, and put it on and showed them how to use it. (Homelessness service, Tower Hamlets)*

## Partnership working

Suggestions were made about the potential for partnerships with companies and local services to play a useful role in promoting StreetLink to employees, customers and contacts, with a range of examples provided of where this is already being done and leading to new referrals. Currently, StreetLink has one partnership with a waste management company, Biffa; the case study below explores this more detail.

An outreach team suggested that StreetLink could approach large supermarkets and national shops which are likely to have rough sleepers sleeping in doorways or round the back of car parks and alleyways, and develop national partnerships with them.

*StreetLink could actually build that relationship with those organisations so those staff are aware of who to contact and what to do if they saw somebody rough sleeping. I suppose that would help us actually.  
(Outreach team, West Lindsey)*

There was also a suggestion from a local homelessness service that other organisations could play an effective role to promoting targeted communications about StreetLink to local communities.

*If we do open it up uncontrolled, that could go to disaster very quickly, but I think the solution then is to use us as homelessness organisations to talk to our communities, to speak to the police, to speak to the local faith-based organisations, to speak to the NHS, all the stuff we are doing anyway around community engagement, use us to do that. (Homelessness service, Tower Hamlets)*

However, they felt that StreetLink could actively support this kind of initiative by providing local services with standard materials and templates to use when promoting StreetLink, in order to achieve a consistent message regarding when and how to use StreetLink. Providing standardised materials also came through strongly in the ideation workshops in Cardiff, Manchester and London.

### ***Case study: Biffa partnership***

*Biffa plc is a waste management company. It provides collection, landfill, recycling and special waste services to local authorities and industrial and commercial clients in the UK. Biffa initially approached StreetLink as a result of its staff finding people rough sleeping in or around their bins, and wanting to do something to help.*

*Biffa explored the possibility of each of its depots having links with local homelessness charities but found that the administrative burden of working in that way would be too great for its staff. The StreetLink offer of a single point of contact to report rough sleepers presented an ideal solution to this challenge, and the partnership has now been up and running for around four years.*

*For me, it is the one-stop shop; if we find someone sleeping in or around a bin, we know there's one number, one app, one website we can go to and report it, and it's simple, it's straightforward. (Biffa representative)*

*From the outset, Biffa was keen that the partnership was based on more than simply providing financial support to StreetLink. While Biffa has raised money for StreetLink through corporate events, the core aspects of the partnership are promotional and strategic. Biffa promotes StreetLink to customers through information is included on the leaflets that customers receive from Biffa.*

*Essentially, the biggest thing we can do is raise awareness. We raise awareness of homelessness and people sleeping in bins, and we raise awareness of the StreetLink charity by making sure that their details are included in the documentation that we hand out to our customers. (Biffa representative)*

*Biffa also trains its staff so that they know what action to take if they encounter someone sleeping rough in or around their bins. On a strategic level, Biffa has been instrumental in supporting the expansion of StreetLink, for example providing StreetLink with intelligence on the number rough sleepers found in or around bins in Wales to support the rollout of StreetLink into Wales. At the same time, Homeless Link has supported Biffa on an industry-wide steering group that was set up to address the issue of homeless people sleeping in and around bins.*

*For Biffa, the missing element of the partnership is understanding the impact of reports its staff and customers are making. Anecdotal evidence exists as to the difference that the partnership is making in terms of alerting outreach teams to rough sleepers about whom they otherwise would not have known. However, in order to maintain the motivation of staff to continue making StreetLink referrals, and feel that these are really making a difference, Biffa would like more comprehensive feedback about the outcome of these referrals.*

*[continued...]*

*Homeless Link has been open with Biffa about the challenges involved in identifying this kind of information, and some options have been discussed, for example including 'Near a waste container' or 'In a waste container' as location options a referrer can select. Capturing this data would help to establish how big an issue this is for the industry, and not just Biffa.*

*If StreetLink were to develop similar partnerships, Biffa suggests that the most effective companies would be those likely to encounter rough sleepers day to day, and those that have a vested (corporate) interest in addressing the problem. For example, distribution companies such as the Post Office or milkmen who are working on the streets early in the morning and could be trained to make referrals to StreetLink.*

## Local ambassadors

Members of the public spoke of using word of mouth to let others know about StreetLink, suggesting that it can play a role in promoting StreetLink.

*I would recommend StreetLink because for the most part it's good. I think it makes that individual feel like they've helped; whether they actually have, I don't know. I guess I would recommend it, but I wouldn't be confident in the outcomes per se. I would recommend it because it's the easiest alternative to anything else, because there's no other kind of referral process that is simple for someone who hasn't experience of homelessness. (Member of public, Brent)*

*Yes, I have done already when I've been speaking to people about rough sleepers. I've said, "Oh, did you know there's this really good charity? There's no pressure on you, but you can easily just drop them an email and let them know." They go out to them, they find them, they tell them about the support services, and stuff, so I have told people about StreetLink, and I have told them how easy it is to use. (Member of public, Birmingham)*

There were also suggestions in the ideation workshops of training people to become local ambassadors of StreetLink who could promote it at a local level to community groups, local businesses, schools and colleges. This could be through regular members of the public who use StreetLink and through local homelessness organisations.

## 4.9 Chapter 4 summary: Key points

There was general consensus across different stakeholder groups regarding a lack of awareness about the existence of StreetLink amongst members of the public and others (businesses, community groups, etc.). Limited marketing

budget and limited resource to respond to spikes in referrals have prevented the organisations running StreetLink from actively promoting the service. However, more awareness and advertising were by far the most frequent suggestion for improvement from StreetLink users.

Local authorities, outreach teams and homelessness services emphasised the need for creating more targeted campaigns which aim to increase the understanding of members of the public about rough sleeping, and thereby improve the quality of StreetLink referrals. There is potential for partnerships with companies and local services to play a useful role, with StreetLink providing standard materials and templates to achieve a consistent message regarding when and how to use StreetLink.

The majority of members of the public who have used StreetLink in England and Wales have a positive overall impression of it, and believe that is a quick and easy way for members of the public to connect a rough sleeper with relevant local services. Those who had received feedback about their referral were more likely to think that it is an effective service than those who had not received feedback.

There has been a marked increase in the use of StreetLink by members of the public in recent years. As the use of StreetLink by members of the public peaked in winter 2016-17 in England and Wales, this was accompanied by an increase in referrals of people begging or involved in 'street activity' rather than rough sleeping. While outreach teams may not respond to these 'inaccurate' referrals, processing them can result in an additional administrative burden for them and the StreetLink team.

StreetLink is being used regularly by a variety of different groups in addition to members of the public for which it was originally designed, including rough sleepers themselves to self-refer, by homelessness organisations to refer their clients, by other organisations where homeless people may present (e.g. food banks), and even by local authority Housing Options teams to refer people who present as homeless to them. This has led to suggestions that different iterations of StreetLink could be developed to cater to the various needs and expectations of these different groups.

Members of the public using StreetLink generally expect a minimum level of feedback about their referral, and ideally to know what difference it has made, whether for the individual rough sleeper they had referred or through evidence demonstrating the impact that StreetLink referrals are having on rough sleeping in their area. There was found to be inconsistency in the extent to which feedback had been provided to members of the public, and the level of detail included. This inconsistency has led to frustration among users and in some cases deterred people from using StreetLink again.

The type of referrer can have an impact on the referral outcome. If referrals are made by a rough sleeper themselves rather than by someone else, it is *more*

likely they will be moved into accommodation, *more* likely they are not found, *less* likely that they are already known to services, and *less* likely to be an inaccurate referral. This was found to be the case in both England and Wales. These findings suggest that self-referrals may have a greater impact on the workload of outreach teams, given that they are more likely to result in the person being moved into accommodation, more likely that they are not found, and less likely to result in no action being taken. This could imply that more effort is required on the part of outreach teams to fulfil these outcomes, but that this effort is justified given that it results in positive outcomes being achieved.

The perception of StreetLink amongst those people who have used it to self-refer in England and Wales is less positive than among members of the public. They were found to be more likely than members of the public to have a negative overall impression of it, and less likely than members of the public to believe that is a quick and easy way for members of the public to connect a rough sleeper with relevant local services.

# Chapter 5

Evaluation question 2: To what extent does StreetLink provide early intelligence to local homelessness services about new rough sleepers?

## 5.1 Data quality and referral mechanism

### Operators and funders

The majority of stakeholders felt overall that StreetLink is providing early intelligence to local homelessness services about new rough sleepers.

*I think in terms of that fundamental message, we are seeing a high level of reports of people sleeping rough, many of whom are new to the streets – by no means all – and that we are passing those referrals in real-time to local authorities and that from our follow-up they are going to find those people as a result of StreetLink reports and provide them with advice and support and accommodation. (Homeless Link representative)*

However, one of the problems identified by stakeholders was that, in some cases, the quality of the data received in the referrals was not of particularly high quality. Referrals would sometimes be vague and the descriptions of the rough sleeper referred were not detailed enough to identify them. The consequence of this is to make it much harder for local authorities and outreach teams to respond to the referrals. Outreach teams would go out and search for an individual only to not be able to find them. In terms of the time and resource capacities of these services, these are pressing issues.

*We work really closely with outreach teams and so, yes, it can be very frustrating that the not-found rate is quite high and I think maybe some outreach teams might say that the quality referrals at StreetLink are not as good as maybe they would be. (Homeless Link representative)*

*The other part of it is not very good referrals, which is basically, you get a bit of a vague description or a vague location. All that kind of thing that makes it very hard for us to actually complete a referral and send it to an outreach team because they're not realistically going to find them. (St Mungo's representative)*

Further to this was the view by stakeholders that members of the public were frustrated when they wanted to receive follow-up information about the outcome of the referral they had made but received nothing.



*From the monitoring meetings I know that, when the public make a referral, they want to know what happened. The communications chain is difficult. It would be good to give the public a realistic estimate of when they can expect feedback about their referral. (MHCLG representative)*

Stakeholders themselves also felt frustrated that the chain of communication between local authorities, outreach teams and StreetLink did not function as well as it could and was an area that needed improvement.

*We're not in a position to say, "That person was found and they don't want to engage with services", but what it does mean is that we do get a lot of frustration from members of the public who – because we can't share that information, they do freak out on us because they feel like nothing is being done, whereas in actual fact an outreach team have been out a lot of times to try and engage but that person isn't engaging at the moment, so I think that's a – that's where we get a bit of conflict from members of the public I feel. (Homeless Link representative)*

Some stakeholders also expressed frustration that some local authorities do not respond to requests for updates from StreetLink. Despite the expectation that outcome data should come back to StreetLink from local authorities within ten days, the reality is that in some areas they have to be chased:

*We need to make things a lot more effective in terms of getting outcomes back, especially from local authorities that aren't in London, that don't engage as much at the moment and I can see why, the fact that we're sending a manual email every week to try and get as many outcomes back as possible, that a service like ours isn't really up to scratch. (Homeless Link representative)*

*Only able to do this when contact information provided. It is also a time consuming process. (Outreach team survey respondent)*

## Local authorities and outreach teams

Of the respondents to the local authority survey in England, 30% agreed that StreetLink is (or had been) an integral part of their local authority's strategy to end homelessness, compared to 70% who were either neutral or who disagreed. The proportions were similar in Wales (33% agreed; 67% were either neutral or disagreed).

The extent to which local authorities use StreetLink to direct their work varies greatly between local authority areas. This ranges from outreach teams being commissioned to be largely directed by StreetLink referrals, as is the case in Tower Hamlets in London, to outreach teams using their own freephone number to receive referrals, which they feel is more effective than using StreetLink, as is

the case in West Lindsey and Manchester. These differences are explored in more detail in the case studies section.

Only 14% of English local authority respondents and 17% of Welsh local authority respondents said that StreetLink had replaced any existing means that members of the public had to refer rough sleepers (e.g. an existing phone line).

*Previously the public would have to refer rough sleepers directly to the Council. Referrals were rather haphazard. (Local authority, Staffordshire)*

*Yes, we have used a separate number in the past but it was manned by a generic team with no rough sleeping knowledge. We also operate Streetconcern in the borough but we tend to reserve this for stakeholders and businesses in the local area. (Local authority, City of Westminster)*

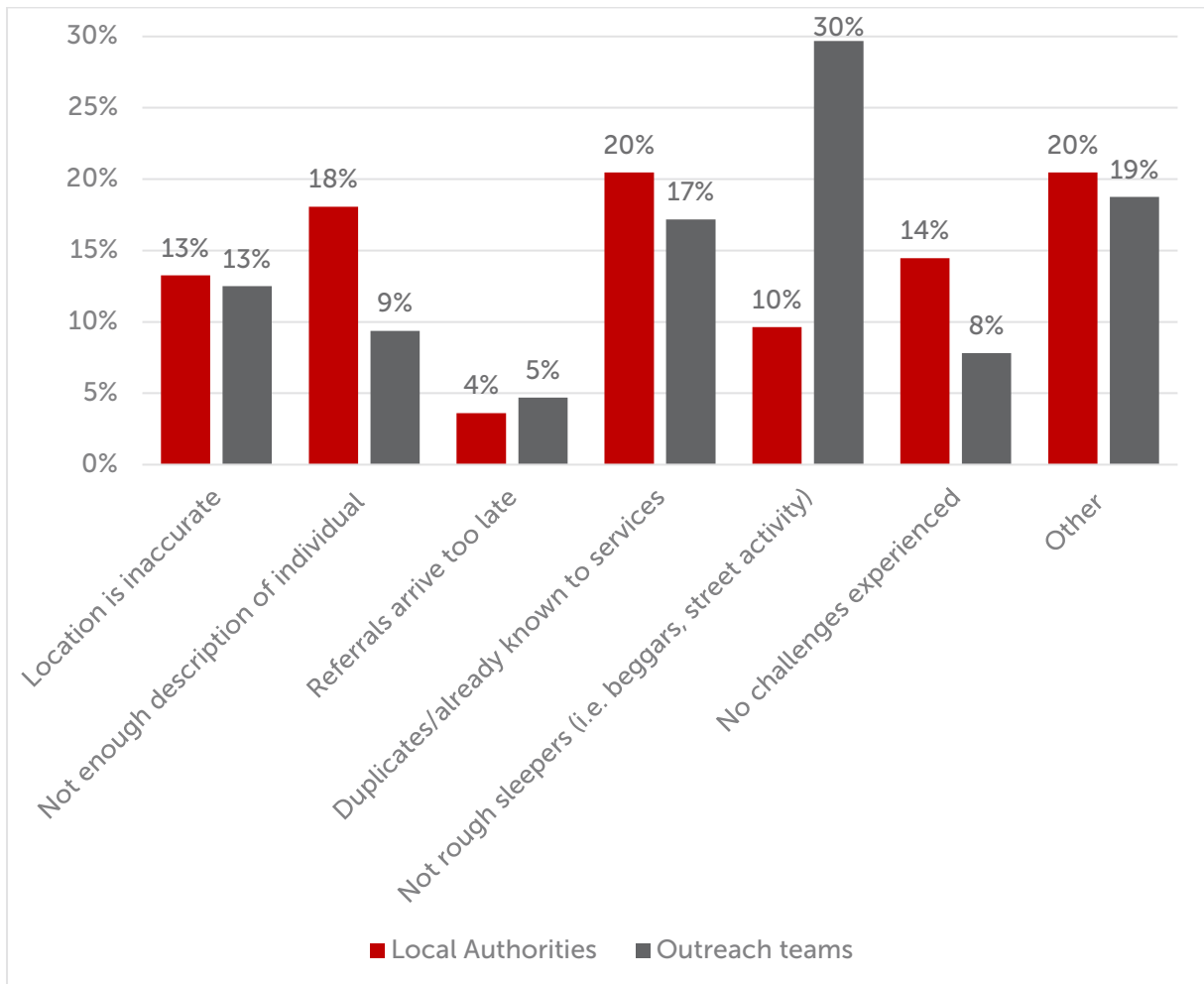
In terms of the usefulness of StreetLink in directing their outreach work, many local authorities and outreach teams pointed to the added value of StreetLink in alerting them to rough sleepers of whom the outreach teams might not have been aware.

*If anyone's sleeping in a stairwell that we didn't know about in parts of the borough that aren't as busy then yeah, it definitely does bring quite a lot of people to our attention that we wouldn't have known about otherwise. (Outreach team, Tower Hamlets)*

*It is a go-to tool for a member of the public who spots someone and thinks, "what can I do?" It gives that person a tool to notify someone and it does in this case, that there is a person in that doorway or that field or whatever, so I think it is brilliant! Because like I said, Cornwall is so rural, really rural. Sometimes we have got people in the most bizarre places, that you would never think to find them. And we get notified that that is where they are. (Outreach team, Cornwall)*

However, many local authorities and outreach teams reported challenges with the quality of referrals received through StreetLink in terms of duplicate referrals, insufficient information with which to be able to find people, and the unpredictability of referrals received through StreetLink in comparison with the more detailed referrals that come from within the homelessness sector. The challenges experienced by local authorities and outreach teams in England are presented in Figure 5.1.

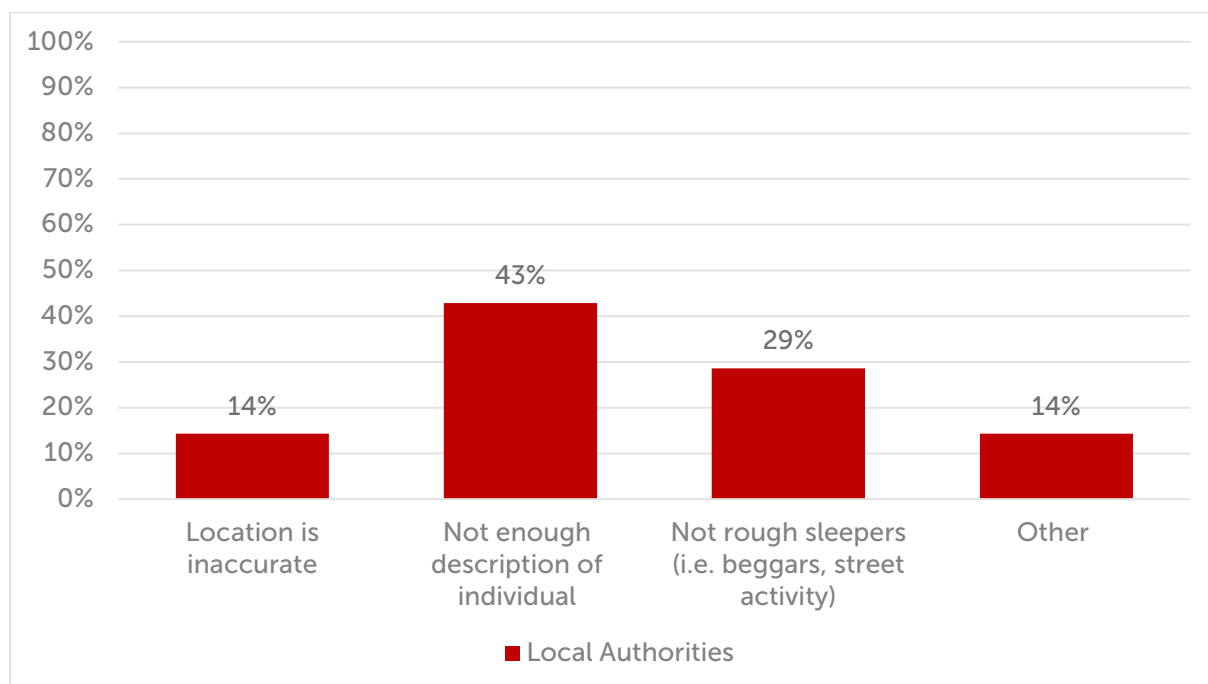
**Figure 5.1 Main challenges with StreetLink referrals experienced by local authorities and outreach teams (England)**



**Source: online survey with local authorities and outreach teams**

The challenges experienced by local authorities in Wales are presented in Figure 5.2 which shows similarities with the challenges identified in England.

**Figure 5.2: Main challenges with StreetLink referrals experienced by local authorities (Wales)**



Source: online survey with local authorities

Another challenge highlighted was that the majority of StreetLink referrals are not found, which has implications for the resource that outreach services are allocating to finding people who have been reported.

*I basically have to look for 100% of referrals within 24 hours, and on average 65% of them aren't found and so that's a lot of time spent looking for people that aren't found. So, that's frustrating. (Outreach team, Tower Hamlets)*

*The only queries that we have around the information gathered there, is that about 60%, or more than 60%, about 65% of those who report off StreetLink are not found. And, from what I've gathered, from what the local authorities have seen across board, they're not found. (Outreach team, Brent)*

Table 5.1 presents all outcomes recorded in England since StreetLink was introduced, colour coded according to StreetLink's categorisation; green represents a 'positive' outcome and red represents a 'negative' outcome. The negative category with the highest proportion of outcomes (36%) is person not found which equates to 31,112 outcomes. This is also the category with the highest proportion of outcomes overall.

**Table 5.1 All referral outcomes recorded since StreetLink was introduced in England in 2012**

Referral outcome: England	Count	%
Person already known	15,349	18%
Other action taken	8,193	9%
Engaging with services	5,768	7%
Accommodation outcome	4,367	5%
Person found - unwilling to engage	1,411	2%
Person not found	31,112	36%
Local services did not respond	11,393	13%
Incomplete referral	4,938	6%
No action taken – identified hotspot	3,187	4%
Outcome not yet known	886	1%
(blank)	4	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>86,608</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data

Table 5.2 presents all outcomes recorded in London since StreetLink was introduced, colour coded according to StreetLink’s categorisation; green represents a ‘positive’ outcome and red represents a ‘negative’ outcome. In London there is a higher proportion of ‘not found’ outcomes than for the whole of England (52% compared to 36%). This is also the category with the highest proportion of outcomes overall. However, the proportion of local services which did not respond is much lower for London than for England overall (2% compared to 13%).

**Table 5.2 All referral outcomes recorded since StreetLink was introduced in London**

Referral outcome: London	Count	%
Person already known	7,193	16%
Other action taken	5,409	12%
Engaging with services	2,449	5%
Accommodation outcome	3,472	8%
Person found - unwilling to engage	639	1%
Person not found	23,117	52%
Local services did not respond	958	2%
Incomplete referral	1,173	3%
No action taken - identified hotspot	431	1%
Outcome not yet known	44	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>44,885</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data

Table 5.3 presents all outcomes recorded in Wales since StreetLink was introduced, colour coded according to StreetLink’s categorisation; green represents a ‘positive’ outcome and red represents a ‘negative’ outcome; those with no colour coding are additional outcomes that have not been categorised by StreetLink. In Wales there is a lower proportion of ‘not found’ outcomes than in England (13%) which equates to 147 outcomes.

**Table 5.3 All referral outcomes recorded since StreetLink was introduced in Wales in 2016**

Referral outcome: Wales	Count	%
Person already known	264	24%
Engaging with services	219	20%
Other action taken	27	2%
Person found - unwilling to engage	25	2%
Accommodation outcome	14	1%
Street activity, e.g. begging site	197	18%
Local services did not respond	186	17%
Person not found	147	13%
Inappropriate referral	12	1%
No entitlement to local services	16	1%
Person seeking advice - signposted to alternative services	1	0%
(blank)	3	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,111</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data

Outreach teams suggested some explanations of why such high proportions of referrals are not found, and the burden that this puts on their service.

*Unfortunately you can't avoid the fact that you're not going to find some people. I don't think it's because people aren't genuinely rough sleeping, I just think the whole verification process is quite tricky because people don't often stay where they say they're going to be and it's almost like they get, not penalised, but I think the issues with verification rather than a referral coming through because people are going to move for various reasons. So, that's the only issue that we have is just how much time is spent looking for a person that isn't going to be there. (Outreach service, Tower Hamlets)*

## 5.2 Referral routes and channels

Table 5.4 shows where the highest levels of StreetLink referrals were received between October and December 2016 in England. The majority are London boroughs (8 of the 15) or other large cities (Birmingham, Bristol, Brighton & Hove, Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield, Oxford). These roughly correspond with the scale of the problem in terms of visible levels of rough sleeping accounted for through the MHCLG rough sleeping counts and estimates data. Apart from Tower Hamlets and Islington, the other local authorities are in the highest third of levels in 2016, whilst there are constraints with this data and it is widely understood to be an underestimate of the issue it does give an indication of trends in rough sleeping.

**Table 5.4 Highest StreetLink referrals between October and December 2016 in England**

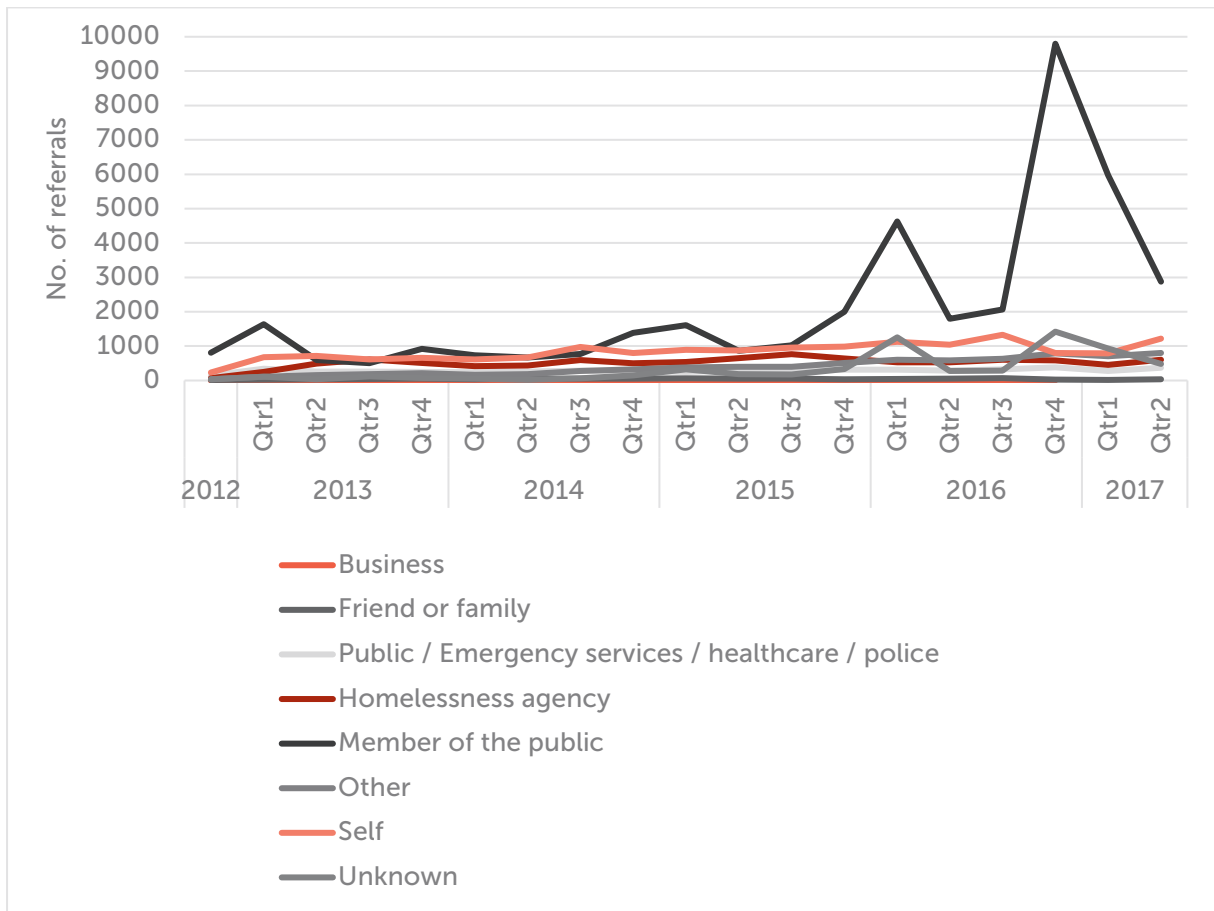
England				
Rank	Classification <sup>34</sup>	Local authority	Referrals, Oct-Dec 2016	MHCLG rough sleeping counts and estimates 2016
1	Urban with Major Conurbation	Birmingham	790	55
2	Urban with City and Town	Bristol, City of	710	74
3	Urban with City and Town	Brighton and Hove	591	144
4	Urban with Major Conurbation	Westminster	547	260
5	Urban with Major Conurbation	Manchester	444	78
6	Urban with Major Conurbation	Camden	359	17
7	Urban with Major Conurbation	Leeds	316	20
8	Urban with Minor Conurbation	Sheffield	293	15
9	Urban with City and Town	Oxford	288	33
10	Urban with Major Conurbation	Tower Hamlets	254	11
11	Urban with Major Conurbation	Lambeth	220	17
12	Urban with Major Conurbation	Hackney	208	17
13	Urban with Major Conurbation	Islington	206	11
14	Urban with Major Conurbation	Southwark	183	32
15	Urban with Major Conurbation	Lewisham	178	16

Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data

Figure 5.3 shows who has been making StreetLink referrals since it was introduced in England in 2012. The referrals submitted by most capacity categories remain relatively stable over time. The exception is members of the public; after a small spike in the winter of 2012, there have been ever greater spikes in referral activity from members of the public every winter from 2014-15 to 2016-17.

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/2011-rural-urban-classification-of-local-authority-and-other-higher-level-geographies-for-statistical-purposes>

**Figure 5.3 Referrals by capacity over time (England)**

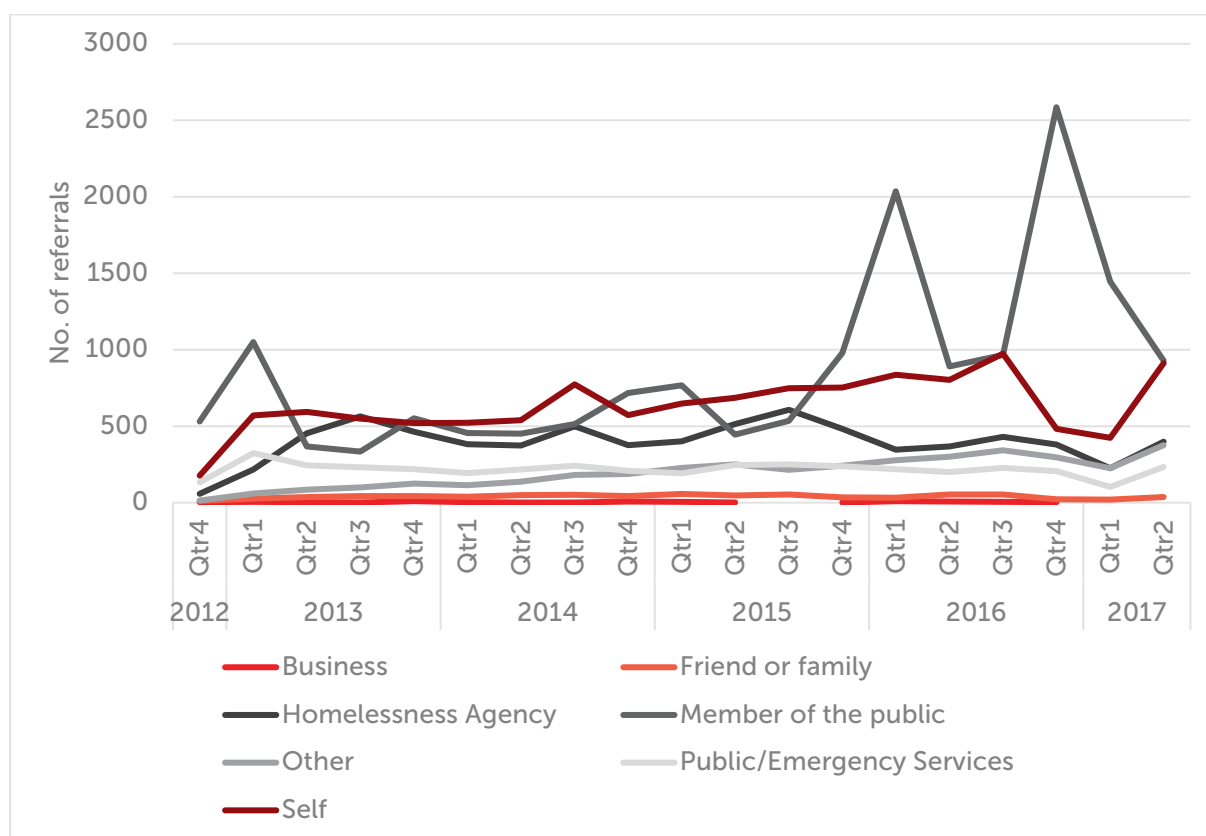


Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data

Figure 5.4 shows a similar pattern in the use of StreetLink by members of the public in London as for the whole of England. However, it also shows a higher proportion of self-referrals than for the whole of England, reaching peaks in Quarter 3 of 2016 and Quarter 2 of 2017. The use of StreetLink by homelessness agencies was also found to be higher in London than for all of England.



**Figure 5.4 Referrals by capacity over time (London)**



Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data

Given that referrals from members of the public constitute the biggest rise in referrals, it is interesting to consider whether there is any difference in the outcomes of the referrals made by members of the public compared with the outcomes of referrals made by those in other capacities.

**Table 5.5 Outcome by type of referral, member of the public compared to non-members of the public (England)**

England	Referral Type		
Referral outcome	Member of public	Not member of public	Total
Person already known	11%	6%	18%
Other action taken	3%	6%	9%
Engaging with services	3%	4%	7%
Accommodation Outcome	1%	4%	5%
Person found - unwilling to engage	1%	0%	2%
Person not found	13%	23%	36%
Local services did not respond	8%	5%	13%
Incomplete referral	3%	3%	6%
No action taken - identified hotspot	3%	1%	4%
Outcome not yet known	0%	1%	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data

The outcomes presented in Table 5.5 suggest a relationship between the type of referrer (i.e. members of the public or others) and the referral outcome, such that referrals made by members of the public are:

- *Less likely to result in accommodation* (1% for members of public versus 4% for non-members of public)
- *Slightly less likely to result in the individual engaging with services* (3% for members of the public versus 4% for non-members of the public); *slightly more likely to result in a refusal from the individual to engage with services* (1% for members of public versus 0% for non-members of public)
- *Less likely not to be found* (13% for members of public versus 23% for non-members of public)
- *More likely to be in an identified hotspot* (3% for members of public versus 1% for non-members of public)
- *More likely to be already known to services* (11% for member of public versus 6% for non-members of public)

**Table 5.6 Outcome by type of referral, member of the public compared to non-members of the public (London)**

London	Referral Type		Total
	Member of public	Not member of public	
Referral outcome			
Person already known	10%	6%	16%
Other action taken	4%	8%	12%
Accommodation Outcome	1%	7%	8%
Engaging with services	1%	4%	5%
Person found - unwilling to engage	1%	0%	1%
Person not found	17%	35%	52%
Incomplete referral	1%	2%	3%
Local services did not respond	1%	1%	2%
No action taken - identified hotspot	1%	0%	1%
Outcome not yet known	0%	0%	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data

When looking only at London (Table 5.6), some of the same relationships between type of referrer and referral outcome are reflected.

These findings suggest that referrals from members of the public may be less targeted than those from other capacity categories. Indeed, an outreach team representative felt that this is the case when comparing referrals received from members of the public compared to those received from within the homelessness sector.

*There is a referral route...if say Cornwall Housing or somebody wanted to make a referral to outreach, we have what is called a single access referral form that is used county-wide by every service. So, we would expect that filled in, because people will try and just make a quick phone call, and that is not really good enough. If we can get more information we will, because obviously we need to look at all the risks around this individual. So, if it is an organisation like probation or whoever, I want to see that risk assessment, I want to know if there is a risk to female, or if we need to double up ... and that is the downside of StreetLink – you don't always know what you are walking in to. (Outreach team, Cornwall)*

One challenge to note is that referrers self-categorise when submitting a referral; an individual may categorise themselves as a member of the public when referring in the capacity of a business or homelessness service, or vice versa, which may have an impact on how referral routes are understood.

Of the three possible channels through which StreetLink referrals can be made, the website has been used more overall in England since StreetLink was introduced (Table 5.7), with website referrals making up almost half (47%) of all referrals.

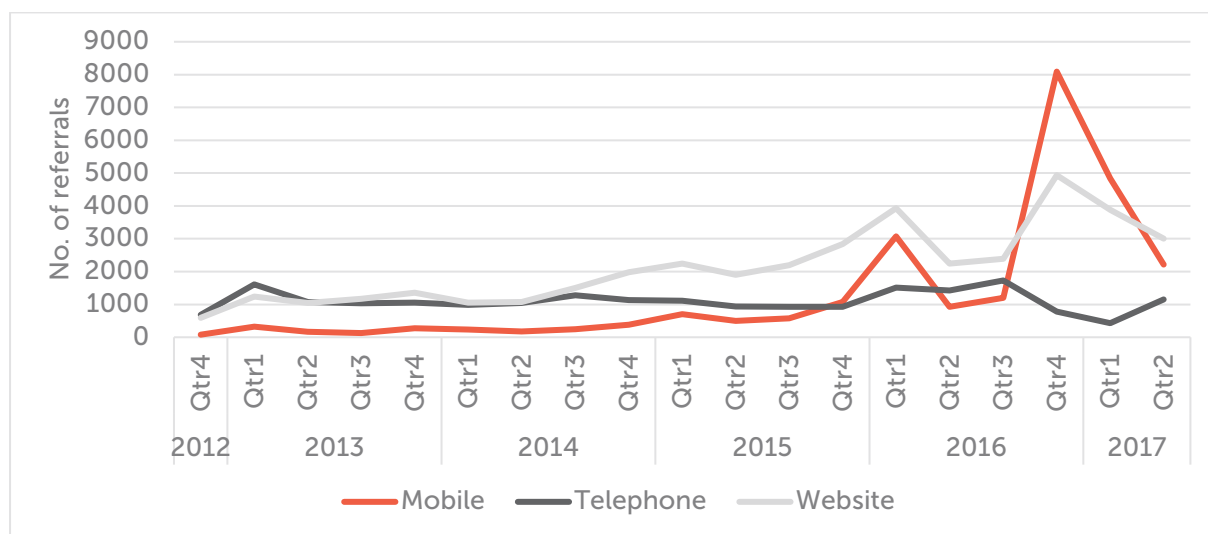
**Table 5.7 Total referrals by channel since StreetLink was introduced (England)**

Channel	Total referrals (Count)	Total referrals (%)
Mobile app	25,211	29%
Telephone	20,836	24%
Website	40,560	47%
<b>Total</b>	<b>86,607</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data

However, when looking at the use of the three referral channels over time (Figure 5.5), use of the website has slowly increased, whereas use of the mobile app has seen a large spike. Phone referrals saw a small drop in winter 2016, around the same time as website and mobile app use spiked, though phone referrals have remained relatively constant over time. These changes reflect the strategic decision taken by StreetLink to actively promote the website and mobile app, while not promoting the phone line due to the capacity to meet the increased demand in StreetLink use.

**Figure 5.5 Type of referral channel over time (England)<sup>35</sup>**



Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data

As presented in Table 5.8, the website has also been the predominant referral route in London, with the website making up almost half of all referrals (46%). However, total telephone referrals have played a proportionally greater role in total referrals in London than in all of England (41% of all referrals) whereas use of the app has been lower than for all of England (13% of all London referrals compared to 29% of all England referrals).

**Table 5.8 Total referrals by channel since StreetLink was introduced (London)**

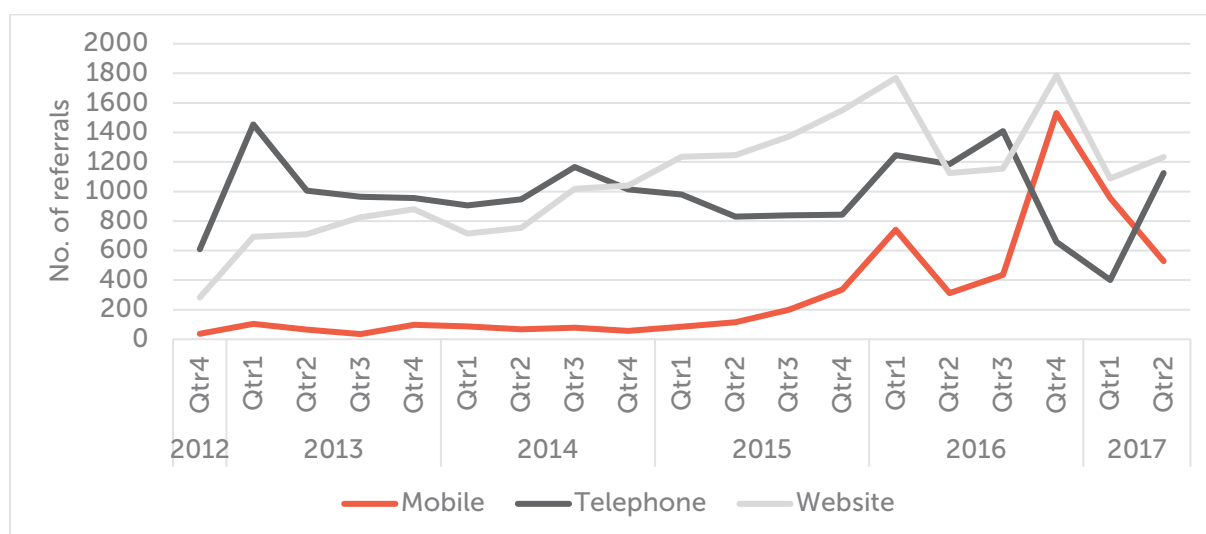
Channel	Total referrals (Count)	Total referrals (%)
Mobile app	5,871	13%
Telephone	18,537	41%
Website	20,477	46%
<b>Total</b>	<b>44,885</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data

When looking at the use of the three referral channels over time in London, the use of the telephone fell more steeply in London in winter 2016 than for all of England, while the use of the website spiked in winters 2015-16 and 2016-17 even more so than the use of the app (Figure 5.6).

<sup>35</sup> A note on channel data: Channel data contain groupings due to change in service over the years. The previous 0300 and 0870 phone numbers have been grouped together with the existing phone number; the former No Second Night Out website has been grouped together with the existing StreetLink website.

**Figure 5.6 Type of referral channel over time (London)<sup>36</sup>**



Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data

Looking at incoming StreetLink referrals over the same period (October and December 2016) in Wales, Cardiff received substantially more referrals than the other large Welsh cities (Table 5.9).

**Table 5.9 Highest StreetLink referrals between October and December 2016 in Wales**

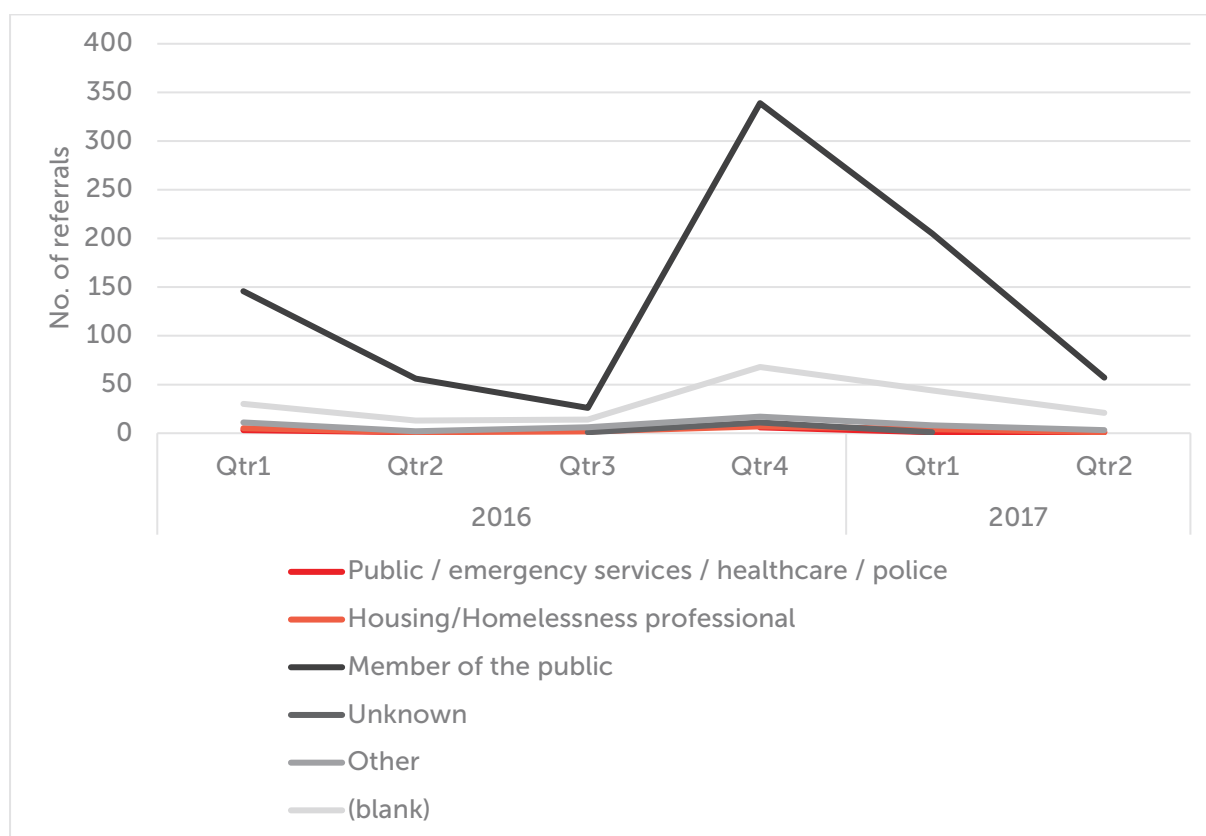
Rank	Local authority	Referrals, Oct-Dec 2016
1	Cardiff	272
2	Newport	38
3	Swansea	24
4	Rhondda Cynon Taff	14
5	Denbighshire	13
6	Vale of Glamorgan	12
7	Conwy	11
8	Ceredigion	10
9	Gwynedd	8
10	Merthyr Tydfil	7

Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data

Figure 5.7 shows who has been making StreetLink referrals since it was introduced in Wales, and reflects a similar picture to that in England. The referrals submitted by most capacity categories remain relatively stable over time, whereas referrals from members of the public have experienced a large spike in numbers in winter 2016.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

**Figure 5.7 StreetLink referrals by capacity over time (Wales)**



Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data

Of the three possible channels through which StreetLink referrals can be made, the mobile app has been used more overall in Wales since StreetLink was introduced, whereas no phone referrals have been recorded (Table 5.10). This is due to the conscious decision to focus attention on the website and app and not advertise the phone line when it was launched in Wales.

**Table 5.10 Total referrals by channel since StreetLink was introduced (Wales)**

Channel	Total referrals
Mobile app	747
Telephone	0
Website	363
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,100</b>

Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data

## 5.3 The role of homelessness services in StreetLink referrals and supporting rough sleepers

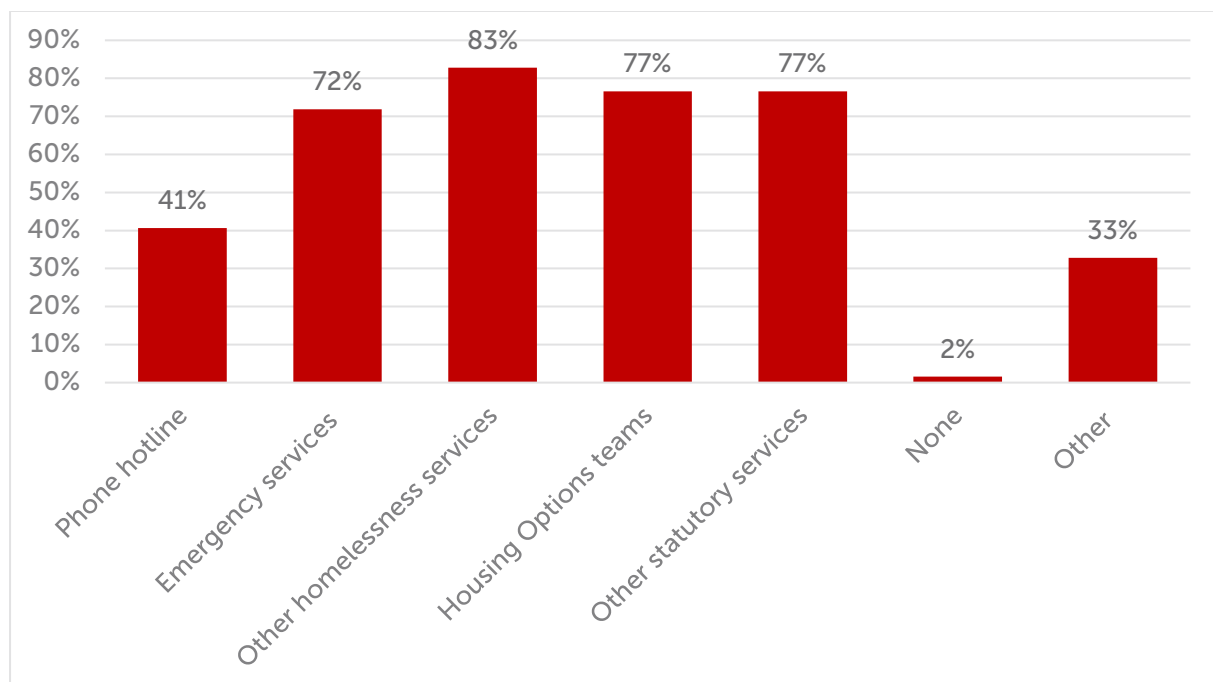
## Outreach teams

Of the 72 respondents to the outreach service survey in England, 67 (96%) are currently using StreetLink as a means of receiving referrals about rough sleepers. The low sample size of those not using StreetLink who responded to the survey means that not many insights can be drawn from these. Out of the three outreach teams which do not use StreetLink, their reasons were that the quality of referrals were not good enough.

Of the outreach services which use StreetLink, 19% receive 75-100% of their rough sleeper referrals, and 30% receive 50-75% of their rough sleeper referrals from StreetLink. This leaves 41% of outreach services who receive less than half of their referrals from StreetLink; the remaining 11% were not sure what proportion of their referrals come through StreetLink.

Outreach teams were asked through which other channels they receive rough sleeper referrals (Figure 5.8).

**Figure 5.8 Other channels through which outreach teams receive rough sleeper referrals (England)**



**Source: online survey with outreach services**

It is clear that StreetLink is certainly not the only source of rough sleeper referrals for outreach teams. The 'other' sources of referrals were reported to come from channels including:

- Community/park/estate wardens
- Direct referrals from rough sleepers
- Local Councillors
- Local businesses

- Members of the public but not via StreetLink
- Police, immigration
- Regular joint working outreach sessions with other agencies.

Indeed, some outreach teams talked about using StreetLink as one of a number of different mechanisms for receiving referrals. It is not necessarily their primary referral route.

*I don't know, it depends, sometimes people would Google us and phone us, and people still do all of that. They phone us, they email us, we get referrals off the council, the police, the churches, you name it we get that. Lots of people still use different routes, it tends to be more the public I think that are using StreetLink. (Outreach team, Cornwall)*

Outreach teams were asked about the impact that the introduction of StreetLink has had on the use of these other channels; around half of outreach respondents (53%) reported that they use the other referral channels the same amount as before, while around a quarter (23%) reported that they use the other referrals less than before.

In terms of StreetLink outreach teams engaging with StreetLink to find and support new rough sleepers, it appears that the majority of survey respondents in England feel that it is serving this purpose. When asked whether they think that StreetLink provides an important means of identifying and helping rough sleepers who might not otherwise get referred to services, 55 of the 61 respondents (90%) either strongly agreed or agreed.

Outreach teams were also asked whether the individuals referred through StreetLink differ from those they see on their normal rounds of the streets. Of the 63 respondents, 10 (16%) said that it alerted them to rough sleepers in new/different locations, while six (10%) said that these individuals were less likely to be already known to the outreach team. However, 15 respondents (24%) said that the individuals were more likely to be already known to the outreach team which reflects one of the same challenges with StreetLink referrals highlighted elsewhere in this report.

An additional benefit of engaging with StreetLink to receive referrals was highlighted by one outreach team, in terms of StreetLink freeing up their time up by doing the administration of the system so that they can focus on going out to work with rough sleepers.

*It takes a massive job off of our hands which frees us up more to actually be working with our service users. I think Tower Hamlets is the third busiest area in the UK for referrals received and, if we had to also within our team be taking those referrals, we wouldn't have as much time to actually support the people that we work with. That's a massive benefit. (Outreach team, Tower Hamlets)*



## 5.4 Chapter 5 summary: Key points

StreetLink is used mainly by members of the public to refer rough sleepers. While referrals submitted by other groups has remained relatively stable over time, there have been ever greater spikes in referral activity from members of the public every winter since 2014-15 in England, and since winter 2016-17 in Wales.

Since introduced in England, the StreetLink website has been the predominant channel for referring rough sleepers. Recent usage figures have reflected the decision by StreetLink to promote the mobile app and discourage the use of the phone line. In Wales the mobile app has been the predominant referral channel, with some use of the website and no phone referrals. This is due to the conscious decision to focus attention on the website and app and not advertise the phone line when it was launched in Wales.

There appears to be a relationship between the type of referrer and the referral outcome in England. If referrals are made by members of the public rather than other groups, they are *less* likely to result in accommodation, *less* likely to result in the individual engaging with services, *less* likely not to be found, *more* likely to result in a refusal from the individual to engage with services, *more* likely to be in an identified begging hotspot, and *more* likely to be already known to services.

The extent to which local authorities use StreetLink to direct their work varies greatly between local authority areas. This ranges from outreach teams being commissioned to be largely directed by StreetLink referrals, to outreach teams using their own freephone number to receive referrals, which they feel is more effective than using StreetLink.

Where local authorities do use StreetLink, there is inconsistency between them in the feedback provided. Some do not respond to requests for updates from StreetLink, despite the expectation that outcome data should come back to StreetLink from Local authorities within ten days.

Outreach teams which use StreetLink in England tend to find it effective in enabling them to find and support *new* rough sleepers, and the majority of both outreach teams and local authorities feel that StreetLink is providing them with early intelligence about new rough sleepers.

The main challenges with using StreetLink for outreach teams and local authorities are poor quality referrals, including duplicate referrals, and insufficient information with which to be able to find people, and the fact that the majority of StreetLink referrals are not found. These both have implications for the resource that Local authorities and outreach services are allocating to processing referrals and to finding people who have been referred.

# Chapter 6:

Evaluation question 3: To what extent does StreetLink help get rough sleepers off the streets faster?

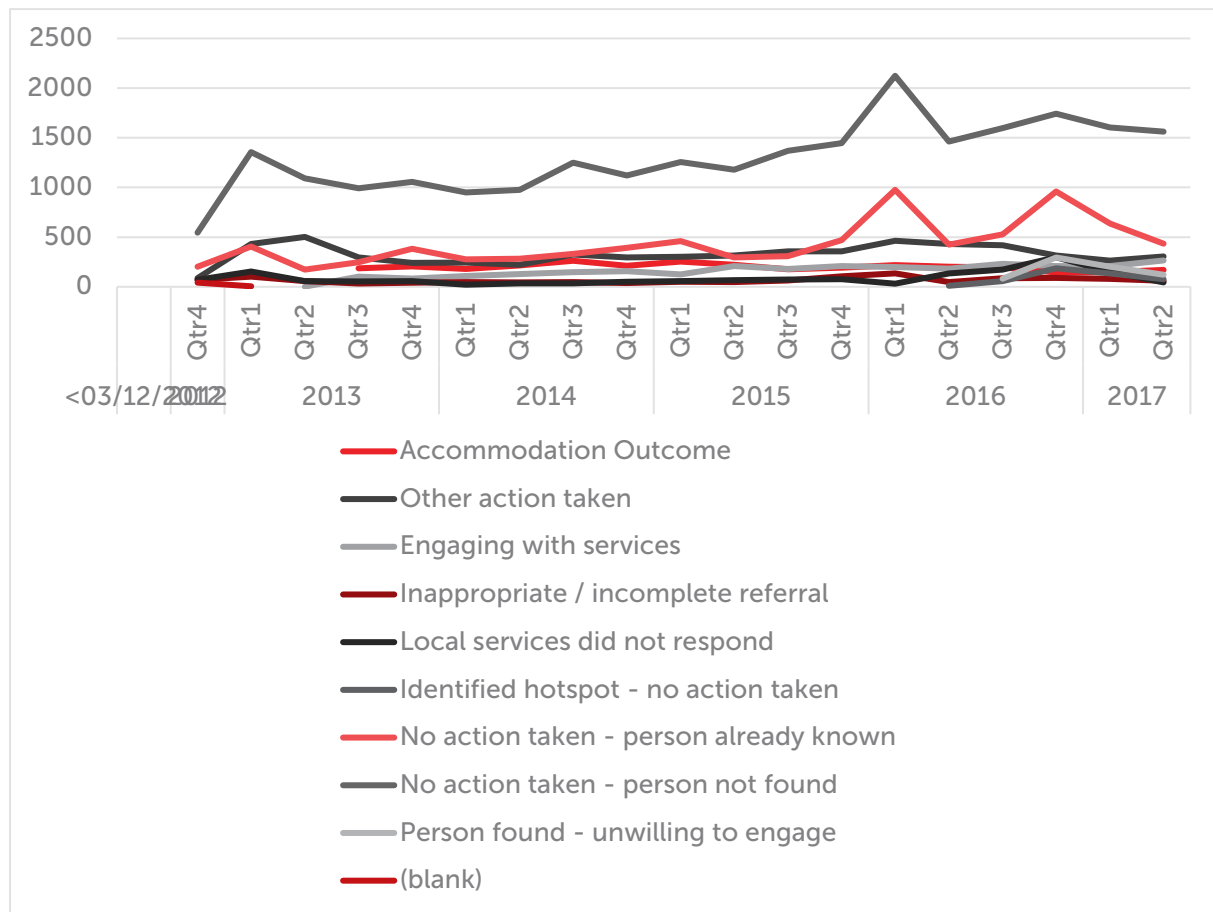
## 6.1 The role of StreetLink as a preventative intervention to address homelessness

Based on the quantitative data to which Crisis was given access, it has not been possible to determine how effective StreetLink is as a preventative intervention towards stopping people from rough sleeping and remaining off the streets. To address this question, full access to CHAIN data and equivalent data sets would be required in order to consider whether more referrals recorded on CHAIN that have come through StreetLink resulted in a positive outcome compared to those coming through other channels. This investigation would also be confounded by the fact that an outcome for an individual who was referred through StreetLink is not necessarily due to the StreetLink referral; they may already have been known to the outreach service, for example. In addition, given that people need to be 'verified' as rough sleepers before they can be recorded on CHAIN, this would not address the question of whether StreetLink is an effective preventative intervention.

When considering CHAIN referrals only, it is apparent that outcomes of 'person not found' have been growing over time, which suggests that StreetLink is not effective in terms of initially locating referrals, irrespective of whether they go on to be helped (Figure 6.1).

Given that 'accommodation outcomes' for CHAIN referrals are at around the 200-250 mark per quarter, and it is assumed that these people would not otherwise have been supported into accommodation had they not been referred through StreetLink, this could be used as the basis of an argument about the effectiveness of StreetLink. However, this would be in terms of supporting people who are already sleeping rough, and not preventing people from rough sleeping.

**Figure 6.1: CHAIN referral outcomes data over time**



**Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data**

If StreetLink were to be used as a preventative intervention towards stopping people from rough sleeping, this would mean that they should refer themselves or be referred by someone else before they start sleeping rough.

However, this relates to the lack of clarity felt among some homeless people and services as to the eligibility criteria for using StreetLink, and whether an individual must be rough sleeping in order to be referred, or to refer themselves, via StreetLink.

*Anecdotally, we hear post referral that the client may have felt that if they had admitted they were self-serving, they wouldn't get the help they needed, so they may tell us they are rough sleeping because that is what homelessness is, in their mind. They don't quite understand the nuance of homelessness. It is not just about living on the streets. There is no statistical backing to that, it is an anecdotal capture that we get... they are fearful of telling us the truth, so they will say they are rough sleeping somewhere. (Homelessness service, Tower Hamlets)*

Indeed, one homeless person who was sofa surfing was unsure whether they were entitled to use StreetLink, or whether they needed to go out and sleep rough before contacting StreetLink.

*So, one of my friends told me about StreetLink, but at the time, I didn't really think about using them because I wasn't completely on the streets, homeless. I didn't know that it could help me, but I was in a situation of homelessness. (Self-referrer, Lewisham)*

Therefore, in order to be used as a preventative intervention, more clarity around eligibility criteria is recommended.

Given that the system is designed to be used by members of the public when they see someone sleeping rough, this would suggest that members of the public would not be able to use StreetLink as a way of preventing that person from sleeping rough, at least not for the first night.

The original aim of StreetLink was clear to national stakeholders.

*...it's to enable early identification of individuals, to get help to them quickly, to enable a quick move on from the streets, really – prevent people becoming entrenched. (Welsh Government representative)*

The role of prevention was not seen as something StreetLink is able to do currently. However, stakeholders felt that this should be considered in terms of the role of StreetLink in the future, but in the wider context of service delivery of homelessness.

*...actually everything we should be doing is avoiding that happening from the start, preventing people having to sleep rough in the first place (St Mungo's representative)*

The rising demand for the service and issues with the capabilities of the technology underpinning StreetLink have compounded the pressure on the StreetLink 'backroom' operation and highlighted resourcing and capacity challenges. Some stakeholders talked of increasing the use of volunteers and changing the role they have within the operations of StreetLink to better cope with rising demand.

*So where we have had spikes in activity...in extreme cold weather and their referral numbers have leapt massively. And those referrals... it's not all useful stuff; if we get 100 reports of someone sleeping outside the same tube station within half an hour that's probably the same person and there are lots of people wanting to take action, which is brilliant that they want to do that but our ability to quickly ramp up our staffing and response in response to those peaks has been... they are a real challenge. (Homeless Link representative)*

*Demand is a big, big thing; and the way that we've changed our service this year to meet that - I mean, a part of that demand is that there are more rough sleepers, people are seeing them more, there's more public awareness around it. There might well be, alongside that public awareness, a conflation of things like street behaviours and street activity with rough*

*sleeping; so, particularly in the winter, there's a lot of demand for the service, so that's a huge thing to grapple with. (MHCLG representative)*

These issues are compounded by technology that cannot cope with the demand and a database system which was designed for a much smaller capacity than StreetLink is currently dealing with

*The system was set up to deal with... in the modelling we did at the start of it, it was to deal with 30,000 phone calls and about 1,000 referrals a month on average; we're now dealing with 50,000 phone calls and about 2,000 referrals a month within broadly the same budget. (Homeless Link representative)*

Stakeholders were also keen to focus on how these challenges interact with managing public perceptions about the impact and effectiveness of StreetLink and how it is able to meet this demand and the way it responds to referrals .

*I mean we had this issue of the perception that when people ring StreetLink they are referred to StreetLink and we will send a StreetLink team out instantly within twenty minutes to find that person and help them off the street. And actually managing the expectation of how little StreetLink delivers was really important because otherwise there is this perception that StreetLink is the fourth or fifth emergency service, which it clearly can't be. (Homeless Link representative)*

## 6.2 To what extent does StreetLink help get rough sleepers off the streets faster?

The data required to robustly ascertain whether StreetLink helps to get rough sleepers off the streets faster was not available. This is for the following reasons:

- In order to assess the *speed* of StreetLink referrals getting rough sleepers off the street, the date differential between each incoming referral and the date the individual was accommodated would need to be analysed. However, the outcome of 'into accommodation' does not provide a date of accommodation, only the dates of report completed and of feedback provided. This was not considered to be reliable enough to be used as a proxy for the day the individual was accommodated.
- In order to assess whether StreetLink referrals are *faster* at getting rough sleepers off the streets than other referrals, a meaningful comparison group is required. The CHAIN data provided for this evaluation only included individuals recorded on CHAIN who had a StreetLink referral; thus, there was no comparison group of rough sleepers who had moved into accommodation but had *not* been referred through StreetLink.

- Even with the full CHAIN dataset, it would not be possible to isolate those rough sleepers who had been referred through StreetLink through those identified via other channels, e.g. outreach. This is because many people identified through outreach may then go on to have a StreetLink referral, or vice versa. Again, this prevents a meaningful comparison group to be identified, against which StreetLink referrals can be compared.

The effectiveness of StreetLink at getting rough sleepers off the streets faster, from the perspective of national stakeholders, was difficult to ascertain. While it was generally recognised that StreetLink did provide a means to identify new rough sleepers, whether it resulted in them getting off the street quicker was less clear.

## 6.3 The role of StreetLink for homeless people

The homeless people interviewed who had used StreetLink to self-refer had found out about it through a variety of different channels, including agencies such as Citizens Advice Bureau, Job Centre Plus, local homelessness charities and day centres, and through word of mouth.

Their motivation for using StreetLink was generally to seek support, often where they may have failed to secure support through other means. Many saw contacting StreetLink as their first step away from homelessness.

*Because I was new to it at the time, I didn't know how to go about it. So, it was a case of just trying to get some form of assistance, but I'd been unable to, you know? (Self-referrer, Brent)*

*That was to get information and pointing to hostel situations...and that was probably the first port of call to not being homeless at some stage. Any other services that were available which I was totally more or less ignorant of at that particular stage... (Self-referrer, Tower Hamlets)*

There seemed to be a general understanding that an individual should be rough sleeping in order to use StreetLink, and indeed one former rough sleeper talked about part of their motivation for contacting StreetLink as wanting to be 'verified' as a rough sleeper so that they could be recorded on the 'system' (i.e. CHAIN) and become eligible for support, having been refused support when they presented to their local authority.

*At least I would have officially gone through a system that I had documentation to take to the Housing Department that I could have used my own initiative and used the proof that I was homeless. (Self-referrer, Tower Hamlets)*

A stakeholder from one of the operators raised the issue that part of the problem with picking up referrals in time and how StreetLink interacts with this is the issue of verification of rough sleepers in order to receive assistance.

*Part of the fundamental problem with the whole thing, with us not getting this right is that we fuel the idea that people have to be verified on the streets before they can be helped. And for me, this is the fundamental problem with actually all rough sleeping services, in the capital anyway, is the context that you have to be seen sleeping rough before you can get help. That's the one thing that actually can't happen. (St Mungo's representative)*

The expectation of homeless people as to what would happen as a result of contacting StreetLink tended to be that they would be picked up and put in touch with services that would be able to provide some help to them.

*Do you know what? I didn't actually know. My presumption was pretty much correct, just to be taken somewhere off the street for a night to speak to people and hopefully put something in place, at least a plan or something. A presumption, which would probably have led to something, rehabilitation or treatment perhaps. (Self-referrer, Surrey)*

*Well, I thought they would send somebody, but when they didn't, I felt disheartened after the first time. Other people on the street never really spoke well about them, you know? (Self-referrer, Brent)*

The majority of people interviewed who had used StreetLink to self-refer had done so via the phone. In some cases, this was because they had no access to the internet, whereas others preferred to speak directly to someone than to use the website or mobile app as they felt that their referral would be dealt with more directly.

*Because if I'm going to send them through an email, I just feel that's going to take longer for them to deal with it, than me making a phone call. I feel that's the best way, and the easiest way is always a phone call. (Self-referrer, Lewisham)*

Several people talked about making multiple phone calls relating to their same self-referral. This was generally the case when they felt that it was taking a long time for someone to come out to them, and indeed there were a number of cases where the outreach team had not been able to find them.

*I stayed there that night and no-one turned up. I rang up the next day and they said, "Yeah, we couldn't find you," so I explained the spot again, which should have been quite simple to understand. They had a map on their side and I was talking them through it. (Self-referrer, Kent)*

*When I initially made the phone call, initially made contact with them, they were very helpful over the phone. They said that they would do their best*

*to come and find me within three days of me making that phone call, and then it never happened. They said that they'd gone there, and that they'd been to the place where I was supposedly at, and they didn't see me there. And, also then it came to me ringing them back to tell them where I would be moving to. (Self-referrer, Lewisham)*

The homeless people interviewed explained why they felt it could be dangerous to stay in the same place and why it was therefore sometimes necessary for them to move from the place where they had made their initial referral. This need to move has also been recognised by outreach teams.

*I wasn't picked up for a month, and then where I got uncomfortable from being in the same spot and getting used to the outdoors, I had to keep moving around because there's more people moving in, and danger here and there, so it wasn't safe to stay in the same spot. (Self-referrer, Kent)*

*Because you're just standing there, you're just waiting on the same spot, because that's the location that you've given them and if you move, you're going to miss them. You can't really go anywhere, you know? You can't go get something to eat or use the toilet or something like that, because if you go they may turn up and then they miss you, you know? It's not wise to stand outside people's property, because you can get yourself into trouble, they could end up phoning the police on you or something. So, it's not a good idea to have people just name a street and stay on that street until somebody arrives, you know? (Self-referrer, Brent)*

Leading from this, some self-referrers wondered why the outreach team had not called them when they were coming to find them, as they felt this would have enabled them to be found more easily, particularly if they had needed to move.

*Well, after a few days I rang up and said, "Look, what is going on?" and they said, "Oh, we came to try and find you but couldn't find you." I told them, "Why couldn't you just ring me?" "Oh, it's not our policy to ring people," and I'm like, "Well, it just makes sense doesn't it really?" So, the first contact, it must have taken four to five days... I was in contact with them literally every day, sometimes more than once a day, just to let them know, "Look, I'm still here, I'm still vulnerable, can you...?" So eventually they did the whole phone number thing and they found me pretty much straightaway... (Self-referrer, Surrey)*

Those homeless people who were found as a result of their referral to StreetLink had positive reports of their experience.

*I waited further down the road, and the bloke rang me, thankfully. He said, "Where are you? I can't see you." I waved and I was like, "Look, I'm here, on the other side of the road" and yeah, he was really helpful... So, basically, they picked me up and we introduced ourselves... (Self-referrer, Kent)*



*Eventually, they did turn up, and they found me there. They were very helpful. They were very nice, and then they took me to No Second Night Out. So, their aim is to try and get everybody out as quickly as possible, but everyone's situation is different. It just so happened to be for me, that my situation, in their eyes, was a little easier than the others, so I was able to be moved out a lot quicker, which I was very grateful for. And, then they referred me to a hostel in Hackney and I was there for just under a month, before moving into this property. (Self-referrer, Lewisham)*

There was somewhat of a division between those homeless people who had used StreetLink to self-refer and deemed the experience to have been positive, and those who described their experience in a negative light. This was largely based on whether they had been found, and whether they felt that StreetLink had helped them to get access to the support they were seeking. Those who felt that their StreetLink referral had led to a positive outcome, even if this had taken some time to achieve, indicated that they believed that StreetLink could help them to change their situation.

*I'd been living in a hostel for two and a half years and, previous to that, I was actually helped by StreetLink. They put me into my first hostel and then I moved to another one, and, finally, I've got a bit of stability again. (Self-referrer, Kent)*

*I feel overall their service is great, and I know that it's probably difficult because they can't always help everybody and find everybody at the same time. It's difficult. It would be frustrating for the person that's homeless, and it's also frustrating for them because they can't get to you. But I just feel like I respect what they do, and I'm grateful for the help that I was given through them... (Self-referrer, Lewisham)*

Those who had more negative experiences were less certain about StreetLink's potential to help them change their situation.

*I was told about it...and I phoned them, and I was told to give the address of where I was, you know, a location, as near as possible, and I did, and no one arrived. I phoned them again...I phoned them, waited, and no one came. When I made the phone calls, I waited the whole day, because they don't give you a time...So, you give up after that, if people don't turn up you just go your own way. (Self-referrer, Brent)*

Feedback gathered from homeless people who had used StreetLink to self-refer suggests that, if they are successfully found by the outreach team (irrespective of whether this happens sooner or later) and provided with support, they feel that it is effective and can play a role in helping them to change their situation. When they have not been found by an outreach team as a result of their self-referral to StreetLink, their view of its effectiveness is less positive.

In order to reduce the number of rough sleepers who are not found, there were suggestions that either someone from StreetLink or the outreach team calls the person who has self-referred to let them know when they are coming to find them, which could help to better locate them, particularly if they are sleeping somewhere hidden away.

In addition to these suggestions, several other proposals were made by currently or formerly homeless people about how StreetLink could be improved. These included providing a round-the-clock service, and promoting StreetLink to ensure that there is more awareness about it among rough sleepers. It raises questions, as discussed in the conclusions and recommendation about what the role of StreetLink is in relation to people experiencing homelessness.

*I think there should also be a call out team at night, as well, when you can call them and let them know that you're out there, and even if they don't find you that night, they at least can talk to you and try and help you maybe find somewhere else to stay, somewhere safer, for them to find you the next day, or something like that. You feel like, "Well, what do I do right now? It's 4 o'clock in the morning. What do I do now?" (Self-referrer, Lewisham)*

*But, I just feel that initial thing like advertising and promotion. Maybe even social media, just getting the word out there that, 'If people do fall into this situation, that this is who you can contact, and we can help'. (Self-referrer, Lewisham)*

The homeless people interviewed were identified through having completed the online user survey about StreetLink, and opting in to take part in a telephone interview. They were identified and their contact details obtained through Homeless Link's records of people who had used StreetLink to self-refer. Therefore, all of the people interviewed for this evaluation had experienced using StreetLink to self-refer rather than having been referred by someone else, such as a member of the public. These people had generally found out or been told about StreetLink in order to seek help for themselves, and consequently there did not seem to be much awareness about StreetLink being used by other people, such as members of the public, to refer rough sleepers. Therefore, it is not possible to say on the basis of these interviews whether homeless people feel that it helps the general public that have not used StreetLink understand what rough sleeping is.

## 6.4 Replication of StreetLink at a local level

As is reflected in the interviews with national stakeholders, the 'results' that have been identified are mainly around identifying rough sleepers, whereas it has been more challenging to demonstrate the StreetLink is delivering results in terms of

helping to get rough sleepers off the streets more quickly. Six case study areas were evaluated in more detail to examine how StreetLink is used at a local level in different operation markets and how it interacts with local service delivery.

## Case study 1: Cardiff (Welsh city)

Cardiff was selected as a case study area to understand how the high levels of referrals relate to the local response to rough sleeping. Since StreetLink Wales was introduced, Cardiff has had 635 referrals recorded; given that the Swansea had the next highest number of referrals at 90, this shows that Cardiff is the part of Wales where StreetLink is used most widely. Comparing this to the rough sleeping data collected by the Welsh Government for 2016, Cardiff recorded 85 rough sleepers in two weeks in October (Swansea recorded 23).

The in-house outreach team at the local authority in Cardiff is working to a three-year rough sleeping strategy which involves a range of pilot projects targeting people with specific types of support needs, and working closely in partnership with other organisations, such as local businesses and charities. Cardiff has seen a rise in rough sleeping, with the outreach team observing increased numbers of people coming to Cardiff from outside of the city, and increased levels of support needs in the people with whom they are working.

One element of the rough sleeping strategy aims to ensure that there are clear routes for members of the public to be able to refer rough sleepers to the outreach team, as they rely on this as a source of intelligence to lead the outreach team work. StreetLink is seen by the outreach team as an important element of this strategy, providing an additional referral route for members of the public in less well known sleeping sites and providing a non-statutory route for rough sleepers.

*...we are a capital city, it's a very big area...so you can imagine you could patrol the city. But especially for people trying to hide themselves away, we do rely on a lot of that intelligence coming from our partners but also from the members of the public as well, especially a lot more neighbourhoods further out on the edge of the city or neighbourhoods around wooded areas and parks and stuff. So it does play quite a big part in our intelligence...we do get emails and phone calls but also a lot of them have come from the StreetLink app as well. (Outreach team, Cardiff)*

The motivation to use StreetLink by the members of the public who were interviewed was based on seeing someone rough sleeping where they had not seen this previously. They reported having taken actions in the past to support homeless people, such as collections of clothes for charity shops, or buying them food or coffee, but using StreetLink was something new.

*I was talking to my cousin, and my cousin works for Social Services. And, she was just saying how cold it was, and I was saying to her that there was*

*a guy sleeping in trolleys, and she suggested I do it, so we both done it. We both put the referral in each. (Member of public, Cardiff)*

In terms of dealing with referrals, the outreach team has experienced several challenges. When the app was first launched in Cardiff, the outreach team found themselves inundated with the large number of referrals, some of which were for people begging rather than rough sleeping, and some of which were duplicates. While the numbers have since decreased, the quality of some referrals remains a challenge.

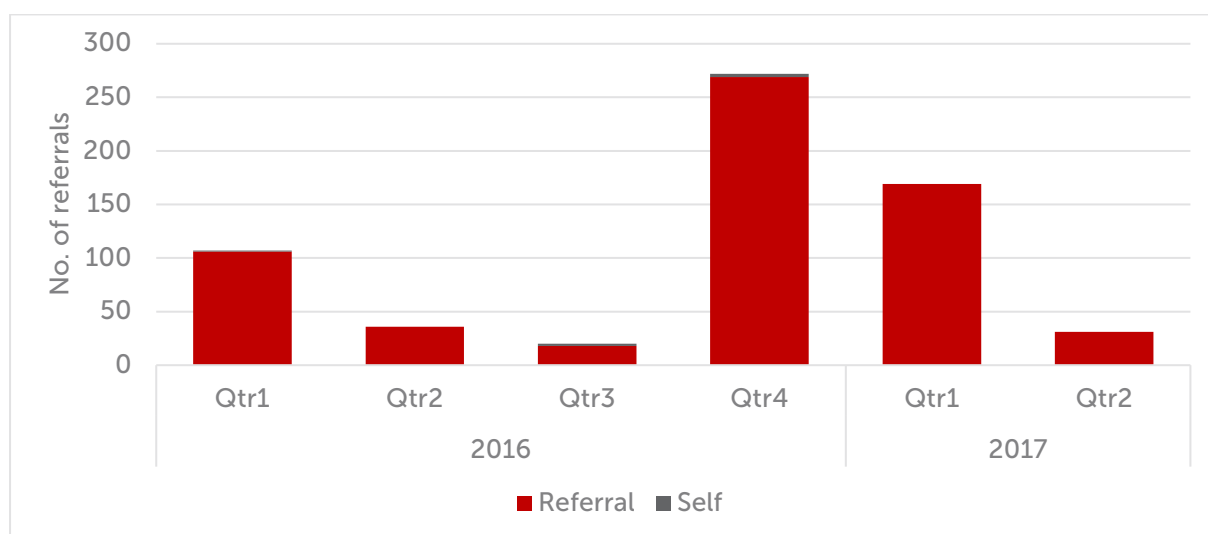
*We had a couple of days where it was very intensive. We also noticed that, for certain people and certain individuals who were rough sleeping and were sitting down and begging, we would get one or two for some people and then we had one individual who had over 30 referrals for the same person. (Outreach team, Cardiff)*

*...there are times where we get referrals where there's nowhere near enough information for us to even sort of know. So the map will give an area, but sometimes the quality of the information can be a bit hit and miss. So, if sometimes we're guessing, do they mean there, do they mean here? So, we sort of go out when we can, the entire area, you know? (Outreach team, Cardiff)*

And while the majority of those referred by members of the public are people already known to the outreach team, StreetLink referrals can also alert the outreach team to rough they may not have known about otherwise. There were over 100 StreetLink referrals recorded from Cardiff in the first quarter after it was introduced into Wales in 2016 (Figure 6.2). The numbers of referrals then dropped before rising sharply in Quarter 4 of 2016. Self-referrals as a proportion of overall referrals is low in Cardiff; two were made in Quarter 3 and three in Quarter 4 of 2016. The Cardiff outreach team has also noticed some self-referrals coming in.

*...we've also lately had one or two that are self-referral through the mechanism, we've had at least one or two I think where people have said, "I am actually homeless," so they've actually used it to refer themselves. But we contact them straightaway, if they give us their phone numbers we contact them straightaway and we engage with them straightaway... (Outreach team, Cardiff)*

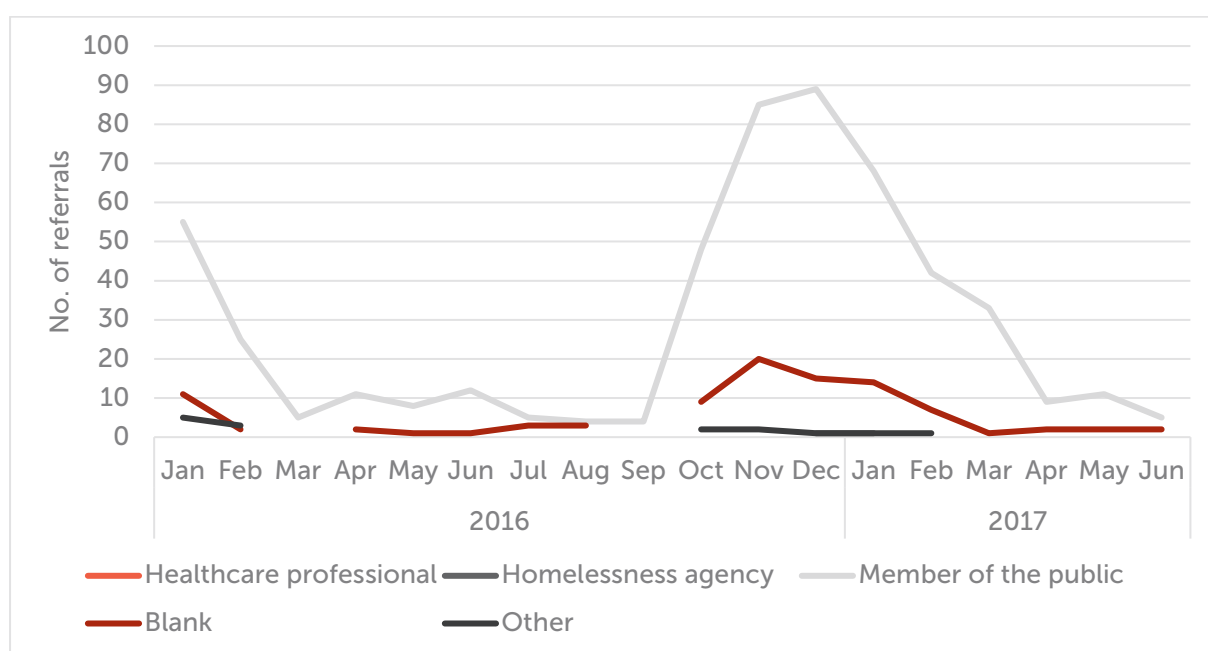
**Figure 6.2: StreetLink referrals over time, by self/other referrals (Cardiff)**



Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data

Looking in more detail at the type of people (capacity) using StreetLink to refer rough sleepers, Figure 6.3 shows that the majority have always come from members of the public, and that the number of referrals they made rose substantially in the winter of 2016-17.

**Figure 6.3: StreetLink referrals over time, by referrer capacity (Cardiff)**



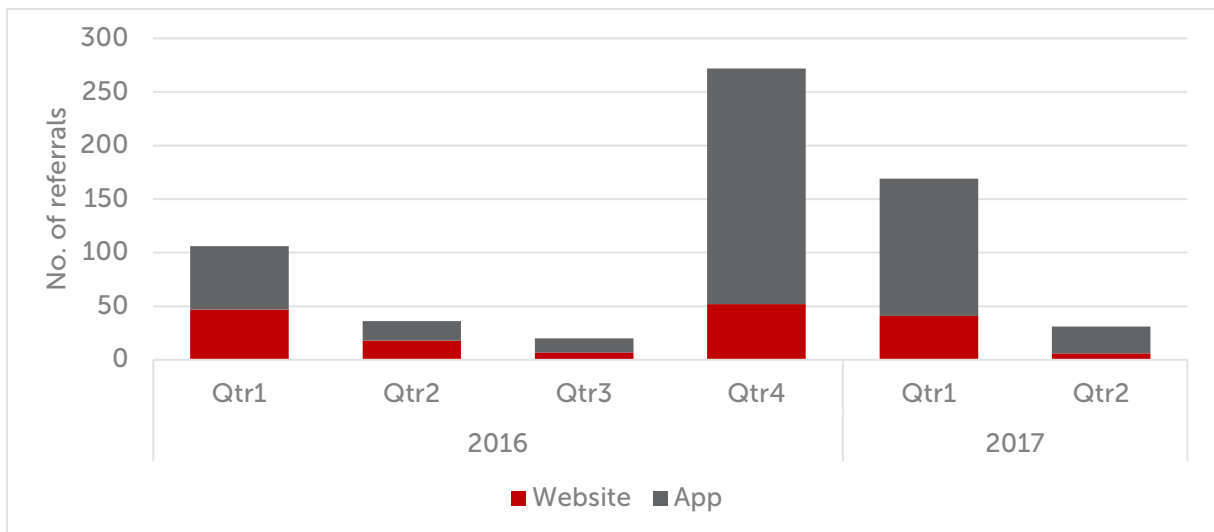
Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data

The outreach team reported that they regularly provide feedback on the outcomes of referrals as part of their usual practice, although they found the system for receiving referrals and reporting feedback cumbersome, and suggested that improved functionality could enable the process to run more smoothly.

*...just how it comes to us and we feed back to it, so just to streamline that part of it. I think just to look at, so it's just very simple as a one stop shop place you go to, that's where you get your referral and that's where you feed it back rather than coming on email then feeding that back here...I think having a simpler sort of way to refer to us and we have to feedback and that one web portal would be a good idea. (Outreach team, Cardiff)*

In terms of receiving feedback on the outcomes of their referrals, there were mixed experiences from members of the public. A member of the public who had used the website to refer a rough sleeper reported that they were very pleased with the confirmation and feedback they had received. However, another member of the public, who had used the app to make a referral, was disappointed that they did not receive any confirmation or follow-up from their referral.

**Figure 6.4: StreetLink referrals over time, by channel (Cardiff)**



**Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data**

There have notably been no telephone referrals in Cardiff (Figure 6.4), which is likely due to the decision to promote only the online channels (website and mobile app) when StreetLink was introduced into Wales. Indeed, one member of the public reported that, when they tried to use the phone line they were referred to the online options.

*And, they didn't answer the phone either. Where we were living, they said they were really busy, and they only had a small team, so the phones were off...it was like an automated message saying that basically they couldn't answer, and they were unavailable on the phone because they have only got a small team. Then we were told, "You need to go online". (Member of public, Cardiff)*

Suggestions for raising awareness about StreetLink were made by members of the public and the outreach team. This included advertising through posters, leaflets and greater media attention.

*More media publicity given to StreetLink. I used it after seeing a BBC Wales news item. (Member of public, Cardiff)*

Other suggestions for improvement from members of the public who completed the survey focused on providing feedback on referrals, or broader information about what difference referrals have made to the lives of the rough sleepers referred.

## Case Study 2: Cornwall (Rural local authority)

Cornwall was selected as a case study due to being rural with high levels of rough sleeping. It was identified as being the only mainly rural area in the list of top 50 local authorities for StreetLink referrals which had above average levels of rough sleeping in England. These local authorities were then classified by type, according to recent research on rural homelessness from the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR)<sup>37</sup>.

Cornwall has seen a significant increase in rough sleeping since 2010 (52%)<sup>38</sup>. It is also a local authority area with a number of large local homelessness services.

In response to steadily increasing numbers, Cornwall Council and Cornwall Housing have recently introduced a Rough Sleeping Reduction Strategy in addition to the existing Homelessness Strategy, encompassing a range of projects to work with people who are new to the streets, with the aim of getting them off the streets as quickly as possible. While there was previously a local phone line for reporting rough sleeping in Devon and Cornwall, the funding for that ended around two years ago, and StreetLink started to be used more widely as an important mechanism for reporting rough sleeping to the commissioned outreach service.

*...when we started using StreetLink, we still had the Devon and Cornwall rough sleeper line up and running, so they were used in conjunction. They were running alongside each other for a time, and then the Devon and Cornwall rough sleeper line ended last year. (Outreach team, Cornwall)*

*We try to use that as the main way to refer. I mean people will obviously self-refer via agencies and otherwise. But for members of the public of course, and our own elected members and other agencies, we do try to get them to use StreetLink, because it's that one point of contact, you know, and it's easier to manage where you've got such a vast area to cover. (Local authority, Cornwall)*

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<sup>37</sup> [https://www.ippr.org/files/2017-06/1498563647\\_right-to-home-a4-report-170627.pdf](https://www.ippr.org/files/2017-06/1498563647_right-to-home-a4-report-170627.pdf)

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness#rough-sleeping-tables>

With such a large geographical area to cover, and an outreach team of five people, StreetLink is considered vital to the effort of identifying new rough sleepers and those of whom the outreach team might not otherwise be aware.

*It gives that person a tool to notify someone and it does in this case, that there is a person in that doorway or that field or whatever, so I think it is brilliant! Because like I said, Cornwall is so rural, really rural. Sometimes we have got people in the most bizarre places, that you would never think to find them. And we get notified that that is where they are. (Outreach team, Cornwall)*

Despite the great distances they need to travel to do so, the outreach team prioritises responding as quickly to StreetLink referrals and also providing feedback on the outcome of these referrals in most cases within 48 hours.

*...we've got someone working seven days a week anyway so we will always respond to it either that day or the following day. And we're not bad actually. They do tend to get out to see them pretty much straight away, within 24, certainly within 48 hours anyway, so our response is pretty good. But everybody else, we use StreetLink so it's ideal for what we do, so it's been pretty beneficial to get people out there response-wise. (Outreach team, Cornwall)*

There are sometimes challenges with the quality of referrals, particularly when insufficient information is provided with which to be able to locate someone. This is exacerbated by the distance the outreach team may need to travel in order to find someone, and then not be able to locate them. In these instances, the referrer is called in order to get more information or to help to locate someone who has referred themselves.

*No, they are not often completed! Sometimes, it might just be 'white male', which is a bit frustrating, so if StreetLink could find a way to encourage the public to give more detail, if they think they might have just seen someone huddled in a doorway, these are distinguishing features, white male, beard, this, that, in such an area, you would think 'oh, it is so and so'. And that would save us a bit of legwork. (Outreach team, Cornwall)*

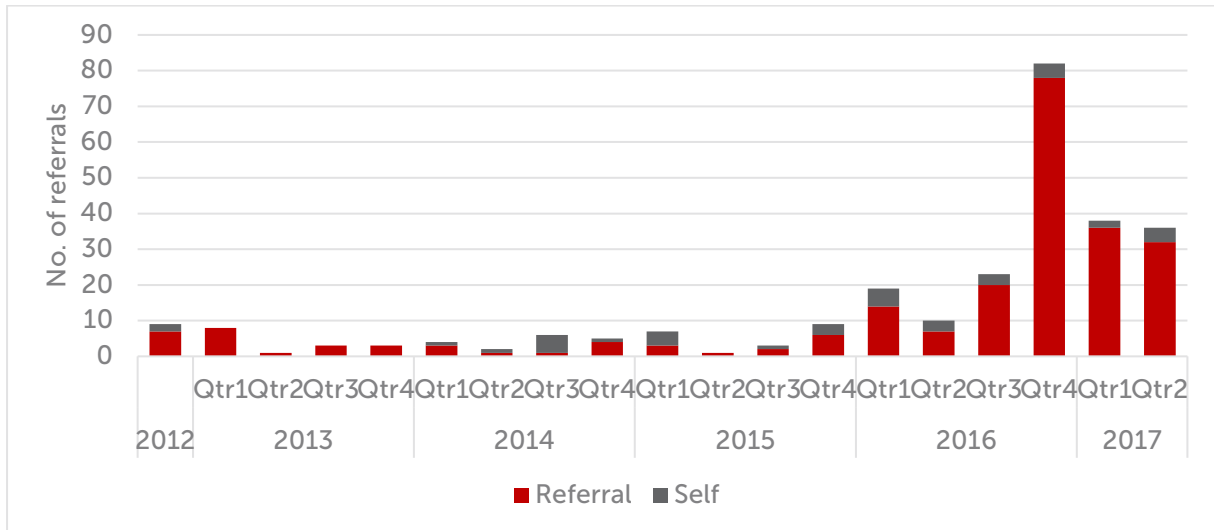
In Cornwall, StreetLink is promoted by a wide range of mechanisms through the local authority and other agencies in the homelessness sector. The link to StreetLink is on the homepage of the Cornwall Council and Cornwall Housing websites, and is promoted on social media and through multiagency groups. StreetLink is also actively promoted to elected council members who are public facing and can help to spread the message.

This more recent focus on using StreetLink as the main referral mechanism for members of the public and others, and its promotion, is reflected in the referral numbers. After relatively low usage in the first few years since its introduction,



StreetLink referrals started to rise in winter 2015-16, followed by a large spike in use in winter 2016 (see Figure 6.5). While the majority of referrals are from others referring rough sleepers, there has also been a relatively steady number of self-referrals made by rough sleepers each quarter.

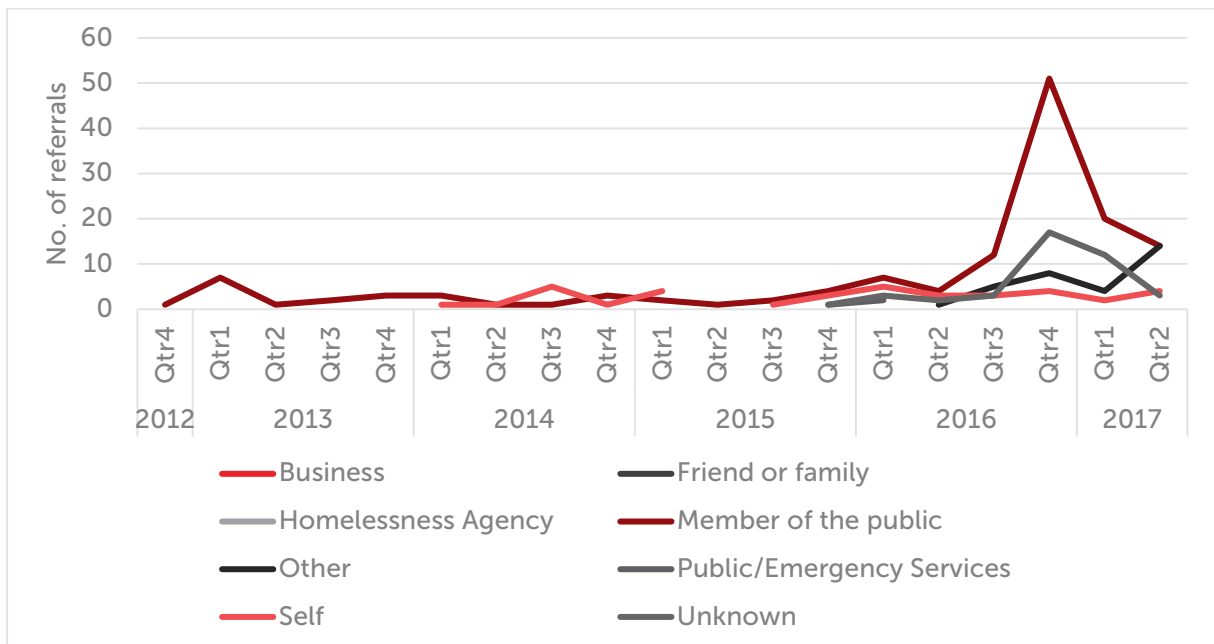
**Figure 6.5: StreetLink referrals over time, by self/other referrals (Cornwall)**



Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data

Looking more closely at the type of people (capacity) making StreetLink referrals, Figure 6.6 shows that the greatest rise has been in referrals from members of the public, with a large spike in winter 2016.

**Figure 6.6: StreetLink referrals over time, by referrer capacity (Cornwall)**

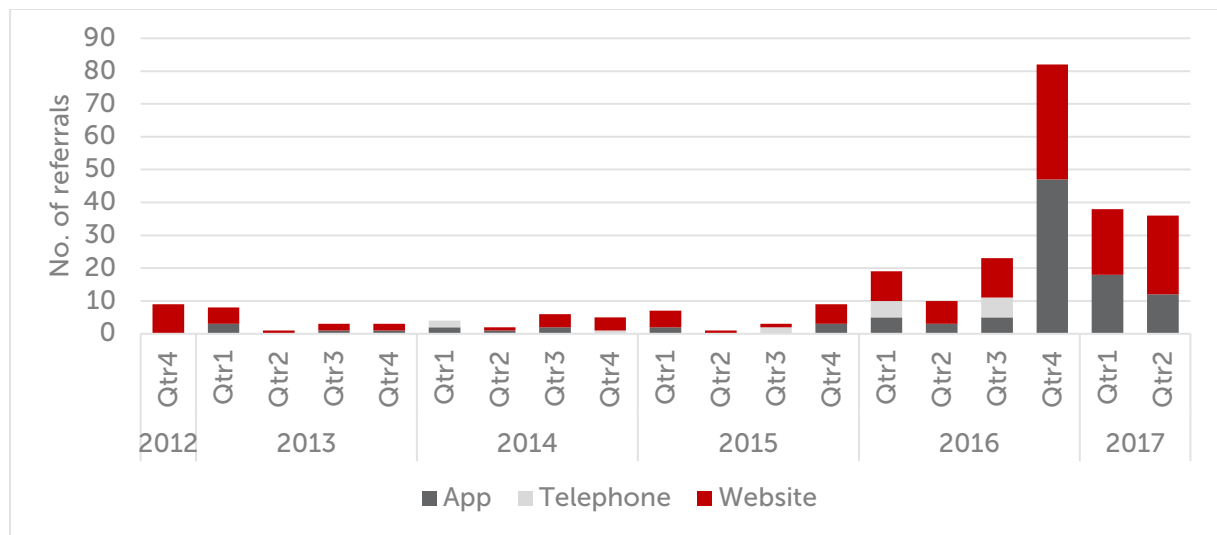


Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data

Referrals have been made via the StreetLink website every quarter since it was introduced in 2012, with small numbers of referrals being made via the phone or

app periodically. However, the use of the app jumped to its highest level in quarter four of 2016, which also saw the greatest numbers of referrals via the website (Figure 6.7). This suggests that members of the public were alerted to the app and website and started using it in higher frequency at this time. No members of the public or self-referrers opted in to take part in a telephone interview as part of the user survey, so it was not possible to explore this in greater detail.

**Figure 6.7: StreetLink referrals over time, by channel (Cornwall)**



Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data

The local authority suggested that StreetLink can help to play a role in raising awareness and improving understanding of rough sleeping, and that it is an important mechanism for enabling members of the public to feel that they are able to take constructive action when they encounter rough sleeping.

*Well, I think people like to feel they're doing something. And if you can direct them to the StreetLink referral process then perhaps they feel like they've done something positive. And yeah, and I think people like that. (Local authority, Cornwall)*

In terms of impact, the local authority and outreach team representatives were generally satisfied with StreetLink fulfilling its aims of providing the public with a means to take appropriate action when they see someone sleeping rough, and providing early intelligence to local homelessness services about new rough sleepers. However, in terms of helping to get rough sleepers off the streets faster it was less clear as this is highly dependent on the availability of services in the areas where people are rough sleeping and the referrals are being made.

*Well, it's getting them linked into whichever services accommodation-wise are usually around. Where we are based in the city area of Truro, it's great if you're within 10, 15 miles' radius. But if you're right at the other side of Cornwall, I mean that's 320 square miles, it's a nightmare to get anybody down from, say, North Cornwall down to where we are. So, as soon as you*

*get to us, then there are services, but certainly up that end, there's nothing. So, it's a big problem getting anybody linked into services out of our area. (Outreach team, Cornwall)*

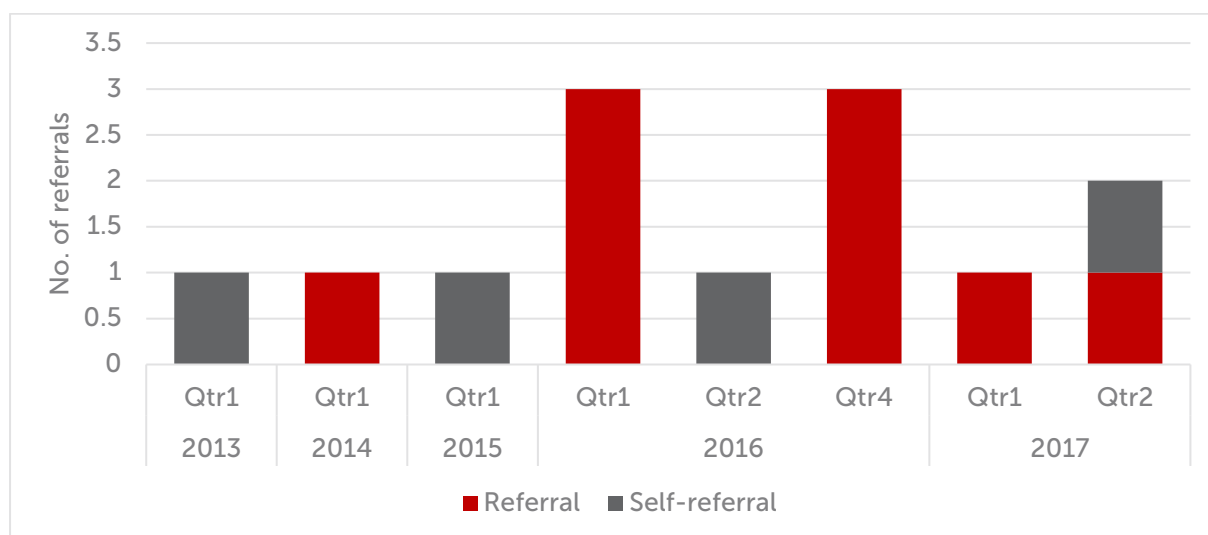
Examining suggestions for improvements, the outreach team felt there was not a lot of awareness of StreetLink amongst members of the public. Similar to other areas in England and Wales, increased advertising and awareness raising was a key area to improve.

### Case study 3: West Lindsey (Local authority with low levels of rough sleeping)

West Lindsey was selected as a case study area in order to understand how StreetLink fits into the context of an area with both low levels of rough sleeping, and low numbers of StreetLink referrals. West Lindsey had its own local phone line to report rough sleepers so has some provision to address the issues locally.

StreetLink referral data was compared with MHCLG rough sleeping counts and estimates to highlight the lowest quartile local authorities in terms of referrals between October and December 2016, and compared the results to the counts and estimates in 2016. There were 38 areas featuring in both lists; West Lindsey was selected from these due to its mix of urban and rural population.

**Figure 6.8: StreetLink referrals over time, by self/other referrals (West Lindsey)**



Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data

West Lindsey is one of seven districts in Lincolnshire, which has a county-wide outreach service commissioned by the County Council. Historically rough sleeping numbers have been very low, and annual counts of zero or one have regularly been submitted. According to the local authority, there have been more instances of rough sleeping over the last 12 months, as a result people are being

evicted from supported housing at very short notice. However, the outreach team has been able to respond quickly to these.

When the first street outreach was initiated in West Lindsey it included a local 0800 number for people to report rough sleepers and, when the service was recommissioned by Public Health, the new provider continued to have a local phone line. The local authority reported that this local phone line is widely promoted across all partners and is well used. There was no specific decision not to prioritise StreetLink; rather the existence and efficiency of the local phone line means that it does not currently make sense to use StreetLink; Figure 6.8 shows the low levels of StreetLink referrals since it was first introduced.

*So, it's purely because we've got a local solution that's working effectively, and is embedded in our overall commissioning process, and embedded within our homelessness strategy, so our view is, why would we promote anything else? So we've never had a bad experience of StreetLink, or anything like that, but we wouldn't see the value in using it when we have something that works effectively that we have a degree of daily contact with, and it just feels like we'd be putting another step in the process if we were to then start promoting StreetLink as opposed to the local number. (Local authority, West Lindsey)*

However, the outreach team reported that they found a qualitative difference in the referrals that are received through StreetLink compared to those received via the local phone line, as well as in the process that is used to derive the referral information. While they still respond to StreetLink referrals as and when they arrive, for example when a member of the public may have found the StreetLink information online, the team feels that these are not of as good quality or provide the detail needed, which the local phone line is able to provide. The outreach team also does not actively promote StreetLink or use it as a referral route.

The fact that the existing local provision is via the phone, whereas the relatively small number of StreetLink referrals are made using the StreetLink website or app since Quarter two of 2016, means that the outreach service feels that they cannot provide the same local, personalised service and the sometimes ongoing contact that they can using the local phone line.

*I think we also use our freephone number as a support tool, so because we cover such a huge area, we ask people who we find rough sleeping to call in every night to keep us updated as to their location, but also to ring in during the day in case of any messages or anything they want to pass on to us. (Outreach team, West Lindsey)*

The local authority would only consider incorporating StreetLink if it could add value to existing local provision. For example, if it were to enable more calls to be

answered, bolster the feedback loop, or provide additional intelligence or insight to the outreach team, StreetLink might be a more attractive prospect.

## Case study 4: Tower Hamlets (London local authority in top ten StreetLink referrals, Oct-Dec 2016)

Tower Hamlets was selected as a case study area in order to understand how StreetLink is used in a London borough with very high levels of rough sleeping and high levels of StreetLink use, as well as a broad range of homelessness services. Tower Hamlets features in the top ten StreetLink referral areas across all three months and has the third highest rough sleeping count in London, as recorded on CHAIN. It has also seen a noticeable increase in the issue in the past two years.

From the perspective of the local authority, the role of StreetLink is to help members of the public identify rough sleepers that the outreach team is not already finding. It sits within the area's broader strategy of aiming to get to new rough sleepers quicker and ensure that they do not spend a second night on the street, as well as helping to identify entrenched rough sleepers. It is also a referral route for other agencies when they feel that someone will not be picked up through the other services on offer.

*...giving agencies and the other departments, voluntary and statutory, a place where they, if they really strongly believe somebody's going to rough sleep and they're not being picked up by our prevention programme or another service, then it gives them an opportunity to ensure that someone is looked for to then prevent them from spending a second night out.  
(Local authority, Tower Hamlets)*

The outreach team in Tower Hamlets is commissioned to use StreetLink as a source of referrals which direct its work, with accompanied targets for the time in which the team is expected to respond to these referrals.

*...they send it through to us via email and it also appears on CHAIN so, at the beginning of a shift, we will run a report on all of our referrals. They come with times of bedding down, so we plan our shifts around when people are saying that they'll be bedded down, and geographically, so we cover the whole borough on every shift. We literally plan that shift, go out at the times after they've said they were bedding down or before they're getting up, so during an early morning shift, and just go and look for them in that site as best we can. (Outreach team, Tower Hamlets)*

The outreach team understands that using StreetLink in this way presents both benefits and challenges. StreetLink can help to identify rough sleepers the outreach team might not otherwise come across on their rounds of the streets.

However, it also means that the team has the capacity only to look for StreetLink referrals.

*Yeah, it just makes the shifts a lot busier, it means that the shifts can only really accommodate looking for referrals rather than visiting those people that we know to be out, so adjusting the capacity to do both, and that can be a challenge, especially because on average throughout the year we don't find about 65% of them. So, obviously that's quite a lot of time spent with nothing really productive at the other end of it. (Outreach team, Tower Hamlets)*

The fact that such a high number of referrals are not found was reflected in the experience of one homeless person who used StreetLink to self-refer. For them, that call to StreetLink was an attempt at taking their first step away from homelessness.

*Mostly I was in a situation where at the beginning of this year I had pneumonia so I really had to start taking it seriously and actually searching for information for help. I didn't choose to be homeless, I just wasn't ready to access that kind of help. I suppose I look at StreetLink as the start... well like a conveyor belt to start not being homeless. (Self-referrer, Tower Hamlets)*

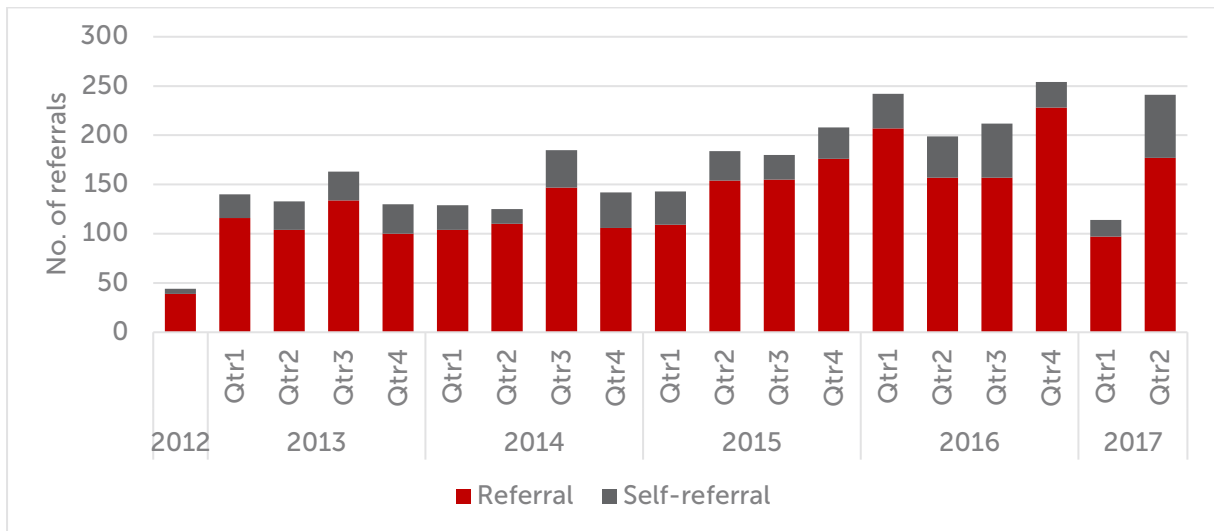
This self-referrer found out about StreetLink through the Job Centre and then searched for more information online. They were not aware of the mobile app, did not have credit on their phone to call the helpline, so chose to use the website the first time they contacted StreetLink, which they did at the library. However, they experienced difficulties being found, which they recognised was likely to be partly due to their own need to move from the place they were sleeping when they made the referral. However, they were disappointed with the amount of time it took for someone to come out and find them.

*...the problem is, because of my location and vulnerability and my habits of using camping equipment and all that, it wasn't ever in my best interest to stay in one place. Also, not having the funds to be in regular contact, the link broke really. And it was quite a big step for me at that particular time... (Self-referrer, Tower Hamlets)*

*...the second time someone rang after four and they were quite blasé about saying, "Well I might come out tomorrow or the next day or it could be some other time," which was, you know, pathetic. (Self-referrer, Tower Hamlets)*

This person was never found by StreetLink, and felt frustrated by their experience which led to a lack of willingness to use the service again. Figure 6.9 shows that a high proportion of referrals in Tower Hamlets, as with other London boroughs, are self-referrals.

**Figure 6.9: Number of referrals over time by self-referral compared to other referrals (Tower Hamlets)**

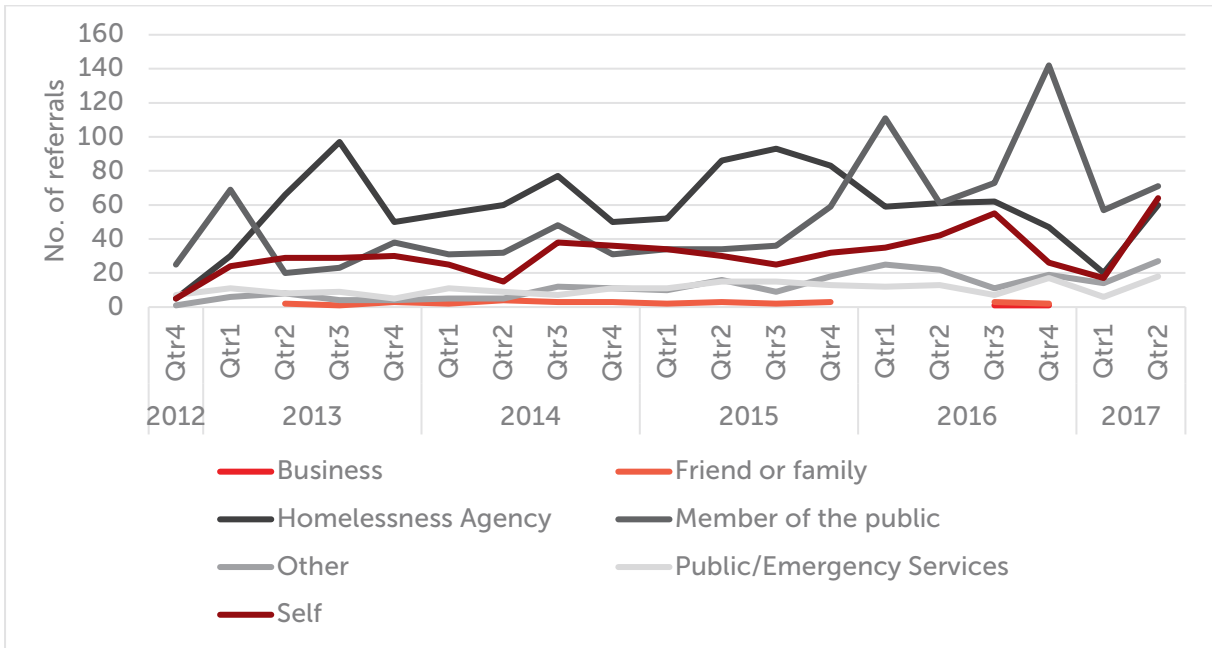


Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data

Figure 6.10 shows that, in the last quarter, whilst referrals from members of the public have gone up, there has also been a recent spike in self-referrals in Quarter 2 of 2017 alongside people from homelessness agencies. Interviews with representatives from homelessness agencies highlighted that some homelessness services in the borough refer directly into StreetLink when rough sleepers present to them, and work in partnership with the outreach team in making these referrals.

*We currently make all the StreetLink referrals for self-reporting rough sleepers coming into the building...So, they will come in for a triage assessment. During that initial capture, if they mention that they are rough sleeping, then we will go over the details of that report of rough sleeping, the place, the time, their description. If there is doubts around the timings of that, we will seek some advice from the outreach teams, to see if they have been around that area, have they spotted anybody, do they know whether that area is clear or not? (Homelessness service, Tower Hamlets)*

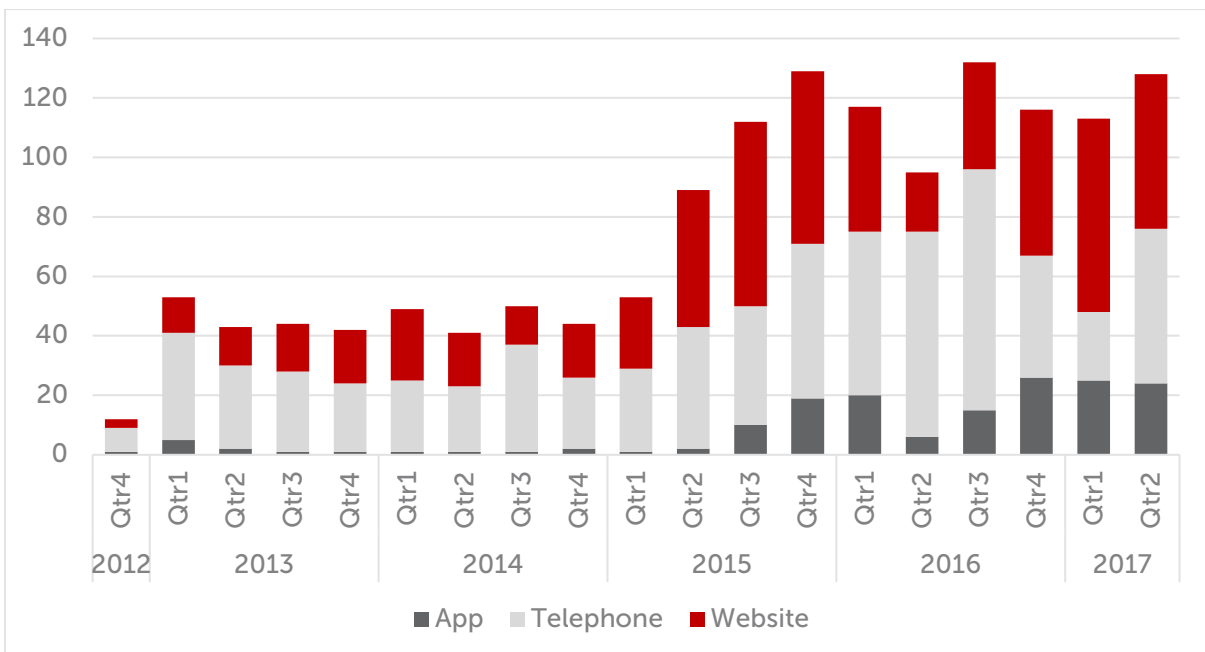
**Figure 6.10: Referrals over time by capacity (Tower Hamlets)**



Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data

As shown in Figure 6.11, the use of the phone line was consistently the main referral channel in Tower Hamlets during the first two years of StreetLink operation, with some use of the website and small numbers of referrals via the mobile app. The website then became more widely used to make referrals, although referrers continued to make significant use of the phone line. Since winter 2015, use of the app became more widespread, but phone and web referrals continue to be the predominant referral channels.

**Figure 6.11: Referrals over time by channel (Tower Hamlets)**



Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data



Stakeholders in Tower Hamlets suggested that StreetLink could be improved through its relationship to CHAIN. Given the way StreetLink is used by outreach teams in Tower Hamlets as a source of referrals, there was a suggestion that, if it was a named person being referred, there should be more opportunity to identify their CHAIN number or if they are a client of No Second Night Out. Stakeholders also thought it would be useful for StreetLink phone line volunteers to have opportunities to see how it operates in different locations across England, as they are very aware that they use StreetLink in a different capacity to other areas both in and outside of London.

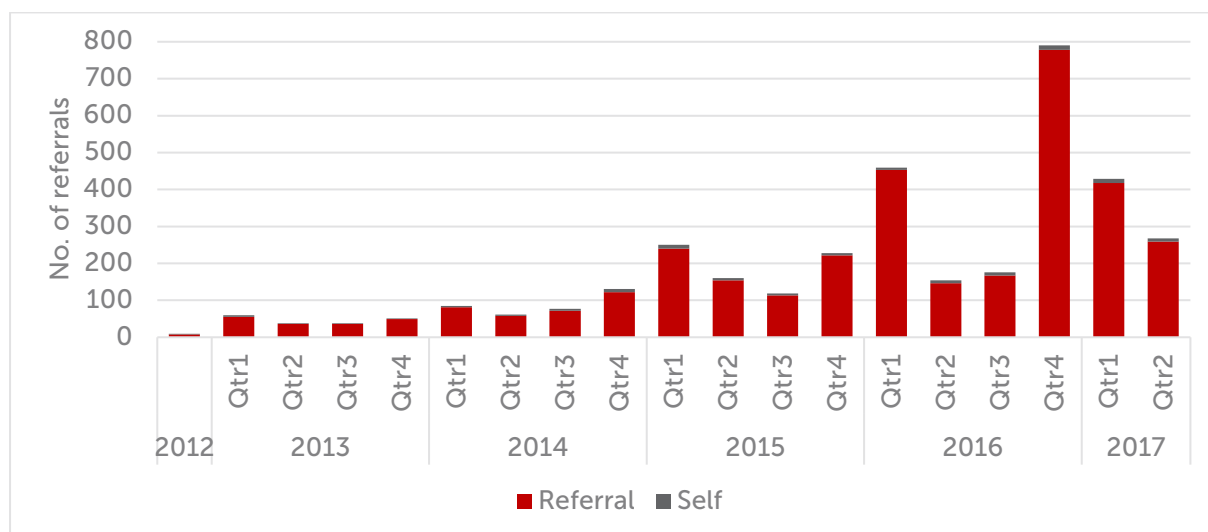
### Case study 5: Birmingham (Non-London local authority in the top ten StreetLink referrals, Oct-Dec 2016)

Birmingham was selected as a case study due to it being the area outside of London with the highest number of StreetLink referrals between Oct-Dec 2016 (790) and a higher than average rough sleeping counts and estimates figure (55). The aim was to investigate how StreetLink is used in a major city other than London.

When Birmingham City Council first started using StreetLink when it was introduced in 2012, they were a bit reticent about a national service because the outreach team already knew the majority of homeless individuals by name, and they started receiving a lot of referrals about these individuals who were already known to them. With the outreach team having to respond to these referrals, the system initially resulted in some duplication. However, StreetLink has since become part of the standard referral route, with a target response time of within 48 hours. Many referrals are followed up within 24 hours, largely because many of the referrals are for rough sleepers within the city centre where outreach teams are already visiting.

StreetLink referrals in Birmingham have increased steadily over time, with ever larger spikes in the number of referrals received each winter. While self-referrals make up a small proportion of overall referrals, these were highest in Quarter 4 of 2016 (Figure 6.12).

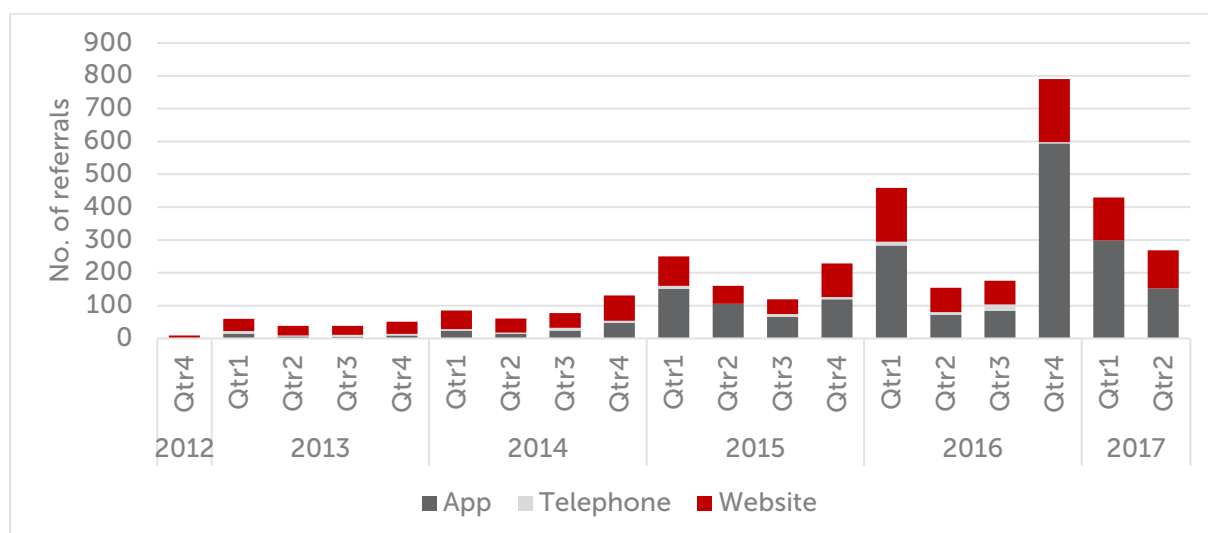
**Figure 6.12: Referrals over time: Self-referrals compared to other referrals (Birmingham)**



Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data

The local authority has actively promoted StreetLink through its website and through ensuring the web link and app are mentioned in all media and communications work they do. They believe that the high referral rates received by the outreach team are as a result of this. Figure 6.13 shows that most referrals in Birmingham have been received either via the app or website with little use of the phone line.

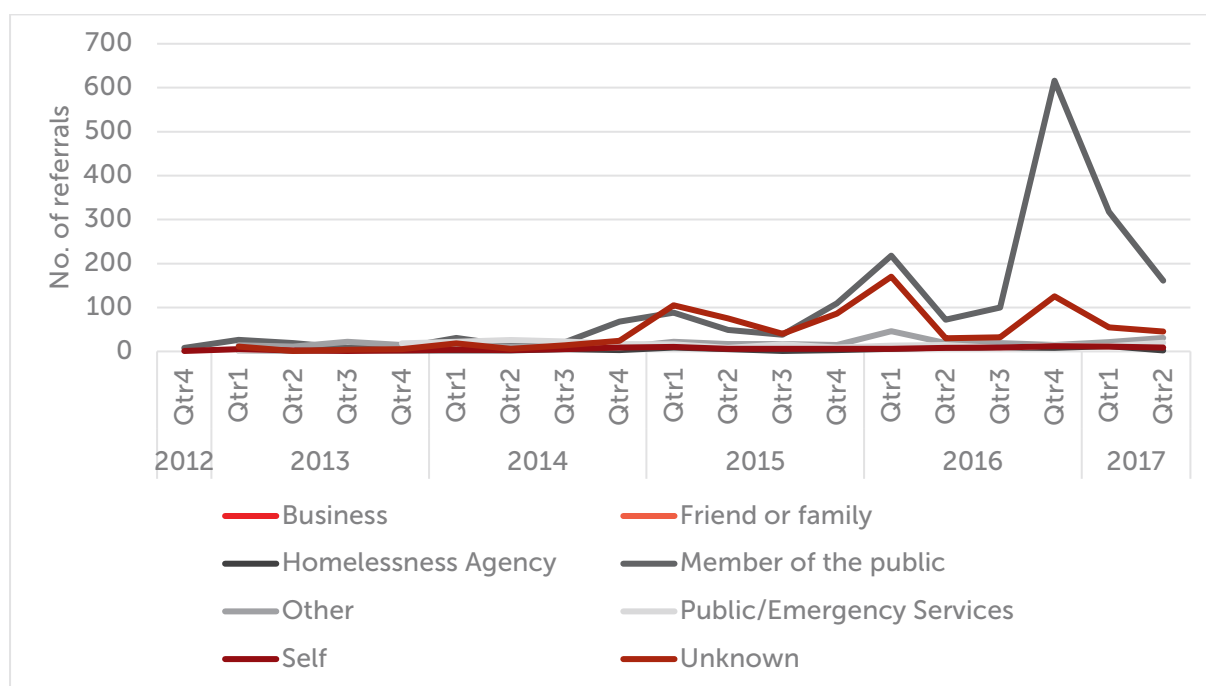
**Figure 6.13: Referrals over time by channel (Birmingham)**



Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data

Figure 6.14 shows that, whilst there are some referrals by homelessness agencies and other public services, members of the public still make up the most of these referrals, with a spike to 616 in Quarter 4 of 2016.

**Figure 6.14: Referrals over time by capacity (Birmingham)**



**Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data**

Where the local authority and the outreach team have come to see the value was when StreetLink referrals alerted the outreach team to new cases of rough sleepers outside of the city centre of whom they would otherwise not have been aware.

*I think it is very easy for the public to do, and I think it's quite an easy app and website to use, in terms of referring. I think it is a good mechanism, particularly if you've got large cultivation areas. So, for Birmingham, although its city centre is quite compact, it's quite a big city. So, that's being promoted to allow people to be reporting from outside the city centre. It does give very good coverage that allows people, if they do come across someone, to report that person. (Local authority, Birmingham)*

*I must say, it's been really useful, because we cover such a large geographical area, to find out about those that are outside the city centre. I think most of the people who are referred in the city centre we already know about, we've already spoken to them, but if somebody's hidden behind a disused garage or at the bottom of somebody's garden, pitched up in a tent in a field, we wouldn't have found them, so that's putting us in touch with people who still need the support but are perhaps more hidden. So those definitely we wouldn't find out about in any other way. That's been a good advantage. (Outreach team, Birmingham)*

The local authority also finds StreetLink to be useful for providing intelligence to commissioners on the volume of referrals and their outcomes.

*I think it is useful from commissioning purposes, to have a look at what's the sort of volumes, how are we responding to those, as outreach services, to give us some information around where it might need to make changes. (Local authority, Birmingham)*

However, some of the challenges with referrals have persisted for the outreach team, particularly in terms of the referral system itself, which have had implications for the capacity of the team to administer referrals and on the process of providing feedback on referral outcomes.

*I think just the fact that it comes in as an email and then with the visiting, if that person's not found then it literally is a quick piece of paper procedure of then going back and then sending it by email. Then somebody's got to update the system the other end, whereas if we had a system that interacts then I think that would be a much smoother process. (Homelessness service, Birmingham)*

*There have been odd blips where we've fed back that we've visited, that hasn't gone back to the person who's referred, so then they're thinking there's no response been, and we've been in and gone, "Actually we did and this is the response." (Homelessness service, Birmingham)*

Indeed, the local authority felt that it was inefficient for the referrals to be made in Birmingham, be sent to London, be sent out to local authorities, to respond locally, and for the outcome information to be sent back to London.

In order to address some of these challenges, Birmingham City Council is currently working with Homeless Link to set up StreetLink Birmingham, which will effectively be a copy of the national system but specific to Birmingham. The launch is planned for January 2018. The main differences between the local and national system is that it will use Birmingham-specific messaging, it will enable local filtering of the data, and the data will be real-time. Anyone using StreetLink to make a referral who enters a Birmingham postcode will be automatically directed into StreetLink Birmingham.

The initiative originally came about because Birmingham City Council was looking into alternative giving schemes, but wanted to enable members of the public to refer rough sleepers to local services as well as encourage them to donate. Rather than setting up something new, they started talking to Homeless Link and it was agreed that they would create a local StreetLink system, using the existing StreetLink technology.

In contrast to the national system, StreetLink Birmingham will enable real-time data on referrals so the outreach team can log directly into the StreetLink system, check the referrals received in real time, respond to the referrals, and then update the referrals through the system in real time; the updates will automatically be sent directly to the referrer. Many of the back-office functions

will be maintained by StreetLink, and the Birmingham referrals will count towards the national figures.

The outreach team is hoping that the new system will prevent previous challenges they have faced with the national system, such as duplicate referrals. Through being able to filter referrals locally, they will be able to run their own de-duplication process.

The Local authority is also hoping to use the new system as an opportunity to communicate about the difference that StreetLink referrals have made locally.

*...one of the things that we'll be able to do as part of having our own version of it is put our own local messaging out. This is how many referrals they've had, this is how many people have been contacted as a result of your referrals, this is what's happened to them. So, just putting some general information out there around, actually, what has happened, and doing some myth-busting things, we want to put on ours as well... (Local authority, Birmingham)*

This addresses a current frustration that it can be difficult to assess the impact of StreetLink on rough sleeping, as ultimately it is the outreach team rather than StreetLink that does the work to support people off the streets.

*It's difficult to say really, because, I mean, obviously, StreetLink is really that mechanism for telling someone about an individual who's rough sleeping. It's the outreach team's responsibility to go and do that engagement, and try and support them into accommodation, but it's a useful platform to make sure that the referrals are coming in. (Local authority, Birmingham)*

*So I don't think there's much reporting and feedback in that sense that comes back to me. It might go to the local authority, I don't know, but we just get that big report of how many came in, how many we responded to on time, and there probably is more that could be done to analyse the data and make that useful. (Homelessness service, Birmingham)*

There will be opportunities for StreetLink Birmingham to learn from the national system and vice versa.

*So, although we will get some benefit of their national knowledge locally, it will probably also help shape some of the national messaging as well, when they see what happens on a local level. So, I think it works to the advantage of both of us, in terms of doing it this way. (Local authority, Birmingham)*

Interviews with members of the public in Birmingham found that, before knowing about StreetLink, they had usually been motivated to take some action themselves to help rough sleepers in terms of direct help through taking food and drinks, as well as clothing and sleeping bags, to the individuals but felt that

they wanted to be able to doing something more to help them get professional support.

The motivation for members of the public to contact StreetLink was from seeing rough sleeping where they had not experienced it previously, and close to home. They felt that taking action to help an individual was feasible, but did not feel that StreetLink was a practical solution to helping homeless people in large numbers. The motivation to use StreetLink for this member of the public was seeing them close to their own home:

*I mean, to be honest, I see quite a lot of homeless people in the city centre. I couldn't email Street Link about that, there is too many of them. I wouldn't be able to help them. I just got in touch about this one guy, because it was quite unusual to see him so close to home. I work in Birmingham city centre, so I see lots of homeless people. So, the difference with this guy was that he was close to home. He was in the little town where I live, on the outskirts of the city centre. (Member of public, Birmingham)*

Members of the public in Birmingham found the website easy to use and were also pleased with the feedback they had received that the person had been helped. One person did comment on the fact they did not find out how the person they had referred had been helped in terms of tangible outcomes and wanted to know more about their accommodation options. The main suggestions for improvements to StreetLink from members of the public were around promoting the service, and providing feedback on responses.

## Case study 6: Brent (Outer London Borough)

Brent is in the top 50 StreetLink referral areas in England (294) and, according to CHAIN, is one of the 10 boroughs with the highest levels of rough sleepers recorded during 2016/17.

The local authority in Brent commissioned the outreach team to use StreetLink as one of the routes through which they receive referrals of rough sleepers, and the outreach team uses StreetLink referrals to plan its activities.

*...we've always been working with StreetLink. We always base our outreach shifts through StreetLink; we always follow the StreetLink referrals, and actually, even the previous service provider used to do exactly the same. So what we do is, before we go on shift, we go through the StreetLink referrals, we try to find out, where are the areas we need to target? (Outreach team, Brent)*

The outreach team also aims to respond to referrals within three days, despite have a small team of two people working in a relatively large geographical area.

The outreach team sees the value of StreetLink when they receive referrals they would not have otherwise.

*...they can say, "I have a rough sleeper in my back yard, and I never reported this person". I mean, for us, it's when there's someone we had no idea existed. (Outreach team, Brent)*

The outreach team finds the system both easy and effective to work with in terms of keeping intelligence on an individual and a record of what action has been taken to help them. This is echoed by the local authority which finds StreetLink a useful tool for gathering intelligence about the scale and location of rough sleeping in the borough.

*Statistically, it's helped to know how many people...to check the customer's journey, for example. So, if it's a self-referral, we know when they first refer themselves as rough sleeping...so for me, the fact that StreetLink actually has been providing a broad overview of where the vulnerable customers are. (Local authority, Brent)*

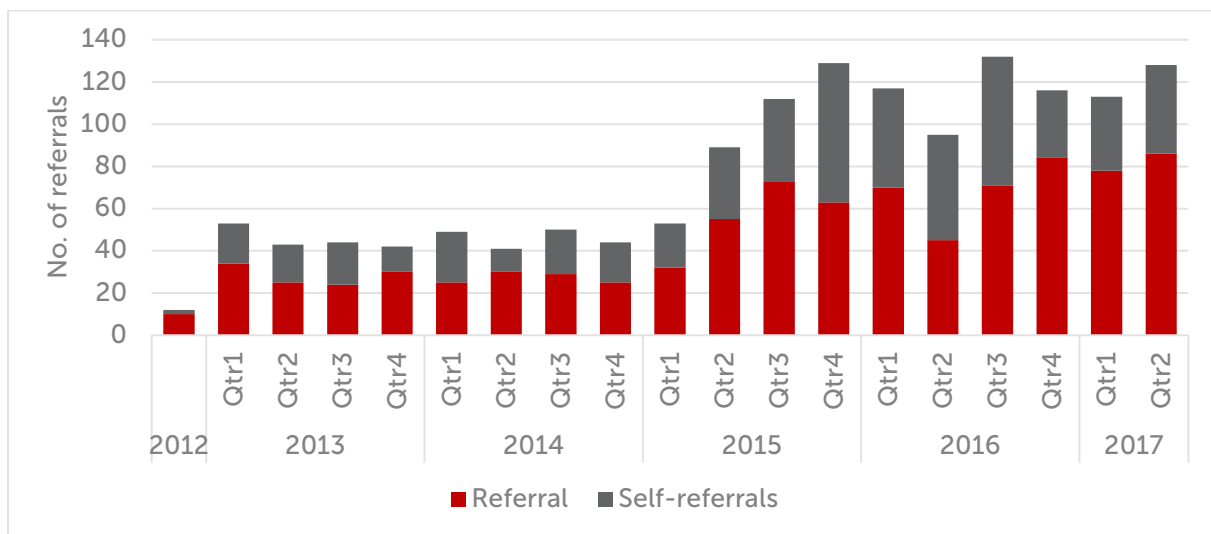
*It helps me to know what the entry points are. It helps to know where the demand is, it helps to estimate the numbers, although it's not real because most of them are not found, which I said is a major, major problem. (Local authority, Brent)*

Of all the case study areas, Brent has the highest proportion of self-referrals as a proportion of total referrals (Figure 6.16). This may be due to the proactive approach that the local authority has taken to promoting StreetLink, particularly in areas where street activity is prevalent.

*When they [the outreach team] go out on their daily shift, we have a leaflet and the leaflets are handed out in hotspot areas. There's been a significant increase in people who self-report and members of the public who refer as well. Internally, within the council, we promote from time to time...often through some of the key services that worked around the areas about referrals with StreetLink and just inform members of the public... And, there has been a significant increase in people who get referred. (Local authority, Brent)*

*I have seen significant increases in self referrals, which may be the outcome of more awareness and more publicity around the fact that people can self-refer or members of public can refer on StreetLink. (Local authority, Brent)*

**Figure 6.15: Referrals over time, self-referrals compared to total referrals (Brent)**



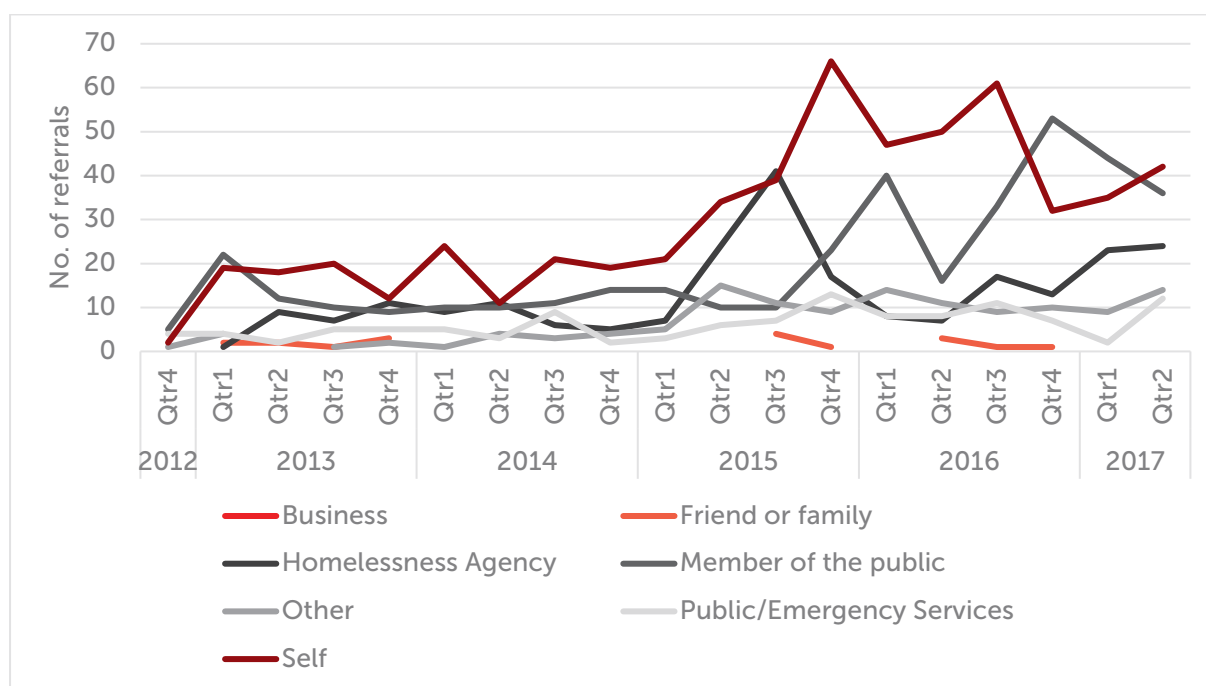
**Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data**

Compared to the other case study areas, Brent has had a relatively high number of self-referrals as a proportion of all referrals over time. Indeed, the number of self-referrals was actually greater than the number of other referrals in Quarter 4 of 2015.

Indeed, when looking more closely at the type of people (capacity) using StreetLink to make referrals, there is a clear rise in the number of self-referrals (Figure 6.16). Brent has an interesting spread between different capacity categories, which includes a spike in the use of StreetLink by homelessness agencies in Quarter 3 of 2015, and higher numbers of self-referrals compared to other types of referrals between Quarter 3 of 2015 and Quarter 3 of 2016. The number of referrals from members of the public stayed relatively constant until winter 2015 when referrals shot up, and the same trend was repeated in winter 2016-17.



**Figure 6.16: Referrals over time by capacity (Brent)**



Source: Homeless Link StreetLink data

In Brent, StreetLink is also promoted to homelessness services and other agencies, which is also reflected in the data (Figure 6.16).

*It has been helpful for agencies, for us to be able to provide a number that we can say, "Okay, if you refer here, it is basically a direct referral line for us, so you will be able to use this at any time," and then, if sometimes they will mix up people in different boroughs, if they say, "Okay, you are on this street, you are not really sleeping in the borough of Brent," they were not contacting the right team; but if you contact StreetLink, StreetLink will be able to allocate the referral for the right team. (Outreach team, Brent)*

One member of the public interviewed works at a food bank and explained that they regularly see people coming to the food bank who are homeless or on the brink of homelessness. They came across StreetLink when trying to put one of the food bank clients in touch with a local hospital for support, and was told that they should make a referral through StreetLink. They use StreetLink regularly to refer some of these people, and sometimes make multiple referrals about the same person. Here they questioned the effectiveness of StreetLink and how homelessness is dealt with in their area if they repeatedly see the same person, and raised questions about the role of StreetLink and its relationship with other services.

Suggestions for improvement in Brent related to how StreetLink could better locate rough sleepers, a similar suggestion coming through the national analysis. Here the proposal was a number of designated areas could be created to make it easier for outreach workers to respond to referrals and prevent frustration by rough sleepers about being found. They also suggested that a follow up call

could be provided, to reassure the rough sleeper that someone will be coming and an approximate time, or explain that they are not able to come, so that the person has clarity.

## 6.5 Chapter 6 summary: Key points

It was difficult to ascertain from the evidence in the evaluation the extent to which StreetLink was a preventative intervention as well as tackling street homelessness. Given that the system is designed to be used by members of the public when they see someone sleeping rough as opposed to someone at risk of homelessness, this would suggest that members of the public would not be able to use StreetLink as a way of preventing that person from sleeping rough, at least not for the first night. Whilst stakeholders recognised the importance of prevention measures, this could not be achieved through StreetLink alone. There were questions raised by homeless people who had used StreetLink themselves as to whether they could alert StreetLink at an earlier stage in their homelessness journey.

The data required to robustly ascertain whether StreetLink helps to get rough sleepers off the streets faster was not available. This is for the following reasons:

- In order to assess the *speed* of StreetLink referrals getting rough sleepers off the street, the date differential between each incoming referral and the date the individual was accommodated would need to be analysed. However, the outcome of 'into accommodation' does not provide a date of accommodation, only the dates of report completed and of feedback provided. This was not considered to be reliable enough to be used as a proxy for the day the individual was accommodated.
- In order to assess whether StreetLink referrals are *faster* at getting rough sleepers off the streets than other referrals, a meaningful comparison group is required. The CHAIN data provided for this evaluation only included individuals recorded on CHAIN who had a StreetLink referral; thus, there was no comparison group of rough sleepers who had moved into accommodation but had *not* been referred through StreetLink.

The effectiveness of StreetLink at getting rough sleepers off the streets faster, from the perspective of national stakeholders, was difficult to ascertain. While it was generally recognised that StreetLink did provide a means to identify new rough sleepers, whether it resulted in them getting off the street quicker was less clear.

Homeless people's motivation to use StreetLink was generally to seek support, often where they had failed to get help through other organisations and statutory services. Many talked about StreetLink as a first step away from

homelessness and felt it was a tangible action that could be taken to help them make that step towards receiving and accepting help.

Experiences of being referred by StreetLink to other services were mixed. Positive experiences were linked to being found quickly, and to the referral leading to meaningful engagement with services in their area. Where experiences were viewed as negative, these were mainly concerned with rough sleepers not being found, taking a long time or numerous attempts to be found, and a negative outcome at the end of the experience. Homeless people described how difficult and dangerous it was to remain in the same spot for hours or days at a time and suggested that designated spots or ways of calling back rough sleepers to understand their location would be an improvement on the current system.

The six case study areas demonstrated different ways in which StreetLink is used and linked to wider homelessness strategies in the local area. The diversity gives an insight into the way in which StreetLink is adapted for homelessness contexts and operational markets each with their opportunities and challenges.

Cardiff, which has seen a rise in rough sleeping levels, has a target in its rough sleeping strategy to ensure there are clear routes for members of the public to refer rough sleepers to an outreach team and StreetLink is part of this. The outreach team views StreetLink as a source of early intelligence, especially for people who are not known to them. There have been challenges including large numbers of referrals when StreetLink was first set up and the quality and duplication of referrals. Suggestions for improvement were mostly linked to awareness raising as many people still do not know what StreetLink is.

The mainly rural and large geographic spread of Cornwall means that StreetLink is viewed as a vital part of identifying rough sleepers, who the team of five outreach workers would otherwise be unable to locate. The local authority and homelessness organisations actively promote StreetLink and this is reflected in the rapid increase in referral numbers since Quarter 3 of 2016, driven by large increases from members of the public. Feedback from the local authority suggested that StreetLink does have and could have more of a role in raising awareness and improving understanding of rough sleeping.

West Lindsey is an area that has very low levels of rough sleeping but there have been more instances of rough sleeping in the last 12 months. West Lindsey has its own local phone line for members of the public to report rough sleepers, which is commissioned alongside their outreach services. As numbers are low, capacity to deal with reports to the phone line is manageable. Both the local authority and the outreach team feel that referrals received through the local phone line are preferable to those which come via StreetLink due to their quality, and the ability to respond in a more personalised way.

Two London boroughs were selected due to the high levels of rough sleepers and the prominence of several of these in the top ten referrals, based on

StreetLink data. Tower Hamlets views StreetLink as a mechanism to help members of the public find rough sleepers the outreach team is not already finding. The outreach team is commissioned directly to respond to StreetLink and also has targets to respond to referrals within a specific timeframe. By operating in this way, they identify more rough sleepers but it adds to their workload and can often lead to people not being found following a StreetLink referral.

Brent, being an outer London borough, has a large geographical area to cover through its outreach provision. Again, the local authority commissions the outreach team to use StreetLink as one of its referrals routes and places importance on StreetLink as an early intelligence tool. Unlike some areas, homelessness services are encouraged to report people via StreetLink and this is reflected in the higher than average proportions of homelessness professionals recorded as using StreetLink. Brent also has a high proportion of self-referrals.

The local authority in Birmingham, whilst not an early user of StreetLink in 2012, has since actively promoted it through its website and set a target response time of 48 hours for the outreach team. Similarly to other case study areas, StreetLink has been viewed as a valuable tool to alert outreach teams to rough sleepers they would not have been aware of otherwise. Some of the challenges experienced include the inefficiency of referrals between Birmingham and London, which add to response time. Consequently, Birmingham City Council is currently working with Homeless Link to set up StreetLink Birmingham, which will effectively be a copy of the national system but specific to Birmingham. The launch is planned for January 2018.

# Chapter 7

## Good practice and opportunities for improved service delivery

The evaluation has demonstrated that StreetLink is understood and is implemented in a range of ways across different operational markets. The impact of this is that the effectiveness of the platform is reliant on the extent to which it is advertised and promoted in local areas, how StreetLink interacts with commissioned outreach services, local authority strategy and practices, and how it is used by people experiencing homelessness and other homelessness services.

Key to evaluating the extent to which StreetLink is meeting its four aims is thinking about whether it still operates according to its stated mission:

- to offer the public a means to act when they see someone sleeping rough, and is the first step someone can take to ensure rough sleepers are connected to the local services and support available to them.

One of the main findings of the evaluation is that StreetLink is currently used and means different things to different people, and is being used way beyond the scope of its original stated aim above. Namely, as a channel for rough sleepers to refer themselves to services because they do not know where to go to seek advice or assistance or have been refused help by homelessness services (statutory and non-statutory). The evaluation has also highlighted that StreetLink has drifted from its original aim by also becoming a vehicle for homelessness professionals to report rough sleepers and signpost people to enable them to be found and helped by outreach teams in their area. In looking at how StreetLink can be improved and recommendations for future service delivery, it is important to address these in the context of how the platform has evolved over time and the diverse ways it is used by local areas. This final chapter highlights elements of good practice that have been found through the evaluation and also suggestions for new or improved service delivery developed through the ideation workshops and interviews with users of StreetLink throughout the five stages of the evaluation.

### 1.1 Current good practice

The evaluation has highlighted a number of ways in which StreetLink is currently working effectively to meet its aims, the examples below provide three specific cases which shows what can be learnt for future development of StreetLink and implemented both nationally and at the local level.

## Feedback mechanism

Providing timely, tailored and meaningful feedback to members of public made the difference between positive feedback about StreetLink and negative views, including reluctance to engage with the platform again. Whilst there are clear constraints to providing feedback to referrers in terms of the confidentiality of rough sleepers, there are simple things that can be replicated to ensure members of the public feel their referral was acted on and valued. Examples of feedback included stating the outcome for the individual or the contribution it had made to addressing homelessness in their area.

## Local StreetLink portals

The case studies and online surveys demonstrated that StreetLink is being used as a local portal or interface which accumulates all referrals, including those identified by commissioned outreach services. An example of this practice in its purest form is about to be implemented in Birmingham through StreetLink Birmingham, a local version of StreetLink developed specifically for Birmingham. Manchester is also demonstrating this practice but through its own system - Street Support. The evaluation also found less bespoke versions of StreetLink, which showed how referrals could be more integrated into outreach case work and helped identify new rough sleepers in Cardiff, Brent and Cornwall. This was found to also prevent duplications and improve the quality of referrals that were being received. Effective partnership working across local authorities, their commissioned services and local homelessness services was also more likely to occur through this mechanism.

## Formal partnerships

The formal partnership with Biffa provides meaningful engagement with a national business that is able to provide funding for StreetLink while also accurately promoting the service amongst its staff and customers. Lack of awareness and few opportunities to promote StreetLink were widely expressed as challenges by all stakeholders, especially members of the public. To address these would seek to improve the use, scale and understanding of StreetLink. Identifying and investing in more strategic partnerships of the type currently in place with Biffa would help achieve this.

## Intelligence tool

In many of the case study areas, StreetLink is viewed as an intelligence tool that can help the local authority and commissioned outreach services to identify new rough sleepers or those hidden from view that they would otherwise not know about. The role of StreetLink as an intelligence and data tool has much wider scope to improve service delivery (see below) and national stakeholders spoke extensively about how they wanted to build on StreetLink's ability to collect,

manage and use data as an early intelligence tool on rough sleeping at the national and local levels.

## 1.2 Future service delivery and recommendations

The interviews, surveys and ideation workshops showed that there is a huge appetite to maximise the potential of StreetLink and improve and develop current service delivery. The evaluation has found that the funders, members of the public and statutory and non-statutory services show great support for the concept of StreetLink and were keen to engage with the evaluation questions about practical ways in which this could be improved. The recommendations set out below have focused on the areas of StreetLink which have not recently been changed subsequent the evaluation being commissioned. In thinking about the future role of StreetLink and possible improvements it is important to consider the potential impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act coming into force in April 2018 in England. This will place a duty to prevent homelessness across local authorities in England which will shift resources to focus on upstream interventions and identifying people at risk of homelessness at 56 days or earlier and potentially preventing some individuals from rough sleeping. However, a duty to prevent has already been in place in Wales since 2014 so it also worth thinking about how lessons learnt from Wales on the prevention agenda and how it impacts rough sleeping levels (which have increased since 2014) can be translated to the English context.

**Recommendation 1:** Maximise the collection and use of data collected through StreetLink channels, which should include:

- Publishing local data about StreetLink outcomes including generic but positive feedback about local area success rates (e.g. 'Thank you for your referral; last month we accommodated X referrals and connected X referrals to local services in your area'), and anonymised case studies to be used by local businesses, organisations and in public awareness campaigns. This would also serve as a link to feedback for members of the public who are interested in how StreetLink works in their area and how it can make a difference to homelessness in the local context
- Improve and increase the links between StreetLink and other homelessness data systems including CHAIN, statutory homelessness statistics and other local level databases
- Review the outcomes categories to ensure they are providing meaningful data to stakeholders at the national and local levels

**Recommendation 2:** Increase budget and capacity for local and national level awareness raising campaigns, linked to resources to deal with additional traffic

generated by proactive campaigning. A key finding from the evaluation is that many people do not understand what StreetLink is, and there is very little activity to promote it, yet members of the public were very positive about its role and the concept once this had been established. This effort should include pre-designed templates and information so local authorities and organisations can give out correct information and design their own campaigns to highlight the role of StreetLink in their area. Increased campaigning and awareness raising would also serve as a mechanism for greater understanding of the issue of rough sleeping and homelessness. The evaluation found that, among members of the public, understanding of the wider issue is quite limited and StreetLink is not able to help shape this presently.

**Recommendation 3:** Explore further fundraising potential and partnerships with national and local businesses. The ideation workshops and stakeholder interviews unveiled appetite for local homelessness organisations to promote StreetLink in their areas. There is also potential for Homeless Link and St Mungo's to have conversations with organisations at a national level to sponsor and invest in StreetLink to facilitate an expansion of the service. Engaging with partners would not only increase financial contribution but would also help raise awareness as they could promote the service and the issue of rough sleeping within their own networks, as demonstrated in the example of the partnership with Biffa.

**Recommendation 4:** Separate StreetLink as a tool for members of the public only and develop an additional phonenumber for homelessness professionals and homeless people to self refer. Part of the issue identified by the evaluation relates to StreetLink drifting from its original aim for members of the public to alert rough sleepers in their local area. As StreetLink has developed, it has been used increasingly by homelessness professionals and homeless people and is trying to be too many things to too many people which has negatively affected expectations of different groups. There is a clear need for a helpline for rough sleepers and those at risk of sleeping rough to be linked to services but StreetLink is not necessarily the vehicle for this. Separate investment needs to be made to accommodate the needs of these different stakeholder groups and should be developed.

**Recommendation 5:** Improve the location mechanism and access to rough sleepers for outreach teams. The evaluation has highlighted issues with the quality of referrals and the high numbers of outcomes as 'person not found'. Some small changes could be made to the feedback loop between a referral being made and the person being located by an outreach team which would help with resourcing issues and wasted journeys by outreach teams to find individuals. These include:



- Designated places and times for rough sleepers to wait to get picked up, so that both the outreach team and the rough sleeper can have greater confidence that they will be found
- Follow-up contact with rough sleepers to assure them that someone will be coming to look for them, with an approximate time provided
- Outreach team could call the rough sleeper when they are coming out to find them, an approach which has proved successful in locating people when used
- Clarity about which homeless situation someone can be in to be eligible to use StreetLink, i.e. whether they need to be rough sleeping or could be sofa surfing

**Recommendation 6:** Galvanise large volunteering networks already in existence in national and local organisations to volunteer for the StreetLink phone line and become local ambassadors for StreetLink to promote the service to local businesses, community groups and services. This would offer opportunities to expand the phone line function but would also serve as a way of educating the public on the issue of homelessness and rough sleeping.

**Recommendation 7:** StreetLink (at appropriate cost) being offered more widely to local areas as a bespoke system that can be designed to respond to local issues and rough sleeping strategies and help prevent duplicates and low quality referrals. The proposal in Birmingham shows how StreetLink can be designed and respond to local need, the evaluation found that many of the challenges at the local area were concerned with delays in the feedback loop and lack of understanding of the local context.

**Recommendation 8:** Use StreetLink as a way of advertising local homelessness services to members of the public using the platform to raise awareness about homelessness services available in their area but also improve feedback and understanding of the process. The evaluation found that members of the public did not understand what happened to rough sleepers whom they referred, in terms of access to accommodation and other services including day centres, housing options and advice services. Having a directory of local services near to where they have seen a rough sleeper could help members of the public to divert rough sleepers to appropriate services, at the same time as educating the public about homelessness services available.

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