

THE HOMELESS PEOPLE'S COMMISSION

FULL REPORT

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SUMMARY

THE HOMELESS PEOPLE'S COMMISSION

The Homeless People's Commission is a committee of people with experience of sleeping rough. This first report from the Commission reviews policies and services for people sleeping rough and makes recommendations for their improvement.

The Commission heard evidence from policy makers and analysts, service providers, researchers and campaigning groups.

PREVENTION OF HOMELESSNESS

Many effective preventive services have been developed but coverage is still patchy and in some areas it is difficult for people to access services.

Our investigations cover:

- **access** to preventive services
- the **structure and quality of services**, including promoting good practice
- **support services**, including improved assessments of need, specialist services and peer involvement
- the role of **health services**
- the **cost effectiveness** of prevention services

STREET OUTREACH

There have been many improvements in the effectiveness of street outreach which have resulted in reductions in the numbers of people sleeping rough. We would like to see all areas adopt the practices of the best.

Our investigations cover:

- **accurate assessments** of the number of rough sleepers and their support needs
- effective **street outreach** techniques
- **joint work** between agencies
- the role of **day centres**
- homeless people with **no recourse to public funds**
- **personal plans and budgets** for people sleeping rough

TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

Hostels have improved in recent years, with many now providing self-contained rooms and a pleasant environment. Much of this improvement has been directed and funded by the government programme, Places of Change.

Our investigations cover:

- **access** to temporary accommodation
- **hostel type and design**, including smaller specialised hostels for different needs

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- **staffing**, including recruitment of former service users and better training
- **support** including activities, training, more specialised help and peer support
- **length of stay** in hostels
- **service charges**

RESETTLEMENT WORK

Resettlement work is an essential part of a successful programme to help people off the streets. It also helps to shorten the length of time people spend in expensive hostels and to prevent repeat homelessness, thereby saving public expenditure.

Our investigations cover:

- **tenancy support**, including support plans
- **staff expertise** and the need for specialist training
- **peer support** from service users and ex-service users
- **managing finances**, including the need for personal financial plans
- **community care grants**: resolving problems over delayed payments
- the need for more help with **training and employment**
- **cost effectiveness** and the need to preserve and improve resettlement services

SETTLED HOUSING

Social housing

Social housing is the most popular option for settled housing among homeless people. There are cost effective ways in which the supply could be increased, but there will still be continuing shortages in many areas for the foreseeable future.

Our investigations cover:

- **housing finance**: support for the LGA campaign to allow local authorities to keep income from rents and sales so they can build more new homes.
- **local authority allocation policies**: more consistency in local authority policies and better information for applicants.
- **quality of social housing**: new developments should include employment and training opportunities, not concentrating people with problems on troubled estates, mixed developments with private housing and better consultations on housing strategies.

The private rented sector

The shortage of social housing makes it essential to expand options in the private rented sector. Private rented access schemes have made progress in helping homeless people to find housing. Private renting is often a cheaper and more popular option than hostels, although social housing is probably the most cost effective of all.

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Our investigations cover:

- **landlord and property standards**, including national good practice standards and the exclusion of bad landlords
- **private rented access schemes**, including national good practice standards, flexibility over local connection rules and rapid payment of deposits
- **shared accommodation**, including more choice of accommodation for people aged under 35 and over who they share with
- **tenancy support**, immediate access to floating support
- **rents** and the Local Housing Allowance.

SELF HELP

There are many inspiring examples of self-help among the Commissioners' own projects and experiences. However, there is at present often little contact between self-help groups and there is much that they could learn from each other.

Drawing on our experience we make a number of recommendations for extending self-help. Many of them would fit in with the government's plans to encourage self-help.

Our investigations cover:

- **service user involvement** in managing projects
- **peer mentoring and support schemes**, how service users can help each other in the resettlement process

- **peer training**
- **peer research**
- **volunteering**
- **employment and training**, including schemes for jobs within homelessness organisations
- **social enterprises**
- **personalised plans**
- **influencing local and national policies**

WELFARE BENEFITS

We have found that the current benefits system has failed. Its complexity makes it difficult for staff to administer and for service users to understand. Too often mistakes are made, adding to the poverty and stress of homelessness. We welcome the government's proposals for a simpler system which will mean people will not be penalised for taking work, including part time work. The government has recognised that by helping people get into work it will save expenditure on benefits.

Our investigations cover:

- **service standards and staffing**, including ensuring best practice, service user involvement and enhancing staff skills
- **Jobcentre procedures**, including timetables for payments and better information
- reducing the **complexity** of the system

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- **training, work opportunities and incentives**, including more suitable job and training offers and better financial incentives.
- **disability benefits**: better assessments of work capabilities

CONCLUSIONS

There have been great improvements in the quality of services and a resulting reduction in the number of people sleeping rough. However, provision is still patchy and the quality of service varies. We make a number of recommendations designed to make best practice the norm and to help achieve the goal of ending rough sleeping by 2012.

We understand the constraints on public expenditure, but there have been a succession of studies which show that preventing rough sleeping and ensuring that homeless people are housed saves on expensive services such as health and the criminal justice system, which otherwise have to deal with the casualties.

If present programmes are not maintained and improved we believe that the number of people sleeping rough will begin to rise again.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our recommendations are included in the body of each chapter and listed together in **Chapter 9**.

INTRODUCTION

The Homeless People's Commission is a committee of 18 people with experience of sleeping rough. This first report from the Commission reviews policies and services for people sleeping rough and makes recommendations for their improvement.

AIMS OF THE COMMISSION

The Commission aims to:

- empower homeless people to play a role in the development and evaluation of policies and services
- consider the effectiveness of policies and services
- identify potential policy and service improvements
- ensure policy makers and practitioners consider our conclusions
- explore the best means for homeless people to continue this role
- develop and disseminate a model of people's Commissions in England that can be adapted for other socially excluded groups and in other UK countries

How the Commission works

The Homeless People's Commission has been developed from the model of the citizens' jury. Citizens' juries consider evidence from policy makers, practitioners and other experts, question them and reach conclusions. The Homeless People's Commission's key

innovation is that it supports an excluded group of citizens to analyse policies and services of which they have direct experience. It has involved key homelessness agencies, as well as representatives from central and local government, as witnesses and advisers.

The Commission is a diverse and inclusive group of homeless people drawing on our own personal experience and expertise. The Commissioners were recruited through a range of agencies, covering different client groups from all nine English regions.

The Commission was funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and had specialist support staff from three organisations:

- Groundswell, the leading self-help organisation for homeless people, who recruited, trained and supported the Commissioners and organised and facilitated the meetings of the Commission
- Research and Information Services, homelessness research specialists, who carried out research for the Commission, briefed witnesses and carried out feedback interviews with them, drafted briefing papers, notes of the meetings and reports
- SPEAKS from Newcastle University, experts on participatory action research, who provided advice on best practice in developing the citizen's jury model

An Advisory Group helped to ensure that the process was managed in a balanced and impartial manner. Membership of the Group included central and local government,

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voluntary groups, service providers, a social policy researcher and people with experience of sleeping rough.

There are further details of the Commissioners, support staff and Advisory Group in **Appendices 2, 4 and 5**.

The Commission heard evidence from policy makers and analysts, service providers, researchers and campaigning groups. Topics covered were:

- prevention of homelessness
- street outreach with people sleeping rough
- temporary accommodation
- resettlement work
- settled housing
- self help
- welfare benefits

Our findings on these are detailed in separate chapters in this report.

There are many aspects of public policy which affect services for people sleeping rough and we were not able to cover them all in detail. For example, we were not able in the time available to consider in depth the problems of homeless people who cannot claim on public funds. We hope to examine this and other issues in more depth in future sessions of the Commission.

The expert witnesses gave presentations and were then questioned by Commissioners. After considering their evidence, along with other

research and our own experiences, we drew up recommendations for policy and practice. The Advisory Group commented on drafts of these and they were discussed in a meeting with the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

There are further details of how the Commission worked in **Appendix 6** and the witnesses in **Appendix 2**.

EVALUATION

Our next step will be to carry out an evaluation which will examine:

- the effectiveness of Commission procedures in enabling members to arrive at considered conclusions
- any benefits to Commissioners, such as new knowledge, skills, confidence and empowerment
- the relevance of conclusions to policy makers and practitioners and their potential impact
- ways the process could be improved
- the transferability of the model to other socially excluded groups

The evaluation will formulate recommendations for future such exercises. These will be drafted into a good practice report.

We hope it will provide a model for a permanent Commission, for local Commissions and for involving marginalised communities in other

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areas of public policy.

A NOTE ON RECOMMENDATIONS

Our recommendations are included in the body of each chapter and listed together in **Chapter 9**. They are classified according to the target of the recommendation with the following abbreviations:

DCLG The Department of Communities and Local Government

DECC Department of Energy and Climate Change

DfE Department for Education

DH Department of Health

DWP Department for Work and Pensions

HO Home Office

HSP Homelessness service provider

LA Local authorities

MoD Ministry of Defence

MoJ Ministry of Justice

This report is being published at a time of severe constraints on public expenditure and we have

therefore also classified the estimated cost of the recommendations as follows:

- 1 Likely to save expenditure immediately, or incur nil or low extra cost
- 2 Requires some investment, but likely to save on net expenditure, although some further cost benefit analysis may be necessary
- 3 Would improve service quality at some extra cost and may therefore need to be deferred until resources are available

We have also prioritised our recommendations using two criteria: those which will have the most impact on improving services and which might be achievable in the short term. Priority recommendations are in **bold**.

PREVENTION OF HOMELESSNESS

BACKGROUND

Government policies and local services are increasingly focusing on services to prevent people from becoming homeless. These services aim to make sure people can stay in their present home or find a new home, as well as help with any support needs. It is far better for the individuals involved, and more cost effective, if people can be prevented from becoming homeless, rather than services having to pick up the pieces after the event.

In addition to drawing on our own experiences and previous research, we heard from two witnesses with extensive experience of planning and managing preventive services: Carolyn Howell, Co-ordinator, National Homeless Advice Service, Shelter and Diane Docherty, Homelessness Services Development Manager, Cambridge City Council.

There is a very wide range of different types of service and it was not possible to examine them all in detail, but we did consider:

- the factors which might increase the risk of homelessness
- the types of preventive service available
- access to these services
- specialist preventive services
- improving service quality
- the cost effectiveness of services

FACTORS WHICH INCREASE THE RISK OF HOMELESSNESS

A Crisis report on preventing homelessness reviewed previous research on the key risk factors which might lead to homelessness (Randall and Brown, 1999). It identified a number of factors, which were also supported by evidence from our witnesses. We have experienced a similar range of problems which can lead to homelessness.

The key factors which increase the risk of homelessness are:

- disputes with parents and step parents
- experience of physical or sexual abuse, particularly for young people
- domestic violence
- time in local authority care
- school exclusion
- lack of qualifications
- unemployment
- alcohol and drug problems
- mental health problems
- contact with the criminal justice system
- previous service in the armed forces
- relationship breakdown

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- lack of a social support network of family and friends
- debts
- previous experience of homelessness
- a combination of two or more of the above

There are also a number of key crisis points which can lead to rough sleeping:

- leaving the parental home after arguments
- leaving care without adequate support
- leaving prison
- discharge from the armed forces
- relationship breakdown
- a financial crisis of mounting debts
- eviction from a rented or owned home
- a sharp deterioration in mental health
- an increase in alcohol or drug abuse

One Commissioner spoke of his own experience of how needs built up to a crisis that might have been avoided with earlier preventive work:

"I became homeless because of drugs. I didn't budget, I didn't pay bills, I built up massive gas and electricity bills. I needed some support The housing association had seen a lot of comings and goings from my flat so they knew, because of neighbours gossiping, they knew I was on drugs. They threatened me with eviction. There was a shortfall in rent, so they had good grounds to evict me I did have a drugs worker, but I

lied to her, I didn't tell her the reason for the debts because I felt I was letting her down There should be a limit to the amount of rent arrears before they [housing association] go in and try to sort something out, before it gets to the stage of having to evict".

TYPES OF PREVENTIVE SERVICE

A wide range of services have been developed with the aim of preventing homelessness. The main ones are:

- **Education** in schools on homelessness and leaving home
- **Housing advice** services
- **Family mediation** services for people, especially young people, in dispute with their families
- **Support for victims of domestic violence** enabling them to stay in their home if it can be made safe, by removing the perpetrator and improving security. However, sometimes rehousing is the only safe answer
- **Reconnection** services to help people return to accommodation in their home areas
- **Tenancy support**
- **Support for tenants** with mental health and substance abuse problems, including the development of specialist support for people with multiple problems
- **Welfare rights** and debt counselling

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- **Multiple services** and inter-agency work, provided through day centres and advice centres
- **Befriending and mentoring** services to tackle social isolation, including peer mentoring and buddying
- **Employment and training** schemes to help people back into work
- Extended and improved support for young people **leaving** care
- Support for people leaving **hospital** with no home to go to
- Support for people in contact with the **criminal justice system**
- Resettlement services for people leaving the **armed forces**
- **Specialist support** for particular groups such as young people, women and people from ethnic minorities

Many local authorities now have **Housing Options Services**. These look at all the options for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, with the aim of preventing homelessness. They may cover some or all of the services above.

ACCESS TO PREVENTIVE SERVICES

Despite the development of some highly effective services, in our experience provision is very patchy, people are often not aware of the services at the time they need them, or they are rationed in such a way as to exclude many single people at risk of homelessness.

Carolyn Howell from Shelter agreed there was sometimes not enough information available for people who have started sleeping rough. Shelter aims to get information out to frontline services who are directly in contact with people sleeping rough, but there are problems about capacity and a dilemma in putting the information out and then coping with the demand.

Recommendation 1: Councils and homelessness agencies should provide better publicity and information on what help is available, so that people can access services before they reach the point of homelessness (LA, HSP, 2).

Many people first become homeless in their teens and an important element of this information campaign should be education in schools.

Recommendation 2: There is a need for more education in schools about the causes of homelessness and preventive services (DfE, 2).

However, at present advice services are under-resourced. A Commissioner asked Carolyn Howell:

“Shelter Helpline – why is there not a person on the end of the phone? Whenever I’ve tried to ring

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the Helpline, I've either had a voice message or told to ring back later."

She replied:

"That's not very good. We have 10,000 calls a month but only have capacity to answer 3,000. We need more advisers in the centre in Sheffield. It is a problem and they are aware of it."

Recommendation 3: There is a need for more resources for the national housing advice helpline run by Shelter to ensure they can answer all calls. One possibility would be for Shelter to train people with experience of homelessness to take helpline calls (DCLG, LA, HSP, 2).

Carolyn Howell also gave us evidence of some local authorities failing to help rough sleepers and other homeless single people, because they are deemed by local authorities to be not in priority need. Local authorities have a duty under the homelessness legislation to provide full advice and assistance, regardless of whether an individual is in priority need. She pointed out:

"Access to early intervention advice and services is critical. The evidence is that if it happens at the right time, when needed, problems can be dealt with relatively easily and quickly...."

Shelter has been working with DCLG to change attitudes among local authorities.

Recommendation 4: Councils should provide a comprehensive housing options service for, and record information on, all people who present as homeless or at risk of homelessness (LA, 2).

Recommendation 5: Comprehensive independent housing advice services should be available in all areas (LA, HSP, 2).

SPECIALIST PREVENTIVE SERVICES

Local authority housing options services can also provide an access point to the specialist services that some people need.

Diane Docherty from Cambridge City Council described the importance of ensuring preventive services are available at key transition points in people's lives when they may be at particular risk of homelessness:

"Sometimes there are clear transition points, for example when someone leaves hospital or prison. We have a hospital release protocol so that discharge teams understand the support that is available. The St Giles Trust in Peterborough run a resettlement of offenders group. We also work closely with adult social care services."

We look at the evidence for the cost effectiveness of preventive services below. If it can be demonstrated that they can save public expenditure, then we believe there is a need for a range of specialist preventive services.

Recommendation 6: There is a need for specialist advice services for all people at risk of homelessness on leaving prisons, hospitals and the armed forces (MoJ, DH, MoD, DCLG, LA, HSP, 2).

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Recommendation 7: There is a need for an advice service for private landlords who have tenants in arrears or at risk of eviction, including information on Housing Benefit and other benefits the tenant might be entitled to (DCLG, HSP and landlords' organisations, 2).

Recommendation 8: There should be specialist teams in all local authority areas for people facing chronic exclusion, for example to deal with alcohol, drugs and mental health problems. These services should include peer support by service users (DH, LA, HSP, 2).

We looked at three specific issues: advice work in the courts, the role of health services and the problems of migrants who are not eligible for assistance.

Carolyn Howell told us about Shelter's advice work in the County Courts to prevent homelessness among people who have rent or mortgage arrears. Advisers can also attend the hearing to present their case. In 75-80 per cent of cases helped, judges do not give a possession order for that day. However, they can only spend around ten minutes on each case.

This is potentially a highly effective way of preventing homelessness and we would like to see it expanded.

Recommendation 9: Court advice services such as that run by Shelter should be available to everyone: they need better publicity and should be easy to access. Services should be notified in advance of repossession hearings so they can advise people prior to the court date, rather than on the day. Advisers should be able to give more than ten minutes to people attending hearings

(MoJ, HSP, 2).

Several Commissioners had experienced problems which led to their homelessness where it was difficult to access suitable services, including drug and alcohol problems, relationship breakdown and gambling addiction. We have found that many people are more willing to discuss such problems with GPs than with some other services, as one Commissioner said:

"You can share secrets with your GP in absolute confidence. They will have qualified information about your physical and emotional history, and a record of previous difficulties, so it would be a safe space to open up."

While GPs cannot be expected to deal directly with all these problems, they could act as a gateway to specialist services which could help to prevent homelessness. A Commissioner explained:

"Some Primary Care Trusts have specialist services in GPs surgeries, they've brought in alcohol advisers to have private sessions with people. [This idea] could be developed to include other specialists working alongside GPs, such as advisers on drugs, gambling, debt, relationships."

This development would fit in with the government's plans for GP commissioning and integrated health and social services.

Recommendation 10: GPs should have clear referral routes to services for common problems that lead to homelessness including drug and alcohol advice, relationship counselling and gambling addiction, as well as housing advice (DH, 1).

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Under the government's reforms to the NHS, GP consortia will be given powers to commission health services at a local level. Homeless people often have difficulty in accessing health services and this can result in high costs through disproportionate use of A&E and low adherence to treatments. The government has recognised these problems with its plans to establish a health inclusion board. We examine the case for local consultative bodies along the lines of the Homeless People's Commission in Chapter 7, Self help.

Recommendation 11: GP consortia should commission research into the health needs of homeless people in their area and involve homeless people in commissioning decisions, for example by consulting local Homeless People's Commissions (DH, HSP, 1).

A particular issue of concern is the position of homeless people who are not eligible for assistance because of their immigration status. One Commissioner had personal experience of these problems and now helps other people in these circumstances. We asked Carolyn Howell:

"Who should be responsible for people not eligible for assistance, for example women escaping domestic violence who have no immigration status?"

She told us:

"People without status in the UK fall at the first hurdle and are not eligible. Local authorities can use the National Assistance Act 1948 to provide other services and also offer interim accommodation to help people deal with their loss of status, but it is not a long-term housing

solution. They can also call in other departments for example, social services, if there are children in the household. Local authorities should look at all the options, including services from the Home Office."

She said that Shelter wanted to extend the use of interim accommodation to destitute asylum seekers to provide full assessment of their needs and effective return to their country.

Recommendation 12: Homeless people should be eligible for temporary accommodation, regardless of their immigration status ((LA, HO, 2).

Recommendation 13: Local authorities should provide advice and support for organisations working with vulnerable people who are not eligible for housing (LA, 2).

Many preventive services depend on different agencies working together to deliver an effective response. Homeless people may be in touch with a range of different services which often don't talk to each other. Carolyn Howell told us about Shelter's multi-agency assessment panels which bring together all voluntary and statutory agencies working with a homeless person to coordinate services. Partners include: local authorities, the voluntary sector, hostels, social landlords, social services departments, probation, Drug and Alcohol Teams, mental health teams, Primary Care Trusts and Jobcentre Plus.

The approach is client-centred and holistic. The client will lead on identifying their needs with their case worker, to agree a care and resettlement plan.

Diane Docherty described how, in Cambridge, a Joint Strategic Needs Analysis on homelessness

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was carried out by the local authority, NHS, police and voluntary agencies. Subject to pilot funding, a Chronic Exclusion Development worker will coordinate services to help long term rough sleepers into sustainable and supported accommodation.

DCLG has recommended that all housing options teams have Homelessness Prevention Funds of £10-20,000 outside London and £30-50,000 for London boroughs. A "spend to save" approach allows the value of payments to be offset against the costs that would have been incurred had the person become homeless. However, in some areas local agencies seem to have little information on the fund and what it can be spent on.

Recommendation 14: Local authorities should provide information to agencies working with homeless people on the availability of the Homelessness Prevention Fund and what it can be used for (LA,1).

COST EFFECTIVENESS AND THE GOVERNMENT SPENDING REVIEW

A government report found that homelessness prevention saves money for the government and local authorities, because of all the extra costs they incur if someone becomes homeless (CLG, 2006a). With government plans to cut public expenditure, this will be a vital argument for new services or to continue funding existing ones.

Diane Docherty explained some of the extra costs of inaction:

"the cost of people moving in and out of hostels, prisons, drug and alcohol units, will be higher than tackling the problem head on."

Carolyn Howell gave some specific examples. DCLG have sent information to local authorities which shows that if an authority accepts 100 households as homeless, they are likely to spend £530,000 assisting them, whereas a local authority that only accepts 30 households as homeless and prevents 70 from becoming homeless can save around £100,000. It costs around £200 to help someone in debt, whereas if they became homeless as a result, it would cost £5,500 per case. These savings would be multiplied over someone's lifetime; the impact of homelessness on a family can be enormous. For example, if children have had a disrupted education, it disadvantages their future.

Many homelessness prevention services are funded by the Homelessness Grant from the DCLG. Although the government spending review has cut many programmes, the Homelessness Grant remains relatively unchanged at around £400m over the period 2011-2015. Homeless Link have commented:

"These are clear signals at a national level that the cost effectiveness of these services is recognised, particularly given the 51% cuts facing Communities and Local Government overall." (Homeless Link, 2010a)

Much housing related support is funded through the government's Supporting People (SP) programme. The Spending Review has announced that Supporting People grant will be cut by 12 per cent over four years. Homeless Link have concluded:

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“Although SP is facing a significant cut, it is far less than many feared, and is significantly lower when compared to the overall cut to the CLG budget. This represents an indication of the CLG’s recognition of the valuable role played by the homelessness sector and housing-related support services in supporting the most vulnerable and the wider benefits this work brings.

“However, providers of SP funded services have already delivered year on year efficiency savings against a backdrop of real terms reduction in their funding. They are now likely to face increased financial pressure, placing some services at risk. Cutting back on services, staff losses and the closure of some projects will place homeless people at risk. We will encourage local areas to ensure sufficient spending is allocated from across the SP categories to address the needs of single homeless people.”

Local authorities will have to make large cuts in their own spending along with having more freedom on how they spend government funds. As Homeless Link explains:

“local authorities face very tough choices in managing 7.1% cuts in their grant every year. Homeless Link are alarmed that some authorities have been planning major cuts to voluntary sector services that support homeless people. It is imperative that they reconsider this approach and take account of the clear evidence that failing to prevent homelessness incurs far more major costs (about £26,000 annually for every single homeless adult).”

Since our meetings it has emerged that many local authorities are planning major cuts in

Supporting People funding. For example, Peter Radage from Framework in Nottingham told us that in Nottinghamshire the county was consulting on a 68 per cent cut to housing related support. The remaining 32 per cent would be spent on the elderly and those with learning disabilities. He said that the view of some local politicians is that these populations are more ‘deserving’.

Recommendation 15: More investment should be put into prevention services which can demonstrate savings on the costs of people becoming homeless (LA, HSP, 2).

Recommendation 16: Supporting People funded services have been proved to make savings and should be protected from cuts. The impact of any proposed spending reductions should be assessed, including taking account of the additional costs of not providing services (LA, HSP, 2).

CONCLUSION

Many effective preventive services have been developed, but coverage is still patchy and in some areas it is difficult for people to access services.

There is widespread agreement that preventing homelessness not only saves much human suffering, it often saves money. There is already strong research evidence for this. If, however, it is not thought to be conclusive, then high priority should be given by agencies to further research to examine the case for investment in these services.

STREET OUTREACH

BACKGROUND

In the past, street services for people sleeping rough were often run by small charities or faith based groups and concentrated on helping people to survive, for example with hand outs of food. Some also gave information about hostels and night shelters, but few did any sustained work to help people move off the streets.

In recent years, there has been increasing emphasis on more active help to move people into accommodation. It has been widely accepted that people might sleep rough not just because of a shortage of housing, but also because of mental health, drugs, alcohol or other needs. After a few weeks or months, they can get used to street life and it can become more difficult for them to escape from homelessness.

In many areas, skilful support work with people on the streets and in day centres has developed which, along with improving the quality of accommodation and other support, has helped to reduce the number of people sleeping rough.

In this section we examine:

- assessing the scale of need in local areas
- effective street outreach
- joint work between agencies
- the role of day centres
- the problem of homeless people with no recourse to public funds
- personal plans and budgets for people sleeping rough

We heard evidence from Peter Radage, Service Director of Framework Housing Association which provides street outreach and a wide range of other services to homeless people in Nottingham.

ASSESSING THE SCALE OF NEED

Local authorities should assess the scale of needs through a rough sleeping strategy as part of, or closely related to, their homelessness strategies. Since the mid-1990s local areas have assessed the number of rough sleepers in their area by counting the number of people visibly sleeping rough on a particular night. Some Commissioners were sceptical about the value of such counts, since they inevitably miss some people. One said:

“It can’t show a true representation of how many there really are. It’s just how many there are in that city, in that place on that day... I don’t believe the certified outreach workers go to the out-of-the-way places for safety reasons... it takes a rough sleeper to know a rough sleeper.”

Peter Radage acknowledged these problems but also argued that street counts do help to measure changes over time:

“The first headcount of rough sleepers was carried out in 1998, when 31 people were found in Nottingham. It is widely acknowledged that the headcount methodology is clumsy, but it does provide a snapshot against which to measure changes over time. Year-on-year the figure has gradually been brought down and in 2005, the CLG set a baseline target of four people. In 2009, the count found two people visibly sleeping rough in the city centre.”

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However, he also described how a wider analysis of the scale of rough sleeping is carried out by Nottinghamshire Homelessness Watch Survey, which takes place over a two week period. Voluntary agencies across the county record where people slept the night before. He thought that gives more robust data than counting people in the streets. In London, a common system, known as CHAIN, used by outreach teams records all known rough sleepers on each contact with agencies <http://www.broadwaylondon.org/CHAIN/NewsletterandReports>.

In our experience people sleeping rough can often be hidden away and a good way of finding them is by involving people with experience of sleeping rough in the area. They are also more likely to be successful in talking to people sleeping rough if extra information about their needs is wanted.

Recommendation 17: There should be a person with experience of rough sleeping on each street count team (LA, 1).

Recommendation 18: In addition to street counts there should be more accurate local recording of the number of rough sleepers over time, as in the CHAIN system in London (LA, HSP, 2).

EFFECTIVE STREET WORK TECHNIQUES

Outreach work involves making direct contact with people on the streets. There has been increasing emphasis on what is known as 'assertive outreach' based on the view that people

sometimes need repeated encouragement to take up offers of services. This involves:

- a focus on intensive street outreach, with up to three quarters of staff time spent on the streets, compared with less than a third in some areas previously
- persistence by outreach staff, with contact attempted every day with individual rough sleepers in their patch
- abandoning the policy of leaving people alone who were not initially willing to engage with staff and instead contacting them as often as possible. (Randall and Brown, 2006)

Peter Radage gave an example of how this works in Nottingham. One worker with long term rough sleepers would see his clients every day. However, some long term rough sleepers may have developed mental health problems and be suspicious of services. He said it is matter of skill and judgement to gauge the appropriate level of intervention. It can be round the clock; the best time to meet someone might be in the middle of the night in a café.

People with experience of sleeping rough can make very effective outreach workers. A discussion between Commissioners explained why, but also recognised the need for trained professionals:

"Homeless people only talk to other homeless people, never to anyone who looks like authority because they're conditioned against it. Most times they've had anything to do with authority, it's gone bad and that sticks with you. Homeless peer grouping is a necessity. You

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need a peer group to walk you through the benefits system... It takes a lot of bottle to go into a strange environment for the first time and sometimes to have someone to walk through the door with you is a great help."

"Clients are more likely to engage with peers, you associate more with them."

"Peer support might be brilliant, but you need a professional to access a hostel."

"A mix of professional and peer outreach workers would provide the best form of support."

Of course, former peers can become trained professionals. A Commissioner who is now working in an outreach team spoke of the intensity of the support he provides:

"I have a couple of clients who are really chaotic so I will personally take them to the hospital, doctor's, dentist, drug worker. I'll go everywhere with them to make sure they get services and I'm on at them all the time because you just don't know when the penny's going to drop."

Drawing on our experiences we identified a number of good practice ideas:

Recommendation 19: There is a need for more specialist mental health support and training for outreach workers in recognising and dealing with mental health problems (DH, LA, HSP, 2).

Recommendation 20: It is often effective to identify the leader of a group of rough sleepers and convince them to move into accommodation, others then follow (LA, HSP, 1).

Recommendation 21: There could be a pilot scheme of giving cheap mobile phones to people sleeping rough with contact numbers for various services programmed into them. It would also make it much easier to keep in contact with people sleeping rough, saving time spent looking for them and encourage them return to services for a recharge (LA, HSP, 1).

There is also a problem of providing street outreach in areas with relatively few rough sleepers. As a Commissioner explained:

"There's a huge amount of inconsistency. They should be able to scale it up or down depending on the size of the place... If you come from a small town like me, there's nothing to support you and help you in your life and stop you from being on the streets, so you're going to move to a big city where there is that help."

Recommendation 22: There should be mobile outreach teams to cover areas where there are not enough rough sleepers for a full time service (DCLG, LA, HSP, 2).

JOINT WORK

People sleeping rough often have a number of other support needs. This means that joint working between outreach teams and other services, such as mental health, drug and alcohol teams, is essential to ensure that people get all the support they need. In some areas there are specialist health services for homeless people, because it can be difficult for them to access ordinary health services. For example, Diane Docherty told us how in Cambridge:

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“The street outreach team are out every day, working closely with mental health, alcohol workers and a community psychiatric nurse. . . . We have two dedicated street police officers, one funded by the council, one funded by the police, and they achieve a good balance between enforcement and giving support in the form of giving advice and information. The police, adult social care services and the NHS are all involved in commissioning services.”

Peter Radage gave details of a model of joint work now followed in many successful rough sleeping programmes: case conferencing. All the agencies working with individuals meet to discuss suitable solutions. In Nottingham, the emphasis is on getting people into accommodation first and then providing the support they need. Outreach workers will identify a suitable bedspace for an individual and hold it for them to ensure that people are accommodated at the point they are ready to move in. He reported there have been some remarkable successes as a result of this approach.

DAY CENTRES

Day centres have an important role to play. They provide food and washing facilities, but also a wide range of other activities and support. In some areas, initial work with people sleeping rough is mainly carried out through day centres, rather than on the streets, to encourage people to come inside and to provide a better quality service. The aim should be that access to comprehensive services including advice, assessment, support and accommodation should

be available from one building. They can also provide activities and training for homeless people as alternatives to street activities and drug and alcohol use. Some areas have identified a need for local day centres which allow drinking to provide alternatives for street drinkers.

Recommendation 23: There is a need for more ‘wet centres’ where people can drink away from the streets (LA, HSP, 2).

Recommendation 24: Drug users should be encouraged off the streets and into treatment by the provision of “shooting galleries” where people can use clean needles. This saves money on treatment costs for illnesses such as Hepatitis C and ensures needles are not left in public places (DH, LA, HSP, 2).

HOMELESS PEOPLE WITH NO RECOURSE TO PUBLIC FUNDS

Some homeless people are foreign nationals who cannot claim any public funding, including payments for accommodation, so they have to sleep rough. We asked Peter Radage about what services they could provide to this group. He explained:

“There have been increasing numbers in Nottingham and it’s very difficult, because by definition organisations don’t get funding to work with them. We have a day centre used by male migrant workers from eastern Europe and have produced literature in Polish, Czech and Lithuanian to explain our services. We have assisted people who want to return to their home

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country, but for the people who want to stay, it's very difficult. As a charity we get donations and can use some of that unencumbered money to provide short-term solutions. But as we enter more constrained economic times our room for manoeuvre is becoming more restricted and we may have to use those funds to prop up mainstream services."

In **Chapter 6**, Temporary accommodation we recommend that temporary accommodation is provided for homeless people without recourse to public funds while their circumstances are being sorted out.

PERSONAL PLANS AND BUDGETS

Effective street outreach services ensure a detailed needs assessment is drawn up for each individual, with a support plan, specifying a lead agency to manage the plan and which agency will be providing which services. These are regularly reviewed. The plan should ensure any necessary support after people have been accommodated.

These plans can also be combined with personalised budgets, so that people can decide what would most help them to resettle successfully. Peter Radage told us that Nottingham took part in a national personalisation pilot scheme in 2009. The aim was to target long-term rough sleepers who have been particularly resistant to offers of accommodation and develop innovative ways of ensuring they were successfully housed. There were seven rough sleepers in the pilot, all moved into accommodation and all seven were still in accommodation.

He explained that personalisation is not only about money, but about an approach which has shown that it is more effective for outreach workers to focus on a limited caseload. Specialised skills are needed for outreach work among people who have been on the streets for a long time and who are likely to be suspicious of law enforcement, institutions and authority.

It was decided in Nottingham to use existing structures, such as case conferences and bring in additional resources. The money went mainly on accommodation, rent deposits, B & B accommodation, but also clothing, travel and for one man, for pocket money because he was suspicious of signing on for benefits.

Peter Radage gave some examples of how it worked in practice:

"We abandoned most previous plans and started with a blank sheet of paper. The case conference identified the seven people and the worker went out and did an assessment of each person and from that, plans emerged. As an example, there was a couple who had been through every hostel service in Nottingham and had been excluded from them all. One had a problematic history of offending in the city centre, the other had vulnerability and exploitation issues. They had had accommodation in the past which had failed. The one thing they were consistently saying was they wanted to get out of the city centre, where they were under bad influences. The local authority which had previously excluded them, took a risk and offered them accommodation outside the city centre. It worked really well. The partner who had caused a lot of disruption to the police didn't come into the city

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centre any longer and it was then possible to start working on other interventions – both had drug and alcohol issues.

“... All seven were different. For example, one had been sleeping rough for five years and was very suspicious of any form of accommodation because of issues to do with money and rent. He was introduced to a B&B, had a look round and left some stuff but didn't stay the night. After a week or so he would come in for the breakfast but still stay out at night. Then one night he did stay, but slept out the next. He gradually got used to the idea and at some stage he decided he could stay there and cope. So it was a good solution, for him and he's been there for several months now. Our challenge is to find somewhere he will be willing to move on to.”

We welcome the personalisation pilots and the flexibility they bring. However, we recommend that people are actively involved in making decisions about how the personal budget is spent.

Recommendation 25: Funding should be transferred to personalised services for homeless people with flexibility on how such schemes work. Where people are offered services paid for by personal budgets, agencies should discuss the options openly with them and offer choices on how the money might be spent and work with people at their own pace (DCLG, LA, HSP, 1).

CONCLUSIONS

There have been important advances in the effectiveness of street outreach and we would like to see all areas adopt the practices of the best, including accurate assessments of the number of rough sleepers and their support needs, joint work between agencies including case conferencing and the development of more personal and flexible services.

TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

INTRODUCTION

For most homeless people, the first step off the streets is into temporary accommodation, usually a hostel. In this chapter we examine:

- the types and size of hostels needed
- support for residents
- access to hostels
- the length of stay for residents
- charges
- alternatives to hostels

BACKGROUND

We have, between us, extensive experience of staying in hostels throughout England. We also heard evidence from two major providers of temporary accommodation for homeless people: Maff Potts, Head of Homelessness Services, Salvation Army and Jeremy Swain, Chief Executive, Thames Reach.

Jeremy Swain gave us some statistics from London on the role of hostels and the fact that they are still not successful enough in helping people into settled housing:

- 75 per cent of rough sleepers who move from the street go into hostels, showing that there are not many other options
- 54 per cent achieve a positive planned move and over half of these planned moves are to another hostel, so people can get stuck in the hostel system

- 24 per cent are evicted, which he considered a very poor outcome
- 10 per cent of residents abandon the hostel. (Broadway, 2008/9)

As recently as ten years ago, many hostels offered poor conditions with, for example, shared dormitories. Some Commissioners have vivid memories of these. In 2000, only 57 per cent of first stage hostels in London had exclusively single bedrooms (Crane and Warnes, 2001). Maff Potts quoted the example of a night shelter in Cambridge with between eight and ten people in an underground room with no windows. Hostels were often thought of as unsafe and were unpopular with some homeless people. It was usual in night shelters for people to have to be out all day and there was little support or resettlement help on offer. While some Commissioners thought that such places “saved lives” others pointed out they did not help to change lives. When we visited Cambridge we found that the night shelter had been converted into an assessment centre. Diane Docherty, Homelessness Services Development Manager, Cambridge City Council explained:

“A night shelter tends to be non-interventionist, simply providing a bed at night and closing during the day, so people have to be out on the streets. The idea of the assessment centre was conceived 5 years ago. [The night shelter] was not fit for purpose – a chaotic environment. An assessment centre means people don’t have to be out during the day, you can work more effectively with people and help them to move on to sustainable accommodation.”

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Most Commissioners thought this a useful model that could be adopted elsewhere.

Recommendation 26: All remaining nightshelters should be adapted where necessary into assessment centres for short stay emergency assessments, before people move to suitable temporary accommodation. (DCLG, LA, HSP, 2)

In the past, many homeless people moved between hostels or back to the street. People with needs such as mental health, drugs or alcohol problems were often evicted for breaking the rules, or they just left of their own accord. Hostels often offered no routes into settled housing, or specialist services for complex support needs.

We have noticed and heard evidence of improvements in recent years, with many hostels now providing self-contained rooms and a pleasant environment, although hostels with large numbers of drug users or heavy drinkers can still discourage some people from staying in them.

In addition to better standards of accommodation, an increasing number of hostels are offering support for the other needs of residents.

Much of this improvement has been directed and funded by the government programme, Places of Change, which was managed by Maff Potts before he moved to the Salvation Army. The programme aimed to encourage hostels to:

- engage their service users in meaningful activity and with the community

- involve their service users in the development of services
- develop well-trained, motivated and supported staff
- provide a quality physical environment (CLG, 2006a)

Maff Potts summed up the achievements of the programme as he saw it:

“There is now a 60 per cent increase in people moving on from hostels positively and 30 per cent fewer abandonments. There are only eleven dormitory based hostels left in England. However, a problem was trusting organisations to follow the key principles of the programme, only to find some schemes were changed from their original designs.... I would now make it a condition of funding that certain criteria and standards must be met.”

But there is still some way to go. The provision of hostels is still patchy and a quarter of local authorities have no emergency accommodation in their area (Homeless Link, 2009).

Hostels still vary widely in the number of people being evicted or abandoning their accommodation. But best practice is being identified by service providers and by central and local government and hostels are being encouraged to reach the standards of the best.

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TYPES AND SIZE OF HOSTELS NEEDED

Building standards

The Places of Change programme set out new standards for hostel buildings including:

- single, self-contained rooms
- a welcoming reception that is both open and safe
- non-institutional decor
- plenty of natural light and air
- a flow of people that mixes staff and residents
- integrated activity spaces and, if possible, space and facilities to share with the local community (CLG, 2006).

We welcome this commitment to decent standards in hostels. Maff Potts gave us some examples of what these meant in practice:

- carpets rather than vinyl
- as few locked doors as possible
- no wired glass, there is unbreakable glass available without wire
- a flow of people, mixing staff and residents, so that they meet each other and it feels like “our place”
- open receptions, no screens, which reduce violent incidents because people have to interact

- interview rooms with windows
- no cluttered notice boards that no one reads: it is better to knock on doors to give people information
- perhaps a graffiti wall for comments
- creating a ‘wow’ factor to encourage people to think they might get their life back together.

Both of the witnesses agreed that smaller hostels were preferable to the old large institutions. They provide a more homely environment and staff can offer a more personal service. Jeremy Swain added that the focus should in future be on small specialist hostels for people with support needs. We agree. As one Commissioner put it:

“Big hostels don’t work. – there are too many vulnerable adults together bouncing off each other’s negativity, which breeds throughout the building. Put them in smaller hostels with trained staff and you get results.”

Large hostels could, another Commissioner pointed out, make people’s problems worse:

“Large, crammed hostels don’t work – people in them have a range of social problems and it’s possible for some people to come out of them with more problems than they went in with – for example drug use.”

The answer, it was agreed, was smaller hostels aimed at specific client groups. A Commissioner said:

“Hostels do work but they should be specific: if you’re homeless with no issues you go to a

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certain type of hostel; if you have drink problems you go to a small specialist hostel and the same for people with drugs problems. It can bring you down if you don't have these problems, coming off the street and going in with a load of people with addictions."

Different homeless people have different needs and these are reflected in the membership of the Commission. This means there is a requirement for different types of hostel provision, but not necessarily an increase in total numbers of beds. There is a need for specialist provision for:

- people with high and multiple needs such as combined mental health and drug or alcohol problems, known as dual diagnosis
- "wet" hostels where people are allowed to drink alcohol
- people who are in recovery and drink or drug use is not allowed
- couples
- people with dogs
- people with other, less widely recognised needs. For example, one Commissioner reported that he had been rejected by some hostels because he did not have a drug, alcohol or mental health problem, but also by generalist hostels because he had a gambling addiction and they thought he would not pay the hostel charges.
- people who are in work or moving into work which have affordable rents and employment advice and support (CLG, 2009a).

There is also a requirement for emergency accommodation for people with low or no support needs. As one Commissioner said:

"If people have no issues, they have no priority status. If someone has drugs or alcohol problems they get priority. But if you leave someone with no issues on the streets, they become more vulnerable to what's out there."

Another Commissioner described a service for people with low support needs:

"I know a hostel where there are only six people there and they absolutely love it. They have put people there who don't have a drug or alcohol problem, but have been made homeless because of other issues, for example they don't get on with their step dad or been chucked out by friends. If you put people in a hostel who haven't got a social problem and they make friends with people with problems, they end up having a social problem themselves."

Such accommodation need not be in the form of a hostel, it could be shared housing with limited floating support if necessary.

However, we would not want existing hostels to be closed until they can be improved or replaced.

Despite the cuts in public expenditure, £37.5m has been allocated to launch a second round of the Places of Change hostels improvement programme, with this additional investment starting in April 2012.

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Recommendation 27: The standards established by Places of Change should be implemented in all new hostel programmes. New hostels should be small and cater separately for the full range of specialist needs and for people with low or no support needs. Larger hostels should be kept open until they are replaced by smaller units offering the equivalent number of bedspaces (DCLG, LA, HSP, 2).

ACCESS TO TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

Commissioners with experience of older hostels pointed out that one advantage of previous direct access hostels was that they could get in immediately without having to be referred by another agency, such as an outreach team or social services.

Even where there is a good supply of hostel beds, we have found that restrictions on referral arrangements can create difficulties for people sleeping rough to access them. A Commissioner explained:

“In hostels now you can’t get direct access, you have to be referred by social services or outreach.”

Recommendation 28: There should be at least some beds in emergency hostels which allow immediate access, including 24 hour access, without the need to be referred by another agency and with extra emergency beds available in winter (LA, HSP, 1).

Some Commissioners who had lived in small towns or rural areas had found it impossible to find any local temporary accommodation. They reported

that they had to move to a city because there was no local provision. One Commissioner said:

“I’m from a little valley just outside Burnley. I was born and bred there, my kids are there, but there’s nothing there, just hills and farms. There are more sheep than humans So I had to go to Manchester, 19 miles away, to go to day centres to have a shower, wash clothes and get fed. I’ve been on the housing list for five years in my home area but have no points because I’m not living there. They expect me to be there for six to twelve months and sleep rough till I can get any points. But there’s nothing there, so I can’t do that. It’s tough.”

A survey by Homeless Link found that 64 per cent of local authorities did not have a direct access hostel in their area. Two thirds (67 per cent) of authorities in urban areas and 87 per cent in rural areas thought that the alternative emergency accommodation in their area did not meet local needs (Homeless Link, 2009).

We have found that councils in some areas without enough temporary accommodation sometimes simply give out addresses of hostels in other areas, rather than making sure there will be a place available when the homeless person arrives.

In areas with small numbers of rough sleepers it might make sense for two or more councils to fund jointly some hostel provision, although this can cause problems if it means people have to move away from family and friends in their home area. There are alternative forms of temporary accommodation which can provide for small numbers in local areas (see below, Alternatives to hostels).

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Recommendation 29: Homeless people should have access in all areas to temporary accommodation suitable to their needs. (LA, HSP, 2)

There is also a need in areas that do have hostels for help to move people back to accommodation in their home areas. These “reconnections” should involve ensuring they will have suitable accommodation and support in their home area.

SUPPORT AND STAFFING

A major concern for the Commission has been the quality of hostel staff and the support they provide to homeless people. There have been some improvements. In some hostels staff are better trained to provide a helpful service. Service users are more involved in designing services and helping to run them. Hostels are reducing the number of evictions and of people returning to the streets and trying to ensure people can move on to settled housing. However, in our experience the quality of support and success in helping homeless people to resettle varies widely.

Some longer term rough sleepers may need detailed and intensive help at first, such as this Commissioner:

“You need support coming off the streets. A lot of people get institutionalised while on the streets. All my adult life I’ve been institutionalised, from army service, coming out of the army, more or less straight onto the streets, in and out of prison, in and out of mental institutions, rough sleeping, rough sleeping, rough sleeping. When I came

off the streets I needed resettling into a life style that was normal for me. I was still drinking a lot but nobody picked it up. There was no help for drinking or mental health. A lot of it had to come from me.”

Some hostels do provide very effective support. Another Commissioner said:

“I’ve progressed very fast since I went to [current hostel]. I’m clean, no drugs or alcohol issues now.”

We have found that the quality of staff is central to the effectiveness of the support provided. Commissioners described some of the problems:

“You get middle class keyworkers telling people who are experienced what to do. This builds barriers.”

“There’s a culture of them and us in hostels, even today.”

Another summed up an ambitious goal:

“You need strong, passionate, caring staff.”

Both of our witnesses also emphasised the importance of this. Jeremy Swain called for:

- better casework and support planning
- priorities set by the residents not by the staff, as residents are usually more aspirational than staff are on their behalf
- the employment of formerly homeless people as staff.

Maff Potts said that hostels should:

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- recruit staff from outside the sector and not ask for two years experience: this can merely recycle under-performing staff; new employees can be trained to meet higher standards
- minimise the use of agency staff
- ensure that keyworking does not only happen in formal meetings, but for example in conversations when staff meet residents in passing
- carry out a staff talent audit: their hobbies and outside interests can be the basis for training events and other activities.

DCLG has identified the need for staff to “have the right skills and aptitudes to support and motivate people to make positive changes in their lives”. There is a need to: “provide training for staff... in support planning, goal setting, motivational interviewing effective listening, how people learn and how people change.” (CLG, 2009b).

We think there is also a need for a change in the style of some support work. A Commissioner gave a specific example:

“They should take clients out for a cuppa, you can have a much better conversation than interviewing people in the office.”

We identified a range of improvements that should be made to staffing in hostels.

Recommendation 30: Staff attitudes are very important. They can make clients feel valid, wanted and worthwhile. Hostel key workers should have opportunities to engage with residents on a personal level and socialise with

them, for example by going out for a coffee or on day outings, when they don't discuss problems but concentrate on positive activities and building relationships (LA, HSP, 1).

Not all hostel staff are well trained for their difficult job. One Commissioner said:

“In my experience, hostel staff are trained very well in safety aspects, how to protect themselves from residents but not trained in how to deal with vulnerable people.”

We believe staff in hostels should get high quality training with input from homeless people and a recognised qualification, for example through Homeless Link's Engage to change qualification.

<http://www.homeless.org.uk/engage-to-change>

Recommendation 31: There should be accredited training for all homelessness support workers, including training in providing specialist support for physical and mental health, drug and alcohol needs (DCLG, LA, HSP, 2).

Hostels do not always provide the right types of support at the time it is needed. Support should be aimed at moving people on to settled housing. Jeremy Swain identified a number of shortcomings:

- People with the wrong level of need are placed inappropriately in hostels. Their needs can be too low to benefit from a hostel. Less commonly, people's needs can be too high and they should be helped by the local authority because they are in priority need under the homelessness legislation

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- Hostels can concentrate too much on containment, holding on to people to stop them getting evicted, rather than moving on to settled housing
- Hostels are failing users in supporting their emotional and mental health needs, addressing substance use and developing positive social networks

Hostels still vary widely in the number of evictions and people abandoning their accommodation. Research by Homeless Link found that the hostels with the fewest evictions and abandonments were those which have:

- involvement of service users in setting the rules
- helpful staff who get on well with residents
- training for staff in providing support
- ways of dealing with challenging behaviour that does not involve evicting people
- conversations with residents about anti-social behaviour rather than punishments
- access to move on accommodation so people don't feel stuck

(Homeless Link, 2010)

Greater involvement by residents in running their hostel can help to improve self confidence as well as the quality of management. As one Commissioner explained:

"In Manchester a few places are now asking residents how they can improve the well-being of the place, handing over house rules so they

can change things. It works better, people feel more comfortable being involved in the day-to-day running of the hostel."

On the other hand, there are some people who do not want to move on. Commissioners explained:

"Some people in temporary accommodation don't want to leave because everything is done for you. You lose your skills and people get comfortable in there."

"People are homeless for various different reasons. Once they get into hostels they don't want to leave. ... There needs to be a boundary, you need to push people harder to set their goals. It can be very daunting to be in a hostel, they've never experienced it before, they don't know what's going on."

There are a number of lessons that we have identified from best practice in providing support to hostel residents.

First, improvements in work methods:

Recommendation 32: The signing up process should be less formal and more aimed at finding out what service users' aspirations are (LA, HSP, 1).

Recommendation 33: There should be a three-tier approach in hostels, recognising that people often arrive in a chaotic state, then stabilise, then need help to move on. Support should enable people to help themselves to progress through these stages. Support plans should include healthcare, reconnection with family and friends, budgeting, lifeskills training and education. Peer support should be built in,

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including use of peer mentors and ‘buddies’ to give practical support to clients. Service users should take the lead in decisions about their support. People should have a contract with the hostel to achieve mutually agreed goals and this should be reviewed regularly (LA, HSP, 1).

Recommendation 34: People should be encouraged to save perhaps £2 a week while in the hostel to give them some funds for when they move on (LA, HSP, 1.)

Second, we identified the need for improved access to specialist support services:

Recommendation 35: All hostels should have access to specialist support agencies, including dual diagnosis workers (LA, HSP, 2).

Homelessness can leave people very socially isolated, as one Commissioner explained:

“People who are homeless have no friends, no partner, no relations with another human being. We need to put homelessness in a wider context.”

A third group of recommendations focus on helping people to develop, or reconnect to social networks:

Recommendation 36: Hostel residents should be able to invite friends to visit them (LA, HSP, 1).

Recommendation 37: There could be open days in the hostel for local services and people from the local community to visit. (LA, HSP, 1).

However, some Commissioners have found it necessary to break away from old social contacts:

“If people relapse after being rehoused, it’s to do with their social circle. I took myself out of the social circle, that’s how I stayed off drugs.”

Finally, the importance of service users’ involvement is crucial to the improvement of hostels. We examine this subject in **Chapter 7, Self help.**

MEANINGFUL ACTIVITY, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

DCLG’s Places of Change programme for improving hostels has recognised the importance of meaningful activities to help people re-engage. As one Commissioner put it:

“Hostels should provide a structure to everyday life which is interesting and makes people want to get up.”

Diane Docherty from Cambridge City Council made a similar point:

“Four walls and no hope does not solve the problem and that people need meaningful activity, interaction with others, skills, a purpose and hope for the future”

The vast majority of homeless people want to get into work as soon as they are able. Well-designed training programmes in hostels can help people to do this.

Activities are a good way of encouraging people to re-engage, but service users also value qualifications that can improve their self-esteem and help them to look for employment. One Commissioner pointed out:

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“A lot of people coming into hostels have poor education. They should provide certificated courses – health and safety, food hygiene, first aid, blind awareness courses, anything that can carry a certificate you can take to a job interview.”

An increasing number of hostels are offering support for the needs of residents and other services such as activities, education, training and employment opportunities. One Commissioner was in a hostel where the main aim is to get people engaged. The belief is that everyone has a skill or talent. The facilities include:

- an education room with full internet access and a jobs point machine
- a fully equipped gym
- a music room equipped with musical instruments
- a radio station which the local community can use to make programmes, with the idea that bringing in the community can help to overcome stereotypes about homeless people.

Specialist tutors are brought in to teach:

- lifeskills and cooking
- non-contact boxing
- coaching in aerobics and other forms of training which can lead to work opportunities in the leisure industry.

Links to Crisis open the door to photography, creative writing and art courses. Other courses available include action for employment which helps to build self confidence and leads to a CV writing course.

Recommendation 38: All hostels should provide a wide range of activities and training opportunities, with smaller hostels making use of community based services (LA, HSP, 1).

LENGTH OF STAY IN HOSTELS

The lack of suitable move-on housing can mean that people can get stuck in hostels, become institutionalised and worried about leaving. Jeremy Swain argued that hostels should focus on providing emergency respite for people with a high level of need. Early assessment and interventions in hostels are crucial. Lengths of stay beyond six months should be unusual. We agree that people can get stuck in hostels, but would want to see flexibility for people who are not ready to move on after six months. Commissioners said:

“Everyone has a different level of recovery, you can’t push them. Hostels should go at the service user’s pace; their needs should be individualised. If they move out too soon they can go back in through the revolving door.”

“It took me two years to come to terms with not living on the streets and with hostel life. If I’d been turned out after six months I’d be dead today.”

Recommendation 39: The aim should be for people to move out of hostels as soon as they are able to sustain independent housing, if necessary with floating support. This should normally be within six months, but people should be able to stay longer if they need to (LA, HSP, 1).

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SERVICE CHARGES

Several Commissioners reported high charges for poor levels of service. One told us:

“The amount of money they charge you – I’ve been in places where they want £25 – £30 a week out of your giro for a poxy little breakfast and poxy little dinner – I wouldn’t spend that on food if I had my own place.”

Research has found that some places with high service charges also have high levels of evictions for arrears and that some of the most expensive have the worst facilities (Homeless Link, 2010).

Recommendation 40: Hostel residents should be able to choose whether to be self catering or to pay a service charge for food. There should be cooking facilities and skills training in cooking (LA, HSP, 1).

Recommendation 41: Service charges should be related to the quality of services and facilities provided. Where these are poor the charges should be reduced or services improved (LA, HSP, 1).

MONITORING STANDARDS IN HOSTELS

Residents can play a key part in achieving better standards in hostels. Two Commissioners work for such a service in the Portsmouth area which inspects hostels, consults with other service users and recommends improvements (see Chapter 9, Self help).

Recommendation 42: There should be peer assessment and audits of hostels, involving service users throughout the process (LA, HSP, 2).

ALTERNATIVES TO HOSTELS

There are a number of alternatives to hostels which can be useful where there is not sufficient local demand for a hostel and to provide a choice where they might offer a better solution. The main ones are outlined below. There are many examples of successful local schemes (Homeless Link, 2009). In many cases they may also cost less than hostels. A Commissioner pointed out:

“Hostels cost money, people staying in them for long periods of time don’t get better but tend to revolve around the system, so money would be better spent in a different way.”

We were not able in the time available to examine alternative schemes in detail and it may be a subject that the Commission could return to at a future date.

B&B hotels

B&B hotels have in the past been seen as offering poor quality accommodation that should only be used in an emergency. In some, people have to be out all day. A Commissioner spelt out how harmful this can be:

“At the time it was a godsend – I’d been on the streets for ages and got put in a B&B – it was a lovely B&B... but I had to be out after breakfast until 5 o’clock at night. I spent all day roaming

TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

the streets... that causes stress. You've got nothing else to do but go to a park with a bottle."

However, B&Bs can sometimes be seen as more flexible than hostels. The City of London and St Mungo's have set up a B&B style scheme for long term rough sleepers. It brought 70 rough sleepers off the streets in six months. It was reported some service users preferred this type of accommodation as a first step off the streets and there were few evictions.

http://www.mungos.org/first_guests_at_lodge

Nightstop projects and lodgings

Nightstops offer emergency beds in a family home for a short time while alternatives are sorted out. Lodgings can be for longer periods. Both have proved particularly useful for young people, but there might be scope for extending them as an option for older homeless people. The families who provide the lodgings are carefully selected and given support where necessary.

Second stage housing

Sometimes people move on from short term temporary accommodation into second stage housing which can last for a year or two, or longer if no settled housing is available. These can be, for example, hostels, shared housing or flats on short term tenancies. The idea is that people can continue to get support with learning the skills to manage independent settled housing. One Commissioner found this stage invaluable:

"I spent six and a half years in the hostel system, five years in one hostel and then they had to send me to second stage. I was that institutionalized I didn't know how to look after

myself, how to function for myself. In second stage, where you're cooking for yourself, doing your own washing, it does prepare you for when you get a flat of your own."

However, some people argue that second stage accommodation prolongs the period of insecure housing and that people can still be given support if they move straight into settled housing.

Private rented tenancies

These can offer a useful alternative to hostels, as tenants will often have more independence and privacy. They have been used for some people who have refused offers of a place in a hostel. As with nightstops and lodgings, it is essential that support is available to both service users and landlords to avoid any problems. We examined the use of the private rented sector separately (see Chapter 8).

Housing First

The Housing First model works by offering homeless people immediate tenancies, usually in the private rented sector, without having to go through temporary accommodation. Support is offered, but engagement with it is not made a condition of the tenancy. It is thought to be particularly useful for people who do not want to use hostels. An analysis of evaluations of such schemes, mainly in the US, found that vulnerable individuals can sustain tenancies in Housing First schemes when provided with open-ended support. However, the authors recognise that the present evidence in the UK is limited. (Johnsen and Teixeira, 2010).

TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

Recommendation 43: Homelessness strategies in all areas should consider the need for all of the alternatives to hostels. They may be particularly useful in areas where the number of rough sleepers is low and does not justify the provision of hostels (LA, HSP, 2).

CONCLUSION

Many of our recommendations would not only improve the quality of temporary accommodation and the support provided but, by helping people to resettle more quickly and more successfully, they would also help to shorten the length of time people spend in expensive hostels, to prevent repeat homelessness and thereby save public expenditure (see Chapter 2, Prevention of homelessness).

RESETTLEMENT WORK

BACKGROUND

In the Commission sessions on preventing homelessness (**Chapter 2**), we examined evidence that many people sleeping rough have other support needs, including alcohol, drugs and mental health problems. The aim of resettlement work is to ensure that people have the necessary knowledge and skills to sustain a tenancy.

Resettlement work covers a wide range of services including:

- advice on budgeting for household costs
- training in the rights and responsibilities of being a tenant and in lifeskills
- welfare rights and debt counselling
- identifying the best accommodation options
- help with moving in, including finding household goods and connecting utilities
- help with getting back in touch with friends and family, or making new friends
- tenancy support
- support for people in contact with the criminal justice system
- resettlement services for people leaving the armed forces
- specialist support for tenants with mental health and substance abuse problems

- education, training and employment schemes to help people back into work
- specialist support for particular groups such as young people, women and people from ethnic minorities

We heard evidence from Professor Tony Warnes, University of Sheffield who, with Dr Maureen Crane, carried out the FOR-HOME study of the outcomes of resettlement work. Their team interviewed 400 single homeless people who were on the point of being resettled. They were interviewed three times:

- the day before they moved into their new accommodation
- six months later
- 15-18 months later

A key conclusion is that resettlement works: the study found that only a small proportion of people (eight per cent) had returned to homelessness after 15-18 months.

In this chapter we look at:

- o tenancy support
- o dealing with financial problems
- o employment and training
- o social isolation
- o the cost effectiveness of resettlement work

RESETTLEMENT WORK

TENANCY SUPPORT

We asked Tony Warnes what FOR-HOME had found were the most common causes of people losing their tenancies. He told us that in the majority of cases it was rent arrears and eviction or threats of eviction, or sometimes abandonment. Another cause, which was not very common, was disputes with, or causing offence to, neighbours.

Tenancy support services have demonstrated that high rates of tenancy sustainment can be achieved, even among those with very high needs. Tony Warnes explained that some people do not realise before they move that they might need help and can be over-confident. One Commissioner confirmed this:

“I can remember: I’ve got my keys, my own front door, I’m sorted. That’s when the problems started and I didn’t know how to look after myself. Within three months I was back out on the streets looking for help.”

We considered some key aspects of tenancy support:

- support plans
- staff expertise
- accommodation options
- peer support

Support plans

The amount of support needed varies widely, from practical help in the few weeks before and after moving in, to long term support and residential care. We believe it is essential that each individual's needs are expertly assessed and that clear plans are made for meeting them. One Commissioner explained how effective this can be:

“In my area you go into direct access, get assessed, all your support needs will be sorted, whether it’s addictions, counselling, whatever. Then you go on to second stage, there you get a Support Plan with seven categories –cooking, budgeting, bills, all your life skills. Once you’ve done that through your keyworker then you move on to a sublet. And you have to go that way. There’s a very small failure rate.”

Unfortunately, such plans are often not in place. Less than half (47 per cent) of the FOR-HOME interviewees received any tenancy support in the first month of their tenancy. The study found that decisions about who receives support are haphazard and it is not necessarily directed towards those most in need. The study concluded that there should be:

- more targeting of tenancy support to those who are most inexperienced and vulnerable
- more intensive support of those who move into the private rented sector or into high rent properties, where people are more at risk.

Support plans should be led by the service user. Some Commissioners had found lifeskills training invaluable and argued for this to be included

RESETTLEMENT WORK

in support plans. We made recommendations for support planning in Chapter 4, Temporary accommodation.

One problem is that support work does not start early enough. Peter Radage from Framework in Nottingham told us that floating support should be introduced to the client as early as possible so they can build up a relationship. It should start at last six weeks before people leave their hostel. One of the problems has been the uneasy transition from the hostel worker to the floating support worker.

Recommendation 44: Support plans should start at least six weeks before people move into a tenancy (LA, HSP, 2).

Staff expertise

In our experience generalist hostel staff are not always able to provide the expert support needed. Resettlement work is a specialist skill and should be undertaken by agencies with trained staff. As with hostel staff, there is a need for better training of staff, for example through Homeless Link's Engage to change qualification.

<http://www.homeless.org.uk/engage-to-change>

It is important for resettlement teams and other services such as mental health, drug and alcohol teams to work together to ensure that people get the support they need. There can be particular difficulties for people who have a combination of mental health and drug or alcohol problems (known as "dual diagnosis"). Tony Warnes identified the need for more continuity of treatment programmes for drug and alcohol dependency problems.

Accommodation options

In many areas there may be few one bedroom, social housing flats available. Homeless people have to consider private renting, but should not be pushed into accommodation where they are likely to fail, for example by moving to an area far from any social contacts or into a property with a rent they cannot afford.

Placing people in the private rented sector can be problematic if there is not enough support available. Tony Warnes explained that, among the FOR-HOME interviewees, less than half of those who went into the private sector (47 per cent) were still in their original tenancy at the end of the study period, compared with 87 per cent of housing association tenants and 81 per cent of local authority tenants. However, they had found that resettlement schemes for people moving into private rented accommodation can be successful if they are closely managed, have detailed skills assessments and give intensive advice, particularly on finances. For example, Broadway's Real Lettings scheme has proved as successful in tenancy sustainment in the private rented sector as for those in social housing.

The other key factor is the size and type of accommodation that people move into. The study found high levels of retention and satisfaction after 15 to 18 months among people in self contained accommodation (88 per cent) and studio flats (84 per cent) compared to those in bedsits (42 per cent). Bedsits are not popular because they tend to be thought of as temporary. This finding is very important in view of the government's proposal to pay Local Housing allowance only on a room in a shared house for any single person aged under 35. This

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is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6, Settled housing.

A Commissioner emphasised the problems of moving into the private rented sector without adequate support:

“I’m a private tenant and I never got offered any support and I wouldn’t know where to start to get that help.”

Recommendation 45: Vulnerable people should have access to floating support before they move into private rented accommodation (LA, HSP, 2).

Peer support

In Chapter 9, Self help, we emphasise the importance of service user involvement in planning, commissioning and running services, including peer support and mentoring.

Tony Warnes also identified the potential of more peer advice from those who have been resettled, explaining:

“It would be helpful if those resettled could learn from people who have been through resettlement and learned to live independently and who are willing to share their experience. We found that people leaving supported housing or hostels don’t have a realistic idea of the challenges ahead.”

He provided us with details of a very effective peer support scheme run by St Mungo’s. The Peer Advice Link (PAL) provides support by advisors who themselves moved from supported housing to independent accommodation. PAL volunteers help new tenants deal with repairs,

welfare benefits, housing benefit problems, applying for Social Fund and charitable grants, purchasing essential items cheaply and other practical issues.

The peer volunteers are supported by experienced St Mungo’s staff. This means that:

- clients receive excellent floating support
- the service is not expensive to run
- the volunteers increase their skills, experience and employability

The degree of support is gradually reduced with the aim that all clients are fully independent in their own tenancies after six months and/or receive support from local services.

The ultimate goal of the peer advisors is to help tenants integrate with the local community and to build up local support networks. New tenants are also encouraged to engage with the events and activities arranged by PAL. These events give clients an opportunity to:

- get out and experience mainstream cultural life
- network with other clients who have been through or are going through similar problems

Social isolation is one of the biggest obstacles when people move on from supported housing. PAL volunteers organise events such as barbeques, museum visits and boat trips to encourage clients to form their own networks and friendships. PAL also builds links to local training, education and social activities. A monthly newsletter gives information on what is happening in their local community.

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Each year, PAL helps more than 300 St Mungo's residents. It combines the enthusiasm of peer volunteers with the experience of St Mungo's staff and delivers an effective and inexpensive tenancy support.

FINANCES

Debt and money management are major problems for many former rough sleepers when faced with the extra costs of running a home on a low income.

Tony Warnes explained that the majority of FOR-HOME respondents had increasing levels of debt over 18 months after resettlement, and that it was most prevalent among private rented tenants (83 per cent). Although the average level of debt was low in comparison to the general population, it was nevertheless a cause of stress and concern. People moving from institutional life to independent accommodation need furnishings and sometimes take on rents which are more than they can afford, particularly if they start working. Sometimes debts from the past can resurface when people become tenants. Many people run into financial problems, and among those who lose a job or go into full-time education, these can quickly turn from manageable to severe.

The first need is for help with financial planning for homeless people. As Tony Warnes said:

"There needs to be more help with financial awareness and personal financial planning, particularly if there is to be more use of the private rented sector. If housing benefit and local housing allowance are going to be capped, so

people won't get so much support in higher rent properties, more careful decisions will have to be made about what people can afford.... So people who are contemplating independent living and getting a job or going into full-time education, need to consider it very carefully to see if it is financially sustainable."

He spelt out how this could work:

"Many organisations now do a good job helping people with setting up utility accounts, understanding different charging systems, giving basic training in daily financial dealings, economical food shopping and so on. But keyworkers told us that not all residents take up offers of help and some people also need more than this basic level of help. They need to be advised what their financial situation will be over the course of a year, especially if they are going to make a change in their life."

Recommendation 46: Before moving into a tenancy, service users should be helped to make a two year financial plan by trained keyworkers (LA, HSP, 2).

Recommendation 47: DWP and other agencies should not try to reclaim debts from newly resettled tenants until they can realistically make payments, as set out in their personal financial plan (DWP, LA, HSP, 2).

A further problem some of us have encountered is that utility companies insist on a pre-paid meter for formerly homeless people who often do not have a bank account or good credit record. These are higher cost than, for example, direct debit payments available to better off people.

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Recommendation 48: Utility companies should be obliged to charge the same amount to customers, regardless of the method of payment (DECC, 1).

Community Care Grants (CCGs)

Tony Warnes' reported that FOR-HOME found that many tenants lacked basic furniture and equipment when they first moved in, with those in local authority housing having the highest levels of need: 65 per cent had no bed, 86 per cent no cooker, 72 per cent no chair and 85 per cent no floor covering when they moved in. However, landlords usually require people to move in quickly. This can cause problems for people with few possessions as Community Care Grants (CCGs) and DWP loans can take time to administer. In addition, grants and loans are not available to people in employment, creating a disincentive for homeless people to take up work before they have found a settled home. The other anomaly is that the amounts vary enormously, from £50 to £500 and there is no obvious rationale for this.

Several Commissioners have had personal experience of these problems:

"I've just moved into a shared house and I had nothing. I was so lucky in having friends and family who were willing to donate some of their possessions. Without them I'd have had nothing."

"There's a case I came across recently – someone had just moved into a property and he's got nothing in it. The housing association have offered him £120 to decorate it. However he has to pay for it himself then hand in the receipts. So it's a problem for him."

"CCGs and loans take six weeks to come through. You can't apply for a CCG until you have an address [to move to] and you get your address two days before you move in. Then you've got to wait six weeks before you get your CCG."

Recommendation 49: Community Care Grants should be replaced by direct funding of resettlement grants to agencies which would supervise the spending of them by people who were being resettled. This would also save on the large administrative costs of individual grants (DWP, 1).

TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Employment or training offers an important route back into social inclusion for former rough sleepers. Work or productive activity are also important for people who are not capable of immediate paid employment, perhaps through training or voluntary work.

However, the FOR-HOME research found that people going into employment risked getting into debt. Tony Warnes explained:

"The problem is not so much getting a job, it's that a lot of people have to take very insecure, low-paid jobs – the so-called flexible labour market – and even in well-organised companies, such as call centres, people can be laid off at short notice. So people's benefits are stopped when they take a job; if they lose it, it takes time to get the benefits re-instated. Other reasons are that when people get a job they usually have more expenses, for example they have to spend more on travel and clothes etc".

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A Commissioner explained the difficulties:

"I'm in debt to my eyeballs. I'm at the beginning of a job which I've got to fight for within 3 months, so hopefully I'll get a continuation. If not, I'm back on the dole again.... It's draining, anxiety, tiring – I have support from services but the only reason I have support is that I've been stamping my feet for them ... I was signing on at a Jobcentre and I had no back-to-work plan or care plan. I went down and signed off and said I've got a job and he said 'that's great, I hope we don't see you again (in the nicest possible way)' ... and that was it.... There should be a structured package for people going back into work."

Recommendation 50: All Jobcentres should have a back-to-work support scheme with a comprehensive package of financial planning and a grant for back-to-work expenses in the first month for items such as clothing and travel (DWP, 2).

SOCIAL ISOLATION

Social isolation can be a major cause of tenancy breakdown. Resettlement workers should aim to help service users with getting back in touch with friends and family, or making new friends, through social activities. Day centres can play an important part here, although some former rough sleepers want to avoid social circles that might lead them back into street life. Some agencies have also developed peer support and befriending schemes to help tackle this problem.

Life on the streets and in hostels does provide a social network for some people, and when people are rehoused they may lose these social contacts. On the other hand, it can be important for some people to escape from their old contacts. This is particularly the case where they were part of a culture of drinking, drug use or street life.

RESETTLEMENT WORK

COST EFFECTIVENESS

It has been possible to expand resettlement services with funding from the government's Supporting People programme, but this could now be under threat from spending cuts. It has, however, been shown that providing resettlement and tenancy support can save money on other services. A government commissioned report found that the £1.6 billion spent on housing support services saved the government £3.4 billion by avoiding the need for other more expensive services. (CLG 2009c).

There is serious concern that local authorities will impose cuts on housing related support and that these will hit homeless people particularly hard. We have examined this issue in Chapter 2, Prevention of homelessness. Although cuts in central government grants for homelessness support services are lower than some feared, we saw that there might still be substantial cuts at the local level.

CONCLUSIONS

It has been recognised since at least the mid-1990s that resettlement work is an essential part of a successful programme to help people off the streets (Randall and Brown, 1995). It has also been shown that it is extremely cost effective in preventing repeat homelessness.

We have identified some elements of good practice in this chapter and a detailed good practice guide on resettlement can be found at:

<http://handbooks.homeless.org.uk/resettlement>

SETTLED HOUSING

For the great majority of homeless people, the only realistic option for a settled home in the near future is by renting in the social or private rented sectors.

We look at the two sectors in turn

SOCIAL HOUSING

Background

Many Commissioners have applied for or lived in social housing. Our experiences reflect the widely differing availability of social housing and allocation schemes throughout the country.

We heard evidence from Ruth Lucas from the Local Government Association (LGA).

Most homeless people would prefer social housing. They tend to see it as more secure, more affordable and of a higher standard than private rented housing.

Services for homeless people try to identify all possible opportunities for their users to access social housing. In many areas of the country, there is a serious shortage of social housing and there are over 1.7 million households on council housing waiting lists in England http://england.shelter.org.uk/housing_issues/waiting_lists .

The shortage of social housing means that many homeless people become trapped in hostels for long periods. For example, in London surveys of hostels have found that around 40 per cent of residents were ready to move on but unable to do so (Randall and Brown, 2007). Just over four out of ten (43 per cent) of people moving out of hostels in England go into social housing

<https://www.spclientrecord.org.uk/reporting/osresults.cfm> . There is no prospect of social housing meeting all of the move-on needs of hostel residents.

Some areas of the country have a more plentiful supply of social housing, for example in some cities in the north of England, but there are currently few opportunities for homeless people to move to these areas, even when they are willing to do so.

Local authority building programmes

We were interested to hear from Ruth Lucas of the LGA's proposals for reforms to the system of housing finance that would lead to an expanded building programme.

The LGA argue that the current housing finance system is unfair and makes the effective management of council housing difficult. At present local authorities who make a profit from rents and sales have to return money to the Treasury.

The LGA publication Local Housing – Local Solutions highlights the problems with the existing system and proposes the following:

- sales receipts and rents should be retained to be spent locally
- council housing needs to be properly funded and placed on a sound financial footing to ensure long term investment
- councils should have financial freedom and be able to invest in their housing and contribute to the local economy

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- councils should be able to borrow money to invest in their new homes in the same way and with similar conditions as their housing association partners

The LGA estimate that these reforms could produce a minimum investment of £35bn to build 80,000-90,000 additional affordable homes over the next five years.

We strongly support these proposals as a fair and cost effective way of using the current resources within the social housing sector to produce more new homes.

Recommendation 51: The financing of council housing should be reformed so that councils can keep the proceeds of their rents and sales and re-invest them in housing, as proposed by the LGA (DCLG, 2).

The government has considered similar plans. However, it seems that cuts in public expenditure on social housing will wipe out any increase gained from these changes to local authority housing finance. Homeless Link summarised the impact of the cuts on social housing:

“Reduction in the National Affordable Housing Programme will reduce the development of new housing stock and remodelling of existing stock. A rate of 150,000 over four years is well below the rate for new homes which was estimated to meet the projected population increases. The shortage of affordable housing is a major barrier to tackling homelessness. Without this investment, there is likely to be less accommodation for vulnerable people, potentially tying up move-on options for homeless people looking to move from

temporary accommodation, and drive up waiting lists and overcrowding.” (Homeless Link, 2010a)

Now is a difficult time to be arguing for more spending on social housing, but we believe the LGA’s proposals have shown not only that such investment can be self-financing but also, as Ruth Lucas said to us:

“It can lead to savings on other services such as health services and the police. People going into social housing also save on the benefits bill, because rents are lower than in the private rented sector.”

Allocation policies

Councils have a legal duty to ensure that homeless people have somewhere to live if they are in ‘priority need’ and are not ‘intentionally homeless’. Although many people sleeping rough might come into a priority need category, they often don’t apply to or don’t get accepted by local councils.

We have experienced great difficulties in some of our local areas in getting accurate information on how social housing is allocated and in registering our need for it.

Recommendation 52: There should be clearer information so that people can understand who fits the criteria for social housing (LA, 1).

Quality of social housing

The need to increase the quantity of social housing should not be at the expense of quality. If homeless people are to settle securely they need, as do other tenants, decent housing in stable communities. Some Commissioners

SETTLED HOUSING

had experienced large housing estates where people's problems could become worse. They argued for a social mix, with employment opportunities and social amenities in the area. This discussion by three Commissioners makes the points:

"There should be more social housing for people who need it, as an emergency measure. But there has to be an incentive for people to not just stay there. People get social housing and accept it as their lot. There has to be more aspiration."

"Years ago council housing was built around areas where there was a requirement for a labour pool. But now it's like a parking place for unemployed people.... They should build new units where there is some community venture, training facilities, social and economic activity that will bring people together and where they have access to amenities."

"Yes, there needs to be industry surrounding social housing with training opportunities for people.... They shouldn't be seen as places of poverty. If managed in the right way, people should want to live there."

"They should look at the places where social housing is working and take the ideas from it. My mother lives on a council estate and has done all her life. It's a place where everyone wants to live because it's a high standard, they all work because there are employers locally, they keep the gardens nice."

"In Newcastle they have four high rises. The Council have done up three and the people who lived there before have gone back to them. One is being sold privately for £200,000

a flat and they're absolutely beautiful. It was a really deprived area before. They've done nice parks for the kids. There has to be quality of life surrounding the social housing."

Recommendation 53: Local authority allocation policies should ensure that they do not create or reinforce 'problem' estates. There should be a mix of social and private housing in new developments with access to social amenities, employment and training opportunities (LA, 1).

As with other aspects of homelessness and housing programmes, a key factor is the involvement of the community and service users in planning provision.

Recommendation 54: Local authorities should produce a summary of their housing strategies in plain English for discussion by the local community (LA, 1).

Recommendation 55: Where council housing is demolished it should be carried out with a sensitive, consultative approach, engaging the local community. Demolitions should be replaced by an equal number of bedspaces (LA, 2).

THE PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR

Background

There is no prospect of social housing meeting all the needs of homeless people moving out of temporary accommodation and it is therefore necessary to try to expand the availability of private rented housing for them. Currently only 15 per cent of residents leaving hostels in

SETTLED HOUSING

England move into private renting <https://www.spclientrecord.org.uk/reporting/osresults.cfm>. Many people are suspicious of private rented housing, seeing it as insecure, expensive and often in bad condition, with tenants at the mercy of unscrupulous landlords. On the other hand, some private tenants have found they have a greater choice of accommodation and area than tenants of social housing and a greater feeling of independence.

There are now many projects run by voluntary agencies and councils which help people to access private renting by ensuring that landlords and properties are good quality, rents are affordable and landlords are prepared to let for several years, or even indefinitely. They are known as private rented access schemes.

We heard evidence from David Hewitt of Crisis SmartMove which funds and supports access schemes. Over 14,000 people have been helped since 1997.

Crisis also have a wider remit to act as a national advisory service on use of the private rented sector to prevent and tackle homelessness. They have carried out research into the coverage, outcomes and costs of private rented access schemes. They work in partnership with the Department of Communities and Local Government and the Scottish and Welsh Governments.

David Hewitt identified the opportunities offered by the private rented sector:

- greater choice of area and properties than in social housing

- people can move in quickly
- it can prevent homelessness, including rough sleeping, and supports independence and progression
- it frees up places in hostels and supported housing
- it can support care and rehabilitation
- it can be particularly suitable for substance misusers, offenders and others for whom location and timing of housing is crucial
- it need not act as a barrier to work.
- the majority of tenants report positive experiences

However, he also pointed to potential problems in the sector:

- accessibility: nationally only one in five landlords will accept tenants on Housing Benefit
- security: tenants can be relatively easily evicted
- affordability
- property standards
- management standards.

He described how private rented access schemes can tackle these problems. We look at the problems and solutions in more detail below.

SETTLED HOUSING

Private rented access schemes

The most effective way of improving access to and conditions in the private rented sector for homeless people is through access schemes.

David Hewitt identified key features of a good scheme. They:

- carry out an initial assessment of clients' support needs
- offer pre-tenancy advice, guidance and training
- give Housing Benefit and money management assistance
- encourage landlords to let to homeless people
- screen out unsuitable properties
- give help in setting up tenancies
- give support for landlords and tenants; for example, the Transitional Spaces Project has helped 128 people into private rented homes and only had three tenancy breakdowns
- have links to complementary local services to provide extra support.

Many local authorities provide schemes for priority homeless people, but those who are non-priority (single people without high needs) are less able to access private rented schemes.

PRIVATE RENTING: PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

We considered how the problems with private renting for homeless people could best be overcome.

Persuading landlords to let to homeless people

Many landlords are worried that homeless people may not be good tenants, especially in maintaining rent payments. We asked David Hewitt:

"How can we persuade landlords to start accepting vulnerably housed people?"

He replied:

"Private rented sector access schemes (such as SmartMove) are very effective at encouraging landlords to let their properties to vulnerably housed people. Good schemes do this by offering assistance and ongoing support with Housing Benefit (a key concern for landlords), ongoing support with the tenancy and other incentives to landlords (for example, deposits, insurance and direct payment of Housing Benefit)."

Recommendation 56: All private rented access schemes should run publicity and education programmes for landlords to persuade them to accept homeless people (LA, HSP, 2).

SETTLED HOUSING

Ensuring good quality property and management standards

There is more private rented housing in poor condition than in social housing, but private rented schemes can ensure that only homes of a reasonable quality are offered to homeless people.

However, procedures for checking on quality vary widely. David Hewitt explained that projects check with the Environmental Health Department if the landlord is known to them. There are also accreditation schemes for landlords in some areas, but it is very varied. Some local authorities insist on landlord training, some inspect all properties, others just get them to sign up to a code of practice and then do nothing. He believed that all should be required to carry out property inspections.

Some Commissioners have experienced bad conditions in the private rented sector and we make the following recommendations to tackle this problem.

Recommendation 57: There should be mandatory minimum standards for landlords and private rented properties let through access schemes, which should be vetted by local authorities. Local authorities should set up a register of landlords with a rating system and awards for good practice. Information on landlords letting substandard properties, including those who let properties as a cover for illegal activities such as drug dealing, should be shared by local authorities and other agencies (LA, HSP, 2).

Recommendation 58: Landlords with court orders against them and other landlords letting substandard properties should not be able to receive Housing Benefit. They should be able to apply for re-registration if they improved their standards (DCLG, LA, HSP, 1).

David Hewitt told us it is only a minority of landlords who provide unacceptable standards:

“There are some excellent landlords, some bad ones and some in the middle who want to manage their properties well but are not sure how to do so. The previous government planned a landlord register which would have allowed Crisis and others to contact all landlords and advise them on good practice, but these plans have been scrapped along with plans to licence lettings agencies.”

Rent deposits

Landlords usually require a deposit of several hundred pounds and most homeless people do not have such savings. Most private rented schemes offer a guarantee to landlords that any losses will be paid back by the scheme as an alternative to a deposit. However, some of us have found that schemes can be slow to pay out. One Commissioner reported that:

“A London Council will pay £1000 up front for a deposit, but if landlords are showing round people at the same time who have cash, then they are more likely to let to them, than wait for a promise note to materialise.”

Recommendation 59: Private rented access schemes should ensure rent deposits are available the day they are approved (LA, HSP, 1).

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Rents and Local Housing Allowance

Some homeless people worry that rents in private rented housing will be too expensive. Some access schemes negotiate rents with landlords to ensure they are within Local Housing Allowance (LHA) limits. However, the government is planning a series of cuts in Local Housing Allowance, even though for half of people their allowance already doesn't cover all of the rent (Crisis 2010). Calculations by the University of Cambridge and Homeless Link show that cuts in Housing Benefit which make people's current homes unaffordable are likely to lead to increased homelessness and cost more than the savings (Fenton, 2010, Homeless Link 2010c).

Recommendation 60: The government should ensure that any cuts in Housing Benefit do not lead to an increased risk of people becoming homeless (DWP, 2).

A lesser problem, but one that we have encountered, is that access schemes can be too rigid in only dealing with properties within LHA limits, meaning service users cannot top up payments.

Recommendation 61: Private rented schemes should be more flexible to allow people to top up the rent from their own resources (DWP, LA, 1).

Young single people aged under 25 have a further problem that they only qualify for Local Housing Allowance to cover the cost of shared accommodation. This is known as the shared room rate (SRR). David Hewitt explained:

"The government's explanation is that most young people who are working share accommodation, so young people on LHA

should have to do the same. But there's big difference between young people who choose to live with their friends and people forced to share. Crisis has campaigned on this for nine years."

Since our meeting the government has announced this will be extended to single people aged under 35. Homeless Link comments:

"A significant proportion of people who have experienced homelessness, often with the related issues of previous neglect or abuse, drug and alcohol misuse, emotional and mental health issues and difficulty forming relationships, will find it even more challenging to share accommodation with others. This change is likely to lead to more breakdowns of tenancies, evictions and returns to the streets or to more expensive hostel accommodation.

"Availability of accommodation is a significant problem for people on the SRR. The experience of Homeless Link members is that it is particularly difficult in rural and regional England to find single rooms to rent as there is substantially lower availability of shared housing or bedsit type accommodation. In the context of homelessness services, 25 – 35 year olds who now have their move-on options greatly reduced may be unable to find and move to appropriate accommodation." (Homeless Link, 2010a)

We believe the increase to 35 in the age limit for the LHA single room rate will result in an increase in homelessness. It is inappropriate for many vulnerable people, for example those in recovery from previous addictions or with certain types of mental health condition, to share accommodation unless they have a choice about

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the people with whom they share. We have seen in Chapter 5, Resettlement work that while 88 per cent of people in self contained flats were successfully resettled only 42 per cent of those in bedsits remained in their accommodation.

The government already has substantial evidence that shared accommodation for homeless people results in more frequent abandonment or breakdown of tenancies and renewed homelessness.

A Housing Corporation funded report about shared housing explained the reasons for replacing shared housing which had been developed under the government Rough Sleepers Initiative (RSI). RSI shared housing had a turnover rate of 103 per cent, three times as high as RSI self-contained housing at 35 per cent. A quarter of all RSI shared tenancies ended in failure (25 per cent); this was significantly higher than the figure for self-contained (14 per cent). By far the most common reason for negative outcomes was abandonment (60 per cent). Nearly all tenants in shared housing hoped that it would help them move on to self-contained accommodation. Often, this hope appeared to be the only factor keeping tenants in shared housing (Housing Corporation, 2001).

Recommendation 62: The proposal to increase the single room rate age limit to 35 should be dropped (DWP, 2).

Recommendation 63: There should be more flexibility in the Local Housing Allowance rules over sharing for young people, to give them more choice (DWP, 3).

Recommendation 64: Tenants placed in shared accommodation by access schemes should have a choice of who they share with (LA, HSP, 1.

Prevention from eviction

Many homeless people and homelessness agencies believe that the private rented sector provides only short-term accommodation. In practice, the majority of landlords regard their properties as medium to long term investments. The great majority of tenancies end because the tenant wants to move (CLG, 2007). Private rented schemes can arrange longer tenancy periods with landlords.

We asked David Hewitt:

“If tenants complain to their landlord, will this lead to evictions?”

He explained:

“Unfortunately this issue, often referred to as ‘retaliatory eviction,’ is one that Crisis has come across. If a tenant is outside their fixed term, the landlord can give the tenant two month’s notice. In practice this is extremely rare if the tenant is paying their rent and there are no other problems. Crisis is campaigning for greater protection for tenants in this position. This campaign has been led by the Citizens Advice Bureau.”

Private rented schemes can also offer speedy and informal mediation to resolve problems between tenants and landlords.

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Housing register

In general, we and most homeless people we know would prefer decent standard private rented accommodation to living in a hostel. However, a disincentive to accepting an offer of private renting is that in some areas people then lose their priority on the register for social housing. One Commissioner had found:

“Some people stay longer in hostels than necessary, with their general welfare deteriorating, but in the hope of getting social housing.”

David Hewitt explained that some councils allow people to remain on the housing register after they have taken a private rented sector tenancy. Crisis has not systematically recorded this but will do so in future. The trend for private rented access schemes has been to use them to prevent homelessness and so in many cases they would support people for whom councils had no formal duty to house. There are new regulations in Scotland covering people in the private rented sector coming off the housing register. They have to have been in the property for 18 months, it needs to be affordable and there must be support for the landlord.

Recommendation 65: Local authorities should allow people to keep their place on the housing register if they move out of temporary accommodation into a private rented tenancy (LA, 1).

Moving

One of the main advantages of private renting by comparison with social housing is that it potentially gives tenants more choice over where they live. It is easier both to move areas and to find better housing.

However, some of us have had difficulty because schemes apply local connection rules, meaning you are only eligible for help if you already live in the area. We asked David Hewitt whether local connection rules have an impact on schemes. He told us:

“Often, yes, because schemes are often funded by local authorities. Crisis recommends that people’s local links are looked at, but should not be a requirement. Some west London boroughs allow cross-borough moves. A national rent deposit scheme would help tackle this problem.”

Recommendation 66: There should be more flexibility over local connection rules in private rented access schemes (LA, 2).

Another problem we have encountered is that some rent deposit schemes are one-off, meaning that some people cannot afford to move to another property.

Recommendation 67: Private tenants should be able to move by transferring their deposit to a new property (LA, 2).

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Tenancy support

We examined tenancy support in detail in Chapter 5, Resettlement work. Much tenancy support has in the past focused on tenants of social housing. It is perhaps even more vital in the private rented sector. We recommended that vulnerable people should have immediate access to floating support before they move into private rented accommodation.

Not all tenants will have been housed through an access scheme but they may also be in need of some support.

Recommendation 68: There should be drop-in centres offering tenancy support for private rented tenants who are not receiving a floating support service (LA, HSP, 2).

Finally, there have been examples of private landlords themselves providing some support to tenants, this can prove popular because of its personal touch. Tony Warnes, who gave evidence on resettlement work (see Chapter 5) told us about the usefulness of such schemes:

“There also needs to be an education programme for private landlords. Sheffield Hallam University runs a course for socially responsible landlords and this is an area that could be developed more. Quite a lot want to make money out of their properties but also do something socially useful. There needs to be an interchange between homelessness organisations, homeless people (groups like the Homeless People’s Commission) and landlords’ organisations to get them to think hard about how landlords can be more constructive to formerly homeless people.”

Recommendation 69: There should be training for landlords who are willing to support tenants in the private rented sector (LA, HSP, 2).

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COST EFFECTIVENESS

Research by Crisis and the London Housing Foundation found that:

"By using private sector access schemes to free up supported housing places for those who need them commissioners can make a unit cost 'saving' of £4,900 in the first year, and even greater savings thereafter....Where the places freed up in supported housing can be let to someone who is currently in residential care the savings can be even higher, with calculations from one borough suggesting annual savings in excess of £13,000 for each person rehoused in this way." (Crisis and London Housing Foundation (2008)

CONCLUSION

Social housing is the most popular option for settled housing among homeless people. There are cost effective ways in which the supply could be increased, but there will still be continuing shortages in many areas for the foreseeable future. This makes it essential to expand options in the private rented sector. It does, in any case, have some potential advantages in offering more choice over area and type of accommodation and more opportunities to move on to better accommodation. Private rented access schemes have made progress in helping homeless people to find housing. We would like to see the schemes extended and for best practice to be implemented in all areas. Private renting is often a cheaper and more popular option than hostels, while social housing is probably the most cost effective of all. However, the proposed changes in Local Housing Allowance are likely to make it more difficult for homeless people to access private rented accommodation and to settle in it successfully.

BACKGROUND

Homeless people and organisations are increasingly interested in developing self-help activities including:

- service user involvement
- peer mentoring schemes
- peer training
- peer research
- volunteering
- employment and training, including schemes for jobs within homelessness organisations
- social enterprises
- personalised plans
- influencing local and national policies

Many of the Commissioners have been involved in these activities and gave evidence to us on their work in these areas. In addition we heard from Charlotte Hueso, Zoe Bendelow and Steve Moss from Services for Empowerment and Advocacy (SEA), an independent advocacy and involvement service working in Nottingham and Derbyshire, which operates as a social enterprise.

We look at the different activities in turn.

SERVICE USER INVOLVEMENT

This is a way of ensuring that service users can express their views on services and how they could be improved and at best have some control over them. It is now a requirement by Supporting People funders that organisations involve clients in running the organisation.

SEA stated the case for service user involvement:

“If you consult with people, they may have some fantastic ideas you haven’t thought of. If you provide that opportunity [for consultation] the more organisations like ours and the things you [the Commissioners] all do, are out there, making sure that service users’ voices aren’t ignored, hopefully we can influence where changes will happen.”

It can involve service users in a range of activities which are outlined below.

User surveys

Many organisations carry out surveys of users on how services can be improved. Users can themselves be involved in carrying out these surveys (see below Peer research).

Service user groups

SEA described how these worked in Framework, the biggest homelessness charity in Nottingham, and the impact they could have:

“A Client Commission has been set up, which is user-led...Any topic can be brought up and will be investigated. For example, a committee of service users and staff looked into the high proportion of hostel evictions and exclusions and produced a report which resulted in a change of policy and a 40 per cent reduction in evictions and exclusions within a year.”

Representing service user views to management

At its most developed this means involving users on management boards. For example, one of the Commissioners, Darren Jones, is based in Leeds, living in hostel accommodation provided by Stonham which is one of the largest providers of supported housing with 20,000 clients in 500 towns and cities around the country. He is Chair of the Yorkshire region client involvement panel. The panel has clients represented at the highest level of the Board. Members from all over the country attend Steering Group meetings to discuss ways of getting clients involved and put recommendations to the Board.

Service reviews

Clients can play a key role by carrying out reviews of services and recommending improvements. For example, two Commissioners, Graham Harrison and Rob Keere, are part of Two Saints Project Assessment Team (PAT) in Portsmouth.

The PAT arose from a Supporting People initiative of peer assessment which was implemented as a model of good practice in Hampshire. The team consists of twelve volunteers who are either

ex or current residents. It assesses direct access hostels, resettlement work and floating support.

Funds were made available to identify client and staff training needs and provide joint training in such areas as:

- assessment skills
- managing professional meetings
- boundaries

The team now trains its own assessors using ideas gained during the process and has developed their own assessors' handbook and record book which facilitates the assessment and report writing.

Assessors visit projects to evaluate them from the point of view of residents. They ask questions on four key areas:

- client involvement
- safety, security and well-being
- availability of support and links to other services
- environment and resources

These are scored on a scale of 0 (no evidence) to 5 (excellent) with 3 the minimum score acceptable.

They explained:

“We've made 180-odd recommendations, 170 completed within three months. We report to senior managers – the Chief Executive and Board of Directors, so we don't say direct to the project manager what's wrong with their hostel, their manager will say it to them. Once residents

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find out that something happens [from our assessment], they're a lot more open."

Staff recruitment

Service users can also help to select staff who will work with homeless people. Kevin Beard, a Commissioner from Nottingham Hostels Liaison Group explained how:

"Work with Nottingham Trent University has included involving service users on selection panels for recruiting social work students and role play on inter-agency working, which have been well-received. Service users gained self-confidence interacting with lecturers, social workers and practitioners in the same forum."

Staff training

Finally, service users can be involved in training staff. For example, one Commissioner, James Earley from Manchester Service Users Network, got funding to work with the NHS to produce a training DVD for staff to help improve their services for and attitudes to homeless people. Using service user volunteers they have run five half-day training sessions. However the funding for the project was due to end at the beginning of December 2010 and they are trying to train up 10 service users to run it themselves. The training includes:

- lifeskills
- conversation skills
- negotiation skills
- editing and creative decisions about producing DVDs
- producing a directory of local services

Good practice in service user involvement

For further information on service user involvement see:

<http://www.homeless.org.uk/client-involvement>

There is a useful Client Involvement Strategy at:

<http://www.broadwaylondon.org/ClientLife/GetInvolvedatBroadway/ClientInvolvementStrategy2009-2012>

Recommendation 70: Funders and commissioners should encourage client involvement in homelessness organisations. Clients should be offered training in self help and supported to run activities themselves to build their self confidence. They should have more control of hostel rules and more involvement in upkeep, so as to develop a sense of responsibility and achievement. Clients should be enabled to participate in staff recruitment and staff training (LA, HSP, 1).

PEER MENTORING AND SUPPORT SCHEMES

People with experience of homelessness can play a vital role in helping other homeless people. They have a deep understanding of homeless people and are more likely to be listened to. Homeless people may be more willing to discuss problems with them. Support can range from helping people to move off the streets, to making a success of staying in a hostel and with moving on to settled housing and employment.

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Commissioners gave several examples of such schemes in which they had been involved. Naima Isgow Sheikh told us about her work with Southall Black Sisters (SBS) who provide support on domestic violence:

“Some time ago the Council wanted to cut the funding, arguing that it is not only ethnic minorities who suffer domestic violence so you have to see people from all backgrounds. But people born in this country... don't have the cultural and language problems that SBS deal with. We understand the cultural issues for people who come from Asia or Africa, where domestic violence is not seen as a crime and when a woman gets beaten, they say we will sort it out in the family. We encourage people to come out and talk about it.”

Jimmy Carlson told us about the Haven social club which he helped to set up in 2003, with two other service users who were attending the Alcohol Recovery Project (ARP) in London.

They realised that for people in recovery, there was no place for them to socialise without coming across drink or drugs: “If you go to the pictures, there's a bar. If you go to a social club, there's a bar.” They set up a club for people in recovery to help them get back into socialising and learn skills to get back into work.

It was difficult in the early days to get people to do anything in the club because of past institutionalised backgrounds. Some were still drinking or using drugs a few days a week, or were in early stages of recovery.

The club founders introduced the idea of sharing meals, paying two people to shop and cook a

meal for the others and two people to wash up. Gradually members began suggesting other activities such as pool competitions and quiz nights. In time, the organisers decided to take a step back and suggested the members should do the organising themselves. Soon the club had taken on a new life, with members developing a sense of ownership and pride in the club.

Six former rough sleepers who had originally not done anything to help with clearing up at the end of each session have now organised themselves, found accommodation and are working full time.

For funding, Jimmy approached the local commissioner for substance misuse and explained the need for such a club. She advised him to find a venue and assess the cost. He found a place and estimated it would cost £15,000 a year to run. In the second year he went to the neighbouring borough, who agreed to pay half the annual cost.

The club is still going today and other groups have taken up the model. Jimmy said:

“We set up in 2003 and started a savings group. One of the members of that group moved on and set up a new group, the Sanctuary Club in Tower Hamlets. A few years later, as the Haven Club became more popular and recognised, the commissioner from Hackney came to see us with the client coordinator and a service user and they then set up something similar in Hackney. So now there are three groups going.”

Andy Martin and Emma Hyde from Cambridge Link-Up explained how hostel residents in

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Cambridge had got together to help each other:

“It evolved from a group of people sitting around in a hostel, trying to work out where to go, what to do, how to get various forms sorted out, etc. Someone suggested meeting regularly as a group to pool ideas, along the lines of a one-stop shop. The idea was floated in 2007 at a public meeting and it was decided to meet once a month. The group has no regular public funding although it has received two grants from Cambridge City Council. Fund-raising from the sale of items at craft fairs enables Link-Up to make small grants of up to £75 to homeless or ex-homeless people or those vulnerably housed, to cover unexpected expenses, such as for funerals or footwear.”

They even built their own premises:

“...it was self-build, in conjunction with English Churches Housing Group. The guys put in all the hard work and it’s a wooden building in the garden of the hostel. We don’t have exclusive rights to it – that’s one of our dreams, to have our own premises.”

Kevin Beard from Nottingham Hostels Liaison Group is paid by the NHS to work with the Assertive Outreach Team as a peer support worker covering homelessness, substance misuse, sexual abuse and mental and physical disability.

He was one of a group of campaigning service users that led to the development of the Dual Diagnosis Forum five years ago, as a sub group of the Nottingham Crime and Drugs Partnership (CDP). It works in partnership with the NHS Primary Care Trust and in parallel to other forums

in the city, such as the ex-drug users forum and the alcohol service users forum.

The group shares information between service users, making sure people’s stories are heard, services are co-ordinated and giving feedback to top level policy and decision makers. It tackles the stigma attached to mental health distress, to enable the wider public to have a better understanding of dual diagnosis.

It has attracted a good deal of interest from a wide range of organisations and individuals, including mental health groups and professionals, Chief Executives, Nottingham Trent University and Nottingham Health Care Trust.

Service users in the forum have engaged in a wide range of activities as part of their recovery and moved into education, training and employment.

Recommendation 71: Service users should be encouraged to share information with peers in group sessions to signpost them to other services and to help empower people to move on (LA, HSP, 1).

PEER TRAINING

Service users can help to train others in new skills. For example, Cambridge Link-Up obtained funding to set up regular bike workshops where homeless people get training, tools and parts to restore bikes, so giving them skills and personal transport. Bikes are donated by the Big Issue and the police.

PEER RESEARCH

People who have been homeless can make very effective researchers, interviewing homeless people and finding out how services could be improved. Homeless people may find it easier to speak to an interviewer who has had similar experiences and peer researchers can use their own experiences to interpret the results. For example, Groundswell recently completed a project, the Great Escape, in which two peer researchers interviewed people who had successfully escaped from homelessness on what helped them to do so. Many of the points raised were connected with self-help.

SEA told us about their peer research and evaluations. Service users are offered the opportunity to be interviewed by other service users, usually by telephone, for service evaluations, rather than filling in questionnaires. They have also been attending team meetings to explain the importance of evaluating services.

VOLUNTEERING

In addition to the various client involvement schemes, there can be other opportunities for volunteering, for example by organising social and training events, or by fundraising. These can also provide useful work experience which can lead to paid employment. For example, in Two Saints, projects send out volunteers to help local residents with gardening, painting and decorating.

TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

There are increasing opportunities for service users to get involved in training schemes to increase their skills and if possible to get a job. Some of these focus on helping people to get jobs in homelessness organisations, as they can make use of their own experiences and help to provide an improved service. Thames Reach (whose Chief Executive, Jeremy Swain was one of our witnesses on temporary accommodation) run such a scheme. Thames Reach has successfully created an organisational culture change that enables them to employ current and former service users across all teams and functions. Through the Giving Real Opportunities for Work (GROW) Project, nearly a quarter of their staff have an experience of homelessness. This has been achieved by:

- identifying and overcoming the organisational barriers that previously prevented the employment of current and former service users, including: revising employment policies and procedures and changing staff attitudes from 'us and them' to 'us and us'
- developing routes into employment for service users including a volunteering scheme and traineeships.

<http://www.thamesreach.org.uk/what-we-do/user-employment/national-grow-programme/>

Recommendation 72: Homelessness organisations should employ a percentage of ex-service users. To achieve this they should help clients to gain qualifications and provide them with a profile of achievements, including training on both lifeskills and employable skills (LA, HSP, 1).

Recommendation 73: Jobcentres should help people to find voluntary work where this is the best immediate option for them. Service user volunteers should get reasonable financial incentives without affecting their benefits (DWP, LA, HSP, 2).

SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

Social enterprises are organisations whose main aim is a social benefit, such as helping homeless people into training and employment. They can take many forms, including organisations offering:

- community cafes and catering
- repairing, making and recycling goods such as furniture or bicycles, for example Cambridge Link-Up (see above)
- building, decorating and gardening.

There are many other examples. They can help to provide homeless people with an income and training for other job opportunities.

Recommendation 74: There is scope for developing more social enterprise self-help models like SEA in Nottingham and Cambridge Link-up (LA, HSP, 2).

PERSONALISED PLANS

Homeless people can actively participate in drawing up personalised plans which identify what type of help would be most useful to them, rather than having to take whatever is on offer. Service users have more choice and control over the support that they get They can:

- identify what services would help them best
- choose where they get these services from
- take an active part in getting themselves back on track

A further development of this approach is for service users to have a personal budget so that they can decide what would most help them to resettle successfully.

Framework from Nottingham took part in a pilot scheme on personalised budgets budget (see **Chapter 4**, Street outreach).

Homeless Link states that:

“At this stage there have been no indications that the homelessness sector will be adopting wholesale changes such as a move to personal budgets. However homelessness providers can start moving towards a more personalised approach by asking how choice is currently limited in their services. Do clients have to pay for food whether they want it or not? Do they have any say over their key worker? Can clients choose activities or where they live? Are support plans structured around the organisation’s expectations of clients’ needs, or around clients’

own aims? Personalisation offers an opportunity to build on current client involvement and to think outside traditional service models.”

For more information see:

<http://www.homeless.org.uk/personalisation>

INFLUENCING POLICY AND PRACTICE

In addition to influencing the policies and practices of the organisations that provide accommodation and support for homeless people they can influence local and national policies. Groundswell has organised Speakouts, where homeless people can express their views directly to local councils and other providers. In some areas homeless people sit on local commissioning boards which decide which services to fund. The Homeless People's Commission is seeking to influence central and local government and other national organisations.

Homeless people have come up with some innovative ways of campaigning. For example, Kevin Beard from Nottingham Hostels Liaison Group told us about their “living library”:

“Recently we ran a Substance Misuse Campaign, with the help of the Dual Diagnosis Forum and NHS, but specifically run by ex-substance misuse clients. We realised that so many people have different stories, each unique to each individual, so the idea came up of setting up a living library, alongside the Time for Change campaign. We set up a ‘bookshelf’ of service user volunteers in the main library in Nottingham and invited

a wide range of organisations to publicise it. Anyone could come along and have 20 minutes with a ‘book’, an individual willing to share their story, experiences and knowledge. Now it has gone on tour across the UK. What has changed? For service users their self-esteem, general well-being and mental health have been boosted. For Directorates and frontline staff, listening to people’s stories has had a powerful impact on them and helped to start changing attitudes, from ‘what can we deliver to you?’ to ‘how can we help you to help yourself? A change from ‘should do’ to ‘can do’.”

The government is devolving more powers and responsibilities to the local level, including to local authorities. This will make it essential that local authorities have accurate and up to date information on the needs of vulnerable people in their areas and on how best to meet these needs.

In our experience service user involvement is critical to the improvement of public services. We believe the government had recognised this in its replacement of “top-down” with “bottom-up” services. Our Commission has developed a model which greatly enhances the quality of input from vulnerable service users by ensuring that they can contribute not only their own experiences and views, but also consider other evidence from research and expert witnesses.

We will be producing a good practice guide to help the establishment of other local and national policy commissions of vulnerable people. We hope DCLG will encourage local authorities to adopt this model.

Recommendation 75: Local authorities should resource independent service user groups, based on the Homeless People's Commission model and facilitated by a local homelessness organisation, to inform local policy. There should be service user consultation in the formulation of all new government policies, through local and national independent bodies on the model of the Homeless People's Commission (All government departments, LA, HSP, 1).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We have found many inspiring examples of self-help among the Commissioners' own activities. However, there is at present often little contact between self-help groups and there is much that they could learn from each other. For example, SEA found in Nottingham that there had been no process to share good practice in service user involvement, so they have devised a programme of training events for staff and service user representatives which aims to improve mutual understanding.

Drawing on our experience we make a number of recommendations for extending self-help further. Many of them would fit in with the government's plans to encourage self-help.

Recommendation 76: National and local government and service providers should recognise that self-help groups are integral to improving services, making them more cost effective and enhancing people's quality of life (DCLG, LA, HSP, 1).

Recommendation 77: Self-help groups should work locally in partnership with each other. There should be a homelessness self-help liaison group in every region to co-ordinate services and disseminate good practice. Central and local government representatives should be invited to these regional service user groups (HSP, 2).

Recommendation 78: It would be useful to have a national service user groups' conference, where groups could share good practice (HSP, 2).

Recommendation 79: There should be a national website to share good practice on self-help, possibly based on the website of an existing homelessness agency (HSP, 2).

Recommendation 80: Service user groups should be informed by providers immediately of any changes to policies or procedures resulting from budget cuts (HSP, 1).

WELFARE BENEFITS

BACKGROUND

The great majority of homeless people are unemployed and a significant number have a disability. Most want to get back into work and the benefits system should play a central role in helping them to achieve this. Service standards vary between offices, but many Commissioners have experienced serious difficulties with the benefits system including:

- lack of information on benefits
- poor standards of customer service
- delays in reaching decisions and making payments
- unjustified suspension of benefits
- unsuitable offers of training and jobs

A survey by Homeless Link found that 41 per cent of people in contact with homelessness agencies had problems with benefits.

<http://www.homeless.org.uk/welfarebenefits>

Underlying many of these problems is the complexity of the current system and inadequate staff training.

We heard evidence from John Dumelow, from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), with responsibility for developing employment support for homeless people and Michael Fothergill, WILLOW Project Manager (Welfare Influencing and Lobbying: Learning Opportunities and Work) based at Crisis.

John Dumelow explained that the DWP strategy is aimed at promoting social and financial inclusion for those at a disadvantage in the labour market because of homelessness by:

- promoting job readiness through employment advice and job related training: disability, a disrupted education and lack of skills and work experience are barriers to the labour market
- providing financial support through the benefit system; people need to feel secure in their accommodation before they look for work
- ensuring that through the combination of employment and benefit support customers gain and remain in their accommodation, for example DWP provides help with mortgage interest payments to prevent homelessness.

The Commission examined:

- service standards and staffing
- procedures
- the complexity of the system
- training, work opportunities and incentives

DWP's comments on our draft recommendations are reproduced in **Appendix 1**.

WELFARE BENEFITS

SERVICE STANDARDS AND STAFFING

In our discussions, Commissioners repeatedly mentioned staff attitudes. Claimants are sometimes treated condescendingly and rudely. It varies between offices, for example it was reported that one Jobcentre in a large city treats homeless people very badly, the other is very helpful.

One of the Commissioners explained:

“Homeless people will already be feeling stressed and problems with benefits and being treated badly adds to stress, so people blow their top.”

Another said:

“Staff, including security officers, should be trained to treat people with respect. They should realise people are under stress and help to reduce this.”

A major cause of problems in our experience is the difficulty of getting understandable information. A Commissioner summed up the problem:

“There’s a lack of information about what benefits there are, how much they will be and when they will be paid.. Some information given is too complicated. They should explain how benefits are calculated. People need this so they can budget.”

Recommendation 81: Information on benefits should be more accessible and easy to understand. Jobcentre staff should be required to inform customers of all the benefits to which they are entitled (DWP, 1).

Too often the service seems impersonal:

“It’s now harder to get to see the same personal adviser, if you are seen by a different adviser and they can’t find your notes you have to start from the beginning again.”

As the Commissioner points out here, this not only provides a worse service but creates inefficiency and additional costs.

Recommendation 82: There should be a nominated caseworker for each individual throughout their contact with Jobcentre Plus (DWP, 1).

Several of these problems suggest there that some staff are not adequately trained. We asked Michael Fothergill:

“What training do Jobcentre staff receive? Is it adequate?”

He replied:

“There is anecdotal evidence that Jobcentre Plus staff are put on the front line with only one day’s health and safety training and little else. This was particularly so during the recession. A lot of staff training is ‘on-line’, and requires staff to make the time to do it – so due to pressure of work, it often does not happen.”

Recommendation 83: There should be better DWP staff training on policies, service standards, people skills, mentoring, the special needs of homeless people, assessing customers’ training needs and on customer relations (DWP, 2).

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Some staff do not seem to realise the problems homeless people may have in addition to the need to find work. DCLG provided us with information on several local authorities which are now working with Jobcentre Plus and other employment and training agencies to provide joint services to homeless people. Diane Docherty from Cambridge City council told us about their dedicated employment adviser who works with homeless people on the streets and in hostels.

Recommendation 84: Homelessness advisers should work jointly with Jobcentre Plus (DWP, LA, HSP, 2).

We have found widely varying standards of practice in different Jobcentres and believe all should aim to achieve a consistently higher standard:

Recommendation 85: DWP should identify lessons from good practice in effective Jobcentres and publish national good practice standards which are independently audited for consistency across all offices (DWP, 2).

PROCEDURES

We have experienced a number of problems with the administration of benefits, including the time taken to decide and make payments, the use of sanctions and appeals processes.

Delays

Delays can leave homeless people without any money and seriously affect their welfare. Sometimes these can arise from the lack of available staff:

“When you telephone, it’s difficult to get through to speak to anyone, people may have to hold on for up to an hour and that’s expensive if you’re phoning from a mobile.”

At other times procedures seem to be excessively bureaucratic:

“Application forms can be very intimidating and sent back if there’s a small mistake, for example on the date. Benefit offices should telephone people if it’s just a small mistake.”

We propose a timetable for dealing with claims:

Recommendation 86: All claims should be paid within one week, with interim payments if there is any delay. Benefit appeals should be decided within one week. Crisis loan decisions should be made the same day, including a decision on reviews. There should be a staff member available to make immediate decisions on urgent matters (DWP, 2).

Suspended benefits

We have experienced occasions when benefits were suspended for reasons that we thought to be unreasonable. For example:

“People can be kept waiting for half an hour after their appointment time, but if they are five minutes late DWP can suspend payments for not turning up.”

“They’re too quick to suspend people’s benefits. I had benefit suspended for three weeks because the office wrongly entered me as a “Mrs” and then recorded it as a change of circumstances.”

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Even genuine changes in circumstances can lead to excessive delays:

“After I told them we were living together it took 12 weeks to sort out the new benefit and Housing Benefit. Our only income was Child Benefit.”

We asked John Dumelow:

“How can people be reassured about returning to work if DWP can’t sort their claim out, especially when there’s a change of circumstances?”

He replied:

“Point taken, it’s one reason why we want to simplify the system.”

Recommendation 87: Benefit payments should not be suspended for minor infringements, accidental errors on the form or changes of circumstances that have not been checked (DWP, 1).

Appeals and complaints

It is often difficult to understand why certain decisions have been made and whether they are mistaken, in part because of the complexity of the system. This makes it difficult to appeal against such decisions.

Recommendation 88: Information on how to make a complaint should be widely accessible. When a claim is disputed, free independent advice should be available to claimants (DWP, 2).

COMPLEXITY

There is general agreement that many of the problems with the benefits system spring from its excessive complexity. As John Dumelow from DWP told us:

“The benefits system is too complex and the government is committed to making it simpler. There are 30 different benefits and many more combinations of benefits and additional premiums. Complexity creates uncertainty for recipients and makes it costly and difficult to administer, this makes customers fearful of moving into work and work doesn’t always appear to pay. They also fear that if they lose their job they won’t be able to go back onto benefit at the same rate. It also makes benefits difficult for staff to assess and customers to understand.”

Since our meeting on benefits, the government has issued a consultation paper setting out proposals to simplify the system and make sure people are better off in work. We have not been able to consider these proposals, but support the principles, as long as benefit levels are not cut.

TRAINING, WORK OPPORTUNITIES AND INCENTIVES

The great majority of homeless people want to work. The key to success is suitable training, if necessary, followed by access to jobs which are suited to people’s aptitudes. In our experience,

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Jobcentre Plus does not always deliver these. For example, people have been sent on a computer course when they want to get into the building trade. We asked both our witnesses about people being required to attend unsuitable courses. John Dumelow replied:

“Advisers will refer claimants to provision that they expect will improve their prospects for moving into work. Contractors shouldn’t ask customers to do unhelpful courses or impose unreasonable conditions on them.”

Michael Fothergill said:

“Jobcentre Plus have targets to put people through New Deal programmes, and people are often referred to courses that are not suitable so as to hit the targets. If this happens, I would suggest that people request to see a senior official, to negotiate a different course. This may well be different when the new Work Programme comes in next summer.” [see below]

Recommendation 89: Each individual should have a training programme designed for their personal needs (DWP, 2).

We have seen that the complexity of the benefits system makes it very difficult for people to calculate whether they would be better off in work. The other major disincentive is that means tested benefits are withdrawn as people’s income from work increases. This can mean that for every extra pound they earn they can lose more than 90p.

A Crisis survey found that 94 per cent of housing advisors said that claimants expressed concerns about what will happen to their Housing Benefit

if they move into work, because of uncertainty over what their benefit would be, especially if they work fluctuating hours and their benefit is recalculated frequently (Crisis 2010).

John Dumelow identified a range of other factors which can act as barriers to work for homeless people:

- health issues, including poor mental health
- drug / alcohol misuse
- offending backgrounds; causing employers to discriminate against them
- debt
- relationship breakdowns
- domestic violence and domestic abuse
- lack of employable skills and work records
- negative perceptions by some employers (irrespective of the above) making it difficult for people to make a ‘fresh start’.

The government plans to replace most of the employment programmes with an integrated Work Programme so as to simplify the process. It will:

- no longer depend on which type of benefit is being claimed
- allow service providers to keep some of the benefit saved by people entering employment
- deal with the problem of providers “cherry picking” by concentrating on the easiest cases

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- pay providers more for the hardest to help
- not try to control how providers work, instead payment will be linked to successful outcomes.

The ultimate aim of the system will be to get people into work.

We agree with the government's aim that people should always be better off in work and that people who may initially only be capable of part time work should be able to do it without losing income.

Recommendation 90: People should be able to earn up to £60 a week (income disregard) before losing benefit (DWP, 2).

We welcome the government's plan to pay more to contractors for helping priority groups such as homeless people.

One Commissioner pointed out another way in which he had been disadvantaged because he had been in work:

"I was on Incapacity Benefit. Because I'd been working and paid contributions I got a slightly higher benefit but lost entitlement to other benefits, such as community care grants, social fund loans, free prescriptions, I got less Housing Benefit and I was worse off compared to people who had not been working."

Recommendation 91: People on contribution-based benefits should be able to access other benefits available to those who have not worked, such as the social fund and travel costs, so that they are not worse off than people who have not worked (DWP, 2).

Some of us have had experience of being referred to unsuitable jobs, for example driving jobs which preclude people on certain types of medication. We asked John Dumelow:

"How can DWP identify an individual's strengths and weaknesses to make sure a job is suitable to them and sustainable?"

He assured us:

"It's important to do this as there is no point in referring people to unsuitable jobs. It's not right for the customer and not right for the employer".

An important element in ensuring people take up suitable work is that contractors who place people into a job should only be paid where that employment is sustainable.

We welcome the government's reassessment of the length of time that is regarded as sustainable employment when fees are paid to contractors for finding employment for DWP customers. We agree that a year in employment would be a suitable target.

In view of the extra barriers they face, we also asked if homeless people would be offered any extra support by Jobcentre Plus. John Dumelow told us that homeless people are a priority group and will get extra support including advisory services and at the moment they go on New Deal from day one of their claim for Jobseekers Allowance.

For people who have been homeless and unemployed for a long time, we have also found that voluntary work can be a helpful first step, or even a long term option for people who are not fit enough for paid work. Homelessness

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agencies are increasingly interested in involving service users in voluntary work and we believe they should be encouraged to do so.

We recommended in Chapter 7, Self help that Jobcentres should help people to find voluntary work where this is the best immediate option for them and service user volunteers should get reasonable financial incentives without affecting their benefits.

A final problem we have encountered is that DWP assessments have not always accurately diagnosed health problems which have been certified by our own doctors.

Recommendation 92: Where a DWP assessment and the claimant's doctor disagree on a diagnosis there should be an adjudication by a third independent doctor (DWP, 2).

After our meeting the government announced that there would be a 10 per cent cut in Housing Benefit for people who have spent one year on JSA. We believe that this will have a severe impact on vulnerable people who are unable to find work. For example, many homeless people have had criminal records as a result of previous addictive behaviour and find it very difficult to be considered by prospective employers.

One Commissioner explained his position:

"I've been out of work for 3 years. I've been looking for work, going to the Jobcentre every week. I've got a criminal record. When you go to a job interview you have to tell them, otherwise it backfires on you.... If I don't tell them, they'll find out anyway and sack me. Then I'd be in a worse position trying to get work after being sacked.... So

you tell them and you don't hear from them again.

If I don't get a job within a year and they cut my benefit by 10 per cent it's very unfair. I'm trying, I'm on courses now, trying to get work.

Crime will go up. There'll be more people homeless."

Recommendation 93: Any cut in Housing Benefit after one year on JSA should not apply to people who are actively seeking a reasonable and appropriate job offer (DWP, 2).

CONCLUSION

We have found that the current benefits system has failed. Its complexity makes it difficult for staff to administer and for service users to understand. Too often mistakes are made adding to the poverty and stress of homelessness. We welcome the government's proposals for a simpler system which will mean people will not be penalised for taking work, including part time work.

The government has recognised that by helping people get into work it will save money. Michael Fothergill gave a graphic example from one of his own projects:

"It costs £8000 to get a job and a home for someone who is in temporary accommodation and on JSA. Our project which got 220 people into work and 180 into private rented accommodation saved the government £1.6m."

Those savings could be multiplied many times if such support was available to all homeless people.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We have found in our investigations that, since the early 1990s when government first became concerned at the extent of rough sleeping and set up a series of Rough Sleepers Initiatives, there have been great improvements in the quality of services and a resulting reduction in the number of people sleeping rough. However, provision is still patchy and best practice is not followed in all areas. We make a number of recommendations designed to make best practice the norm and to help achieve the goal of ending rough sleeping by 2012.

We understand the constraints on public expenditure, but there have been a succession of studies which show that preventing rough sleeping and ensuring that homeless people are housed saves on very expensive services such as health and the criminal justice system which otherwise have to deal with the casualties. Homeless Link have produced an excellent summary of these studies of cost effectiveness:

<http://www.homeless.org.uk/costs-homelessness>

If present programmes are not maintained and improved we believe that the number of people sleeping rough will begin to rise again.

Our recommendations are included in the body of each chapter and listed together here.

They are classified according to the target of the recommendation with the following abbreviations:

DCLG	Department of Communities and Local Government
DECC	Department of Energy and Climate Change
DfE	Department for Education
DH	Department of Health
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
HO	Home Office
HSP	Homelessness service provider
LA	Local authorities
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MoJ	Ministry of Justice

This report is being published at a time of severe constraints on public expenditure and we have therefore also classified the estimated cost of the recommendations as follows:

- 1: Likely to save expenditure immediately, or incur nil or low extra cost.
- 2: Requires some investment but likely to save on net expenditure, although some further cost benefit analysis may be necessary.
- 3: Would improve service quality at some extra cost and may therefore need to be deferred until resources are available.

We have also prioritised our recommendations using two criteria: which will have the most impact on improving services and which might be achievable in the short term. Priority recommendations are in **bold**.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

PREVENTION OF HOMELESSNESS

Recommendation 1: Councils and homelessness agencies should provide better publicity and information on what help is available, so that people can access services before they reach the point of homelessness (LA, HSP, 2).

Recommendation 2: There is a need for more education in schools about the causes of homelessness and preventive services (DfE, 2).

Recommendation 3: There is a need for more resources for the national housing advice helpline run by Shelter to ensure they can answer all calls. One possibility would be for Shelter to train people with experience of homelessness to take helpline calls (DCLG, LA, HSP, 2).

Recommendation 4: Councils should provide a comprehensive housing options service for, and record information on, all people who present as homeless or at risk of homelessness (LA, 2).

Recommendation 5: Comprehensive independent housing advice services should be available in all areas (LA, HSP, 2).

Recommendation 6: There is a need for specialist advice services for all people at risk of homelessness on leaving prisons, hospitals and the armed forces (MoJ, DH, MoD, DCLG, LA, HSP, 2).

Recommendation 7: There is a need for an advice service for private landlords who have

tenants in arrears or at risk of eviction, including information on Housing Benefit and other benefits the tenant might be entitled to (DCLG, HSP and landlords' organisations, 2).

Recommendation 8: There should be specialist teams in all local authority areas for people facing chronic exclusion, for example to deal with alcohol, drugs and mental health problems. These services should include peer support by service users (DH, LA, HSP, 2).

Recommendation 9: Court advice services such as that run by Shelter should be available to everyone: they need better publicity and should be easy to access. Services should be notified in advance of repossession hearings so they can advise people prior to the court date, rather than on the day. Advisers should be able to give more than ten minutes to people attending hearings (MoJ, HSP, 2).

Recommendation 10: GPs should have clear referral routes to services for common problems that lead to homelessness including drug and alcohol advice, relationship counselling and gambling addiction, as well as housing advice (DH, 1).

Recommendation 11: GP consortia should commission research into the health needs of homeless people in their area and involve homeless people in commissioning decisions, for example by consulting local Homeless People's Commissions (DH, HSP, 1).

Recommendation 12: Homeless people should be eligible for temporary accommodation, regardless of their immigration status (LA, HO, 2).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 13: Local authorities should provide advice and support for organisations working with vulnerable people who are not eligible for housing (LA, 2).

Recommendation 14: Local authorities should provide information to agencies working with homeless people on the availability of the Homelessness Prevention Fund and what it can be used for (LA, 1).

Recommendation 15: More investment should be put into prevention services which can demonstrate savings on the costs of people becoming homeless (LA, HSP, 2).

Recommendation 16: Supporting People funded services have been proved to make savings and should be protected from cuts. The impact of any proposed spending reductions should be assessed, including taking account of the additional costs of not providing services (LA, HSP, 2).

STREET OUTREACH

Recommendation 17: There should be a person with experience of rough sleeping on each street count team (LA, 1).

Recommendation 18: In addition to street counts there should be more accurate local recording of the number of rough sleepers over time, as in the CHAIN system in London (LA, HSP, 2).

Recommendation 19: There is a need for more specialist mental health support and training for outreach workers in recognising and dealing with mental health problems (DH, LA, HSP, 2).

Recommendation 20: It is often effective to identify the leader of a group of rough sleepers and convince them to move into accommodation, others then follow (LA, HSP, 1).

Recommendation 21: There could be a pilot scheme of giving cheap mobile phones to people sleeping rough with contact numbers for various services programmed into them. It would also make it much easier to keep in contact with people sleeping rough, saving time spent looking for them and encourage them return to services for a recharge (LA, HSP, 1).

Recommendation 22: There should be mobile outreach teams to cover areas where there are not enough rough sleepers for a full time service (DCLG, LA, HSP, 2).

Recommendation 23: There is a need for more 'wet centres' where people can drink away from the streets (LA, HSP, 2).

Recommendation 24: Drug users should be encouraged off the streets and into treatment by the provision of "shooting galleries" where people can use clean needles. This saves money on treatment costs for illnesses such as Hepatitis C and ensures needles are not left in public places (DH, LA, HSP, 2).

Recommendation 25: Funding should be transferred to personalised services for homeless people with flexibility on how such schemes work. Where people are offered services paid for by personal budgets, agencies should discuss the options openly with them and offer choices on how the money might be spent and work with people at their own pace (DCLG, LA, HSP, 1).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

Recommendation 26: All remaining nightshelters should be adapted where necessary into assessment centres for short stay emergency assessments before people move to suitable temporary accommodation (DCLG, LA, HSP, 2).

Recommendation 27: The standards established by Places of Change should be implemented in all new hostel programmes. New hostels should be small and cater separately for the full range of specialist needs and for people with low or no support needs. Larger hostels should be kept open until they are replaced by smaller units offering the equivalent number of bedspaces (DCLG, LA, HSP, 2).

Recommendation 28: There should be at least some beds in emergency hostels which allow immediate access, including 24 hour access, without the need to be referred by another agency and with extra emergency beds available in winter (LA, HSP, 1).

Recommendation 29: Homeless people should have access in all areas to temporary accommodation suitable to their needs (LA, HSP, 2).

Recommendation 30: Staff attitudes are very important. They can make clients feel valid, wanted and worthwhile. Hostel key workers should have opportunities to engage with residents on a personal level and socialise with them, for example by going out for a coffee or on day outings, when they don't discuss

problems but concentrate on positive activities and building relationships (LA, HSP, 1).

Recommendation 31: There should be accredited training for all homelessness support workers, including training in providing specialist support for physical and mental health, drug and alcohol needs (DCLG, LA, HSP, 2).

Recommendation 32: The signing up process should be less formal and more aimed at finding out what service users' aspirations are (LA, HSP, 1).

Recommendation 33: There should be a three-tier approach in hostels, recognising that people often arrive in a chaotic state, then stabilise, then need help to move on. Support should enable people to help themselves to progress through these stages. Support plans should include healthcare, reconnection with family and friends, budgeting, lifeskills training and education. Peer support should be built in, including use of peer mentors and 'buddies' to give practical support to clients. Service users should take the lead in decisions about their support. People should have a contract with the hostel to achieve mutually agreed goals and this should be reviewed regularly (LA, HSP, 1).

Recommendation 34: People should be encouraged to save perhaps £2 a week while in the hostel to give them some funds for when they move on (LA, HSP, 1).

Recommendation 35: All hostels should have access to specialist support agencies, including dual diagnosis workers (LA, HSP, 2).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 36: Hostel residents should be able to invite friends to visit them (LA, HSP, 1).

Recommendation 37: There could be open days in the hostel for local services and people from the local community to visit (LA, HSP, 1).

Recommendation 38: All hostels should provide a wide range of activities and training opportunities, with smaller hostels making use of community based services (LA, HSP, 1).

Recommendation 39: The aim should be for people to move out of hostels as soon as they are able to sustain independent housing, if necessary with floating support. This should normally be within six months, but people should be able to stay longer if they need to (LA, HSP, 1).

Recommendation 40: Hostel residents should be able to choose whether to be self catering or to pay a service charge for food. There should be cooking facilities and skills training in cooking (LA, HSP, 1).

Recommendation 41: Service charges should be related to the quality of services and facilities provided. Where these are poor the charges should be reduced or services improved (LA, HSP, 1).

Recommendation 42: There should be peer assessment and audits of hostels, involving service users throughout the process (LA, HSP, 2).

Recommendation 43: Homelessness strategies in all areas should consider the need for all of the alternatives to hostels. They may be particularly useful in areas where the number of rough sleepers is low and does not justify the provision of hostel (LA, HSP, 2).

RESETTLEMENT WORK

Recommendation 44: Support plans should start at least six weeks before people move into a tenancy (LA, HSP, 2).

Recommendation 45: Vulnerable people should have access to floating support before they move into private rented accommodation (LA, HSP, 2).

Recommendation 46: Before moving into a tenancy, service users should be helped to make a two year financial plan by trained keyworkers (LA, HSP, 2).

Recommendation 47: DWP and other agencies should not try to reclaim debts from newly resettled tenants until they can realistically make payments, as set out in their personal financial plan (DWP, LA, HSP, 2).

Recommendation 48: Utility companies should be obliged to charge the same amount to customers, regardless of the method of payment (DECC, 1).

Recommendation 49: Community Care Grants should be replaced by direct funding of resettlement grants to agencies which would supervise the spending of them by people who were being resettled. This would also save on the large administrative costs of individual grants (DWP, 1).

Recommendation 50: All Jobcentres should have a back-to-work support scheme with a comprehensive package of financial planning and a grant for back-to-work expenses in the first month for items such as clothing and travel (DWP, 2).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SETTLED HOUSING

Recommendation 51: The financing of council housing should be reformed so that councils can keep the proceeds of their rents and sales and re-invest them in housing, as proposed by the LGA (DCLG, 2).

Recommendation 52: There should be clearer information so that people can understand who fits the criteria for social housing (LA, 1).

Recommendation 53: Local authority allocation policies should ensure that they do not create or reinforce 'problem' estates. There should be a mix of social and private housing in new developments with access to social amenities, employment and training opportunities (LA, 1).

Recommendation 54: Local authorities should produce a summary of their housing strategies in plain English for discussion by the local community (LA, 1).

Recommendation 55: Where council housing is demolished it should be carried out with a sensitive, consultative approach, engaging the local community. Demolitions should be replaced by an equal number of bedspaces (LA, 2).

Recommendation 56: All private rented access schemes should run publicity and education programmes for landlords to persuade them to accept homeless people (LA, HSP, 2).

Recommendation 57: There should be mandatory minimum standards for landlords and private rented properties let through access schemes, which should be vetted by local authorities. Local authorities should set

up a register of landlords with a rating system and awards for good practice. Information on landlords letting substandard properties, including those who let properties as a cover for illegal activities such as drug dealing, should be shared by local authorities and other agencies (LA, HSP, 2).

Recommendation 58: Landlords with court orders against them and other landlords letting substandard properties should not be able to receive Housing Benefit. They should be able to apply for re-registration if they improved their standards (DCLG, LA, HSP, 1).

Recommendation 59: Private rented access schemes should ensure rent deposits are available the day they are approved (LA, HSP, 1).

Recommendation 60: The government should ensure that any cuts in Housing Benefit do not lead to an increased risk of people becoming homeless (DWP, 2).

Recommendation 61: Private rented schemes should be more flexible to allow people to top up the rent from their own resources (DWP, LA, 1).

Recommendation 62: The proposal to increase the single room rate age limit to 35 should be dropped (DWP, 2).

Recommendation 63: There should be more flexibility in the Local Housing Allowance rules over sharing for young people, to give them more choice (DWP, 3).

Recommendation 64: Tenants placed in shared accommodation by access schemes should have a choice of who they share with (LA, HSP, 1).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 65: Local authorities should allow people to keep their place on the housing register if they move out of temporary accommodation into a private rented tenancy (LA, 1).

Recommendation 66: There should be more flexibility over local connection rules in private rented access schemes (LA, 2).

Recommendation 67: Private tenants should be able to move by transferring their deposit to a new property (LA, 2).

Recommendation 68: There should be drop-in centres offering tenancy support for private rented tenants who are not receiving a floating support service (LA, HSP, 2).

Recommendation 69: There should be training for landlords who are willing to support tenants in the private rented sector (LA, HSP, 2).

SELF-HELP

Recommendation 70: Funders and commissioners should encourage client involvement in homelessness organisations. Clients should be offered training in self help and supported to run activities themselves to build their self confidence. They should have more control of hostel rules and more involvement in upkeep, so as to develop a sense of responsibility and achievement. Clients should be enabled to participate in staff recruitment and staff training (LA, HSP, 1).

Recommendation 71: Service users should be encouraged to share information with peers in group sessions to signpost them to other services and to help empower people to move on (LA, HSP, 1).

Recommendation 72: Homelessness organisations should employ a percentage of ex-service users. To achieve this they should help clients to gain qualifications and provide them with a profile of achievements including training on both lifeskills and employable skills (LA, HSP, 1).

Recommendation 73: Jobcentres should help people to find voluntary work where this is the best immediate option for them. Service user volunteers should get reasonable financial incentives without affecting their benefits (DWP, LA, HSP, 2).

Recommendation 74: There is scope for developing more social enterprise self-help models like SEA in Nottingham and Cambridge Link-up (LA, HSP, 2).

Recommendation 75: Local authorities should resource independent service user groups, based on the Homeless People's Commission model and facilitated by a local homelessness organisation, to inform local policy. There should be service user consultation in the formulation of all new government policies, through local and national independent bodies on the model of the Homeless People's Commission (All government departments, LA, HSP, 1).

Recommendation 76: National and local government and service providers should recognise that self-help groups are integral to improving services, making them more cost effective and enhancing people's quality of life (DCLG, LA, HSP, 1).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 77: Self-help groups should work locally in partnership with each other. There should be a homelessness self-help liaison group in every region to co-ordinate services and disseminate good practice. Central and local government representatives should be invited to these regional service user groups (HSP, 2).

Recommendation 78: It would be useful to have a national service user groups' conference, where groups could share good practice (HSP, 2).

Recommendation 79: There should be a national website to share good practice on self-help, possibly based on the website of an existing homelessness agency (HSP, 2).

Recommendation 80: Service user groups should be informed by providers immediately of any changes to policies or procedures resulting from budget cuts (HSP, 1).

WELFARE BENEFITS

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CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Recommendation 90: People should be able to earn up to £60 a week (income disregard) before losing benefit (DWP, 2).

Recommendation 91: People on contribution-based benefits should be able to access other benefits available to those who have not worked, such as the social fund and travel costs, so that they are not worse off than people who have not worked (DWP, 2).

Recommendation 92: Where a DWP assessment and the claimant's doctor disagree on a diagnosis there should be an adjudication by a third independent doctor (DWP, 2).

Recommendation 93: Any cut in Housing Benefit after one year on JSA should not apply to people who are actively seeking a reasonable and appropriate job offer (DWP, 2).

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APPENDIX I

DWP RESPONSES TO THE DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS ON WELFARE BENEFITS

DWP made the following response to our recommendations:

Service standards and staffing

The sharing of good practice is encouraged within DWP, and the benefit delivery agencies of Jobcentre Plus (JCP) and Pensions, Disability and Carers Service (PDCS). DWP is looking at key processes and identifying where procedures could be sped up and improved, using evidence and ideas from staff that use the processes on a daily basis.

The DWP Customer Charter clearly sets out the customer service that individuals can expect to see in their contact with any part of DWP. The Charter is based on what DWP customers told us was important to them in the service they receive from us. The principles at the core of the Charter are; Right Treatment, Right Result, On Time, Easy Access.

The Charter enables everyone to better understand how their individual efforts contribute to the quality and effectiveness of the service our customers receive, and is used as a set of guiding principles to allow the Department to look at changes in delivery, policies and behaviours to ensure we keep the needs of our customers at the heart of all we do.

DWP has signed up to a code of good practise consultation, and does consider how best to consult with a wide range of service users and customer representative groups on all changes to delivery, not just legislative ones. Copies of public consultations can be found on the DWP website. The Department also regularly engages with national tier representatives from key customer representative groups to discuss changes in service delivery and policy.

All DWP staff working in either JCP or PDCS receives Learning and Development applicable to their roles, but all receive standard training in customer services.

Staff are given training, and also have guidance available on all benefits, to help them identify where a customer may be entitled to any other benefit and to help them to advice customers where applicable

Procedures

DWP does aim to make timely decisions for all customers, but where more urgent circumstance arises, staff do endeavour to help.

In JCP, if an urgent decision is required on a benefit claim, then staff will always try to make that decision if they have all of the necessary information required to make that decision.

JCP has national targets in which to process all new claims to benefits

Currently, these targets (called actual average clearance targets or AACT) are as follows;

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- a. ESA – new claims to be processed in 14 working days
- b. Income Support – new claims to be processed in 9 working days
- c. Jobseekers Allowance – new claims to be processed in 11 working days

Our performance against these targets is measured, and made available to the public on a quarterly basis on the DWP Adviser site. Interim payments are considered by staff where applicable, or where they are requested by customers. JCP does aim to give decisions on crisis loans within the same call if not the same day, in recognition of the urgent nature of these payments for customers

DWP makes information on services and benefits available in hard copy at local JCP offices and libraries, as well as welfare rights offices. Further information about benefits can be found on Direct Gov, as well as the DWP Advisor site. We have a wide range of leaflets, giving information on what to do if you think a decision is wrong, or if you wish to complain about the service you received from DWP. Where customers do wish to appeal or complain, our leaflets do remind them that they can seek the help of a local welfare rights team, Citizens Advice Bureau or other locally available free advice.

APPENDIX 2

WITNESSES

Cambridge City Council: Diane Docherty, Homelessness Services Development Manager

Crisis SmartMove: David Hewitt, Private Renting and Housing Development Manager

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP): John Dumelow

Framework Housing Association: Peter Radage, Service Director

Local Government Association (LGA): Ruth Lucas

Salvation Army : Maff Potts, Head of Homelessness Services

Services for Empowerment and Advocacy (SEA): Charlotte Hueso, Zoe Bendelow and Steve Moss

Shelter: Carolyn Howell, Co-ordinator, National Homeless Advice Service,

Thames Reach: Jeremy Swain, Chief Executive,.

University of Sheffield: Professor Tony Warnes,

WILLOW (Welfare Influencing and Lobbying: Learning Opportunities and Work) based at Crisis: Michael Fothergill, Project Manager

In addition we held a meeting with Helen Keats, Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to discuss our draft recommendations.

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APPENDIX 3

HOMELESS PEOPLE'S COMMISSION MEMBERS

Kevin Beard

The years that Kevin spent homeless never seemed to end to him, always feeling that homelessness was all that there was for him. It seemed that people were only using him for their own benefit and he was doing things that he was not proud of, but it was survival sometimes from one hour to the next. The image and stigma of being dirty and worthless, not being cared about and to the point of eating out of bins and sleeping in places that would hopefully keep him dry and get him through to the next day, made him feel most of the time that he didn't want to see the next day.

Today Kevin has his own flat and a part-time job as a peer support worker at NHS Nottingham. Since receiving support he feels respected and trusted with a positive future but still finds things hard at times having to learn and trust things about his new life. But, he believes, there is hope with appropriate support and with determination and hard work, you can achieve your goals.

Jimmy Carlson

Most of Jimmy's early homeless years were spent going up and down the country reporting to the nearest police station in search of a referral to a reception centre (Spike). You were given a good meal, a place to sleep and sent on

your way the next morning. In Leeds he spent his rough sleeping periods in derelict houses with others in the same situation. He did move into a 300 bed mixed hostel in Leeds before he moved down to London, once again rough sleeping mainly along the embankment with a cardboard box and blankets. Then a street drinker, Jimmy moved into various hostels, the last being a second stage hostel for five and a half years. A year after being resettled in his current flat, Jimmy went into recovery.

The last eighteen years has seen Jimmy help others in his former situation. Jimmy is an established Client Involvement Trainer for Groundswell. He is the founder of the Haven Club which is a social evening for recovering alcoholics and recently received an award from the Mayor of Islington for his community peer work. Most importantly Jimmy has accepted that he is no longer homeless.

Martin Dick

Martin has slept rough many times, sofa surfed when possible. He also slept rough in a skip full of cardboard and was nearly fatally injured when it was collected at 6.30 one morning. All of which resulted in ill-health and saw him begging money to feed his drug habit. When he was housed through housing associations he had to abandon homes because of debt which accumulated because of his habit.

Three years ago he totally turned his life around with the help of a good support worker and has cleared £700 of debt. He is in move-on accommodation awaiting an offer of a permanent home and is very active in

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client involvement work for Stonham Housing Association who have asked him to speak about homelessness in front of 200 people at the House of Commons.

James Earley

James spent months sleeping in the Arndale centre car park in Manchester. To start with the security people would move him on, but as they got to know him and they could see he was cleaning up after himself they let him sleep there so as long as their boss didn't see him.

James is now doing voluntary work for the Manchester Service User Network which is how he got to know about the Commission and as James says "hopefully it's onwards and upwards from here".

Shaun Fielding

Shaun was recruited to the Commission through Manchester's Service User Network (SUN). He has been on and off the streets for 24 hard years and since the age of 16, been in and out of hostels all over the country. He is in a hostel at present.

He achieved an NVQ in cooking at a day centre. He regularly uses these skills, on a volunteering basis, to cook for homeless people in day centres in Manchester.

Drew Foster

Drew had his own place until he became unemployed, he became depressed and eventually had a breakdown. Drew began drinking heavily to the point where he became a chronic alcoholic. His chaotic lifestyle meant he was attracting the wrong sort of 'mates'. He was

living in a shared house which gradually became a drink and drugs den. Drew would walk into the house and people were openly injecting. He decided it was safer on the streets.

Drew was put into a detox ward and then relapsed when he was back out on the streets. He then went into a residential detox centre and has now been clean for 16 months. He has had to change his life and keep away from drinkers and has changed one major bad habit for lots of good ones. Drew is currently looking for work and occupies his time usefully. He has been on a writing course and is a published poet. He is into drama, both acting and playwriting and is also starting to learn about photography. On the fitness front, Drew trains three times a week, has won four non-contact boxing awards, practises mixed martial arts and has a Community Sports Leadership Award.

Graham Harrison

Graham has had four experiences of rough sleeping, in cars and just about anywhere. He was homeless for 3 years after losing his home following a relationship breakdown. His last stay in a hostel was a direct access hostel for 18 months followed by a second stage hostel for seven months during which time he met his girlfriend and moved in with her.

Graham is a member of Two Saint's Projects Assessment Team which assesses all support services within the hostel environment to ensure a good standard throughout the organisation's projects. Graham started volunteering within Two Saints after he had been through their direct access and second stage projects in Fareham.

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He now volunteers across Hampshire, West Berkshire and Oxfordshire. Graham joined the Homeless Link National Advisory Council in 2010 as a service user representative and is also currently Chairman of the Project Assessment Team, both voluntary positions.

John Hyncica

John slept rough in Bristol with about 15 others on an unused boat. All had a hardcore drug using lifestyle which included begging and robbing to feed his habit. He went to prison and got clean, then moved back to Newcastle and went back onto drugs.

He finally went into rehab which was the start of turning his life around. Following rehab John worked voluntarily for Fareshare. He then went onto becoming a volunteer in a day centre where he was able to access training courses. He achieved an NVQ3 in Health and Social Care which led to full time paid work as an Outreach Worker. He has since gained an NVQ3 in Social Housing, now has his own tenancy through Newcastle Cyrenians with all furniture paid for by himself and money in the bank!

Emma Hyde

After a bitter divorce and being made redundant, Emma slowly but surely became an alcoholic. This led to her losing her tenancy, resulting in rough sleeping on the streets of London and Cambridge.

Emma engaged with a Street Outreach team and after a while was placed into a homeless hostel in Cambridge. While in the hostel Emma successfully completed an alcohol detox and

during her sobriety became Chair of Cambridge Link Up, a homeless-led community group which organises projects, awards small grants and represents the views of homeless people to local policy makers.

Darren Jones

When Darren was 22 he got into debt through drugs in his home town of Newcastle and had to move to the other side of the city where he slept rough for over three months. He managed to get housed by a housing association in Middlesbrough, but through drugs ended up homeless again.

Darren managed to get rehoused with Stonham Housing Association and hasn't looked back since. He is the Client Representative for Yorkshire, Chair of the Stonham Client Involvement Group and sits on Stonham's National Steering Group. He has just completed work for the Tenants Standards Authority (TSA) on a one year pilot looking at Tenant Standards. He is now in move-on accommodation and waiting for an offer from his local council in Leeds.

Rob Keere

Previous to moving into his present accommodation, Rob had been in and out of hostels for the last seven years and on two separate occasions slept on the streets of Gosport.

He made contact with Two Saints Housing Association and through them moved into a second stage hostel. He now lives in shared accommodation. While with Two Saints Rob has been involved with the Project Assessment Team as

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a hostel inspector. He is now looking for work and is trying to knuckle down and get on with his life.

Andy Martin

After a relationship breakdown and breaking both legs in a serious accident, Andy found himself sleeping on the streets. He eventually ended up in Jimmy's Nightshelter in Cambridge and after a period was moved into a hostel.

Andy became involved in Cambridge Link Up and started a project enabling the waste scrubland at the back of the hostel to be turned into a memorial garden for homeless people. He is currently Treasurer of Cambridge Link-Up and continues to help provide exciting and helpful projects for homeless people.

Naima Isgow Sheikh

Naima's experience of homelessness lasted about four years after her application for asylum was turned down. It was a terrible time and gave her depression and suicidal thoughts. Apart from sleeping out some nights, she stayed with people who expected her to work for them in exchange for a bed.

She became involved in Southall Black Sisters, doing voluntary work for the Somali Community Project. She went to college to learn English and became a teacher with the project. With the help of a good solicitor, she successfully appealed against the Home Office decision and was granted leave to remain. She is now finally settled and is studying at University to become an active and contributing member of the community.

Gloria Temple

Because she had no idea about claiming Housing Benefit, Gloria found herself without a roof over her head. She became less astute about her choices and spent time sleeping in cars, underground car parks, station waiting rooms and sofa surfing.

Gloria is now housed by Julian House Housing Association and feels she has achieved acceptance in society. She is proud of her work with MIND and has recently won an art design competition in aid of the Drugs and Homeless Initiative and is proud of bringing her art skills to a competent level.

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APPENDIX 4

ADVISORY GROUP MEMBERS

Chair: Lord Richard Best

Maureen Crane, homelessness researcher, Sheffield University

Simon Cribbens, GLA

Keith Davies, Head of Homelessness, Manchester City Council

Alice Evans, Homeless Link (1st meeting)

Colin Glover, Connection at St Martins

Helen Keats, DCLG

Helen Mathie, Homeless Link

Martin Murphy, former service user and House at St Barnabas

Pragna Patel, Director, Southall Black Sisters

Rebecca Pritchard, DCLG (1st meeting)

Claire Ritchie, Lambeth council, commissioning Manager for Street Population Services

Steve Scott, former service user, volunteer with Groundswell member of the Groundswell Board of Trustees

Martin Wheatley, LGA, Programme Director, Environment

APPENDIX 5

PROJECT TEAM

Groundswell:

Athol Halle, Project Manager

Steve Scott, Project Assistant (from 5/10) and Commissioners' biographies (Appendix 3)

Kiran Nihalani, Project Assistant (1/10 -5/10)

Simone Hellenen, Lead Facilitator

Josie Mavromatis, Peer Facilitator

Milly McNally, Peer Facilitator

Steve Bethell, Peer Facilitator

Research and Information Services

Susan Brown, meeting notes, report drafting, evaluation interviews with witnesses and Commissioners

Geoffrey Randall, research briefing papers, witness briefing, meeting notes, report drafting

SPEAKS

Dr Pummi Mattu Specialist adviser

Dr Tom Wakeford, Specialist adviser

APPENDIX 6

HOW THE HOMELESS PEOPLE'S COMMISSION WAS ORGANISED

This is a brief overview of how the Commission was organised. We will be producing a good practice guide which sets out in more detail the lessons we learned from the process.

Terms of reference

Definitions of homelessness cover a very wide range of circumstances and policy responses. It was decided to focus on people who have slept rough. This group of homeless people are most likely to experience multiple exclusion, with high levels of physical and mental health problems and substance misuse.

Advisory Group

We set up an advisory group to represent the full spectrum of stakeholders, so as to ensure that the process was managed in a balanced and impartial manner. It included the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG), Homeless Link (the umbrella body for voluntary agencies), local authority representatives, service providers, researchers and homeless people. Appendix 4 lists the membership of the group. They advised on topics to be covered, the draft recommendations and report and on future work of such Commissions.

Recruiting the Commissioners

Groundswell recruited 18 Commissioners through a range of agencies, covering different client groups from all nine English regions. It could not be representative of all homeless people, or cover all BME communities, but did aim to balance the diversity of homeless people, by age, gender and ethnicity, bearing in mind the overall profile of the rough sleeping population. Appendix 3 gives details of the individual Commissioners. All had past experience of rough sleeping, with many having done so for extended periods.

Potential recruits were visited and interviewed by peer workers who themselves had experience of sleeping rough.

Commissioners were paid for their time and expenses, while ensuring that benefits were not affected.

Training and support

Commissioners were consulted on their training needs and a programme provided which covered group work, decision making, being heard and evaluation techniques.

'Family Groups' were set up whereby the same small groups of Commissioners met at the end of each of the days of the Commission to reflect on both the content and the process. Views were fed back through facilitators to enable continual adjustments to better meet the needs of the Commissioners in subsequent sessions.

Commissioners were offered continuing support throughout the project by their host agencies and by Groundswell.

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Identifying topics

Commissioners were provided with materials to help them hold group discussions in their host agencies on what topics should be covered. Commissioners were also provided with a general briefing paper on policies and services for rough sleepers. The Advisory Group and DCLG was also consulted on which topics should be a priority.

On the basis of these consultations, Commissioners decided on the list of topics which are covered in this report. In the time available it was not possible to cover all issues and there are some notable gaps, for example the growing problem of rough sleepers from Eastern European countries who have no right to public funded services.

Expert witnesses

The project team suggested expert witnesses to cover the topics which had been identified, with the aim of gaining a wide range of views from central and local government, service providers and policy researchers. Details of the witnesses are in Appendix 2.

Commission meetings

Five two-day residential meetings were held in Birmingham, London (twice), Cambridge and Nottingham.

After the initial training, separate days were devoted to each topic with short briefing papers provided in advance. The witnesses each gave a fifteen minute presentation. Commissioners then split into small groups to discuss the evidence with which they had been presented and to

formulate questions for the witness. Each group was facilitated by a Groundswell staff member or trained peer facilitator. There followed a half hour question and answer session. The groups then reconvened to formulate recommendations based on the evidence they had heard and their own knowledge and experiences.

Reports

Notes and / or recordings were made of all sessions. These were drafted into detailed minutes for discussion at the following meeting.

A major success of the Commission was the large amount of material it generated, including 128 separate recommendations, which were later condensed into the 93 which appear in this report, by combining those which overlapped.

This material was drawn together into a draft report by Research and Information Services, which was then discussed by the Commission and priorities identified.

Further information

There will be more detail in the Good Practice Guide which we are producing, but if you have any questions you can contact:

Recruitment of Commissioners, training, support and facilitating discussions: Simone Hellenen, Groundswell: Simone@groundswell.org.uk Tel: 020 7976 0111

Policy briefing papers, witnesses, notes of meetings, report drafting and policy recommendations: Geoffrey Randall, Research and Information Services: Geoffrey@researchservices.org.uk Tel: 01379 870376

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APPENDIX 7

THE FUTURE

We believe the Homeless People's Commission has proved to be a successful model for previously excluded people to participate actively in discussions on public policies and services and that it should be continued and indeed extended to local Commissions and to other policy areas. These developments would reflect the government's policies on localism.

At the time of writing this report we are working on proposals to achieve these aims, but are acutely aware of the difficulties of funding new initiatives in the current financial climate. However, we believe the recommendations from the Homeless People's Commission show that more efficient and effective investment of funds in public services will save money at the same time as improving services.

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