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**HOMELESSNESS CHARITY REPORTS 40% INCREASE IN DEMAND**

Kent homelessness charity Porchlight has released figures from the last financial year showing a 40% increase in people asking for its help.

The charity, which provides supported accommodation, homelessness prevention and outreach services across the county, has seen the most dramatic rise in demand for its rough sleeper service.

Chief Executive Mike Barrett said: "We have seen this coming for a couple of years and now Kent is facing a homelessness crisis on a deeply concerning scale. Our rough sleeper service alone has seen a 93% increase in referrals in the last year."

The charity's 24 hour helpline is also seeing unprecedented demand, receiving an average of 771 calls per month – even more shocking considering that the Canterbury Samaritans reported an average of just 476 in 2010.

"Having a stable home is the one basic human need that creates wellbeing in all other aspects of an individual's life. Not having that security can lead to a downward spiral in terms of mental ill-health, substance dependency and crime." explained Mr Barrett.

The crisis facing Kent echoes the national picture with government data showing that 26,400 people approached their local council for housing help in the first three months of 2011, a rise of 23% compared with the same period last year.

Less than half of these applications were successful resulting in growing numbers of "hidden" homeless – people forced to squat or sleep on friends' sofas after not qualifying for statutory help.

Gill Bryant, Porchlight's Head of Operations said: "When people are vulnerable and need help they shouldn't have doors shut in their face and be forced into squats and other unsuitable accommodation. It's the final stage before living in the street. Help needs to be there before it gets that far."

The charity says that the forthcoming changes to Housing Benefit and the introduction of the Localism Bill are going to put even more pressure on its services as people struggle to cope and spending cuts start to bite. Porchlight is particularly concerned about Kent Supporting People's decision to re-commission its rough sleeper service and reduce funding for this service by 75%.

Mr Barrett says: “Whilst we appreciate the need to make cuts it is unfair to make vulnerable people the main victims. There is insufficient money to meet the current demand, so we can’t begin to imagine how an ever-increasing number of people facing life on the streets will be supported with just a quarter of the money. We want to work with Kent County Council and all local authorities in order to reduce the impact of this dramatic cut to the county’s rough sleeper service.

The irony of it is that not supporting vulnerable people properly now will only cost the public purse more in the future with extra pressure on prison, health and local government. It’s a false economy where we will all suffer and those that need help most will suffer the greatest.

Housing Minister Grant Shapps said in January this year that if he’d thought the spending cuts would increase homelessness then he would have never supported them. We could see the consequences from a mile away.”

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## NOTES TO THE EDITOR

### 1. Referral and helpline statistics

Referrals	2010-11	2009-10	# incr	% increase
Accommodation	1,497	1,224	273	22%
East & West Kent Rough Sleeper	787	408	379	93%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,284</b>	<b>1,632</b>	<b>652</b>	<b>40%</b>
No. of calls to Outreach Helpline	9,257			

### 2. Samaritan’s statistics <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-kent-11698267>

3. Porchlight, established in 1974, is a Kent wide independent local charity that works to support single, vulnerable homeless people or those at risk of homelessness. In 2010-11 Porchlight helped more than 2,300 vulnerable people.

### 2. Porchlight provides three main support services:

#### **Kent Outreach Service**

The service supports rough sleepers and people in unsuitable temporary accommodation to find long term housing solutions. Support is offered through street outreach, local drop-in sessions and a 24 hour helpline **0800 567 7699**

#### **Supported Accommodation**

Porchlight has supported accommodation projects in Canterbury, Dover, Ashford, Tonbridge and Ramsgate. The accommodation ranges from medium to high support. There is specific accommodation for young people aged 16-21 years old and for people suffering enduring mental ill health.

Porchlight also has several managed and shared houses which provide move-on accommodation when people are ready to live more independently.

Residents at Porchlight accommodation have a dedicated key worker that works with them to address any issues preventing the person from achieving an independent lifestyle.

### **Homelessness prevention**

The charity works to prevent homelessness through a floating support service, which is offered to vulnerable people living in their own accommodation. We provide one to one support to people at risk of homelessness. A floating support worker makes home visits and works with the individual to address the issues affecting their housing security.

4. Porchlight is committed to involving our service users throughout all the activities of the charity. They are actively encouraged to become involved in education, employment, volunteering and service user involvement opportunities.