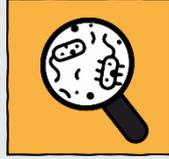
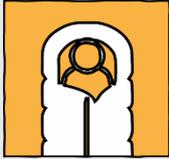




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Monitoring the Impact of COVID-19

Fortnightly Homelessness Briefing 4:

Focus on Next Steps

Introduction

Groundswell are delivering research to explore the impact of COVID-19 on people experiencing homelessness. The research aims to ensure the voices of people who are homeless are heard and are utilised to inform the ongoing response to COVID-19 both locally and nationally.

This is the fourth in a series of briefings that outlines what we are hearing through our day-to-day work, conversations with our [#HealthNow](#) network, telephone interviews with people experiencing homelessness and from logging any concerns we hear from our network of people with experience of homelessness. Further details of the research approach can be found here: [‘Monitoring the impact of COVID-19 for people experiencing homelessness’](#).

This is our first themed briefing which draws upon insight we have gathered throughout the project specifically in relation to transition and next steps. This briefing utilises the stories we have heard over the last two months to illustrate people experiencing homelessness’ experiences, fears and hopes following the COVID-19 pandemic. People’s experiences of the pandemic and the responses to it must be central to decision-making around transition and next steps for the homeless population post-COVID-19.

Transition and Next Steps

On the 24th May, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) announced [plans](#) to produce 6,000 new supported homes to end rough sleeping. This was backed by £433 million of government funding with 3,300 homes to be made available in next 12 months. MHCLG also stated they are increasing revenue support of the total programme by 37%, pledged a further £6 million for frontline homeless charities, £700,000 for councils to support care leavers at risk of homelessness, and recognised the importance of specialist wrap around support for these housing units. Over the weekend, Luke Hall MP, Minister for Rough Sleeping and Housing wrote to local authorities regarding next steps in the rough sleeping response and requesting move on plans. The letter emphasised a health-led, integrated approach and the continuation of support such as mental health and substance misuse once people have moved from the emergency accommodation.

These announcements have been welcomed, however, there are key concerns as highlighted in an [open letter](#) signed by national and local charities. Firstly, a large part of this announcement was already committed to before the COVID-19 outbreak, including the pledge for 6,000 new homes. Furthermore, the majority of the funding was announced as part of the four-year rough sleeping initiative with £160 million being accelerated forwards. Importantly, the letter highlights the ambiguity concerning the end of the ‘everybody in’ scheme, despite the government denying that funding has been ceased. The Government has stated that 90 percent of people have been placed in emergency accommodation, however, if hotel contracts are not being extended then this gives local



authorities little time to secure long term move on plans for people staying in the hotels.

There is further uncertainty about who will be helped by the Government as the announcement only focused on supporting people who have already been accommodated in emergency provision. There are still people who are rough sleeping and there are increasing concerns of a surge in homelessness with the impending recession and ending of eviction freezes. Despite numerous calls on the Government to address the lack of support for people with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), the announcement also failed to outline how those people with NRPF would be supported.

Several organisations, charities and local authorities are now focusing on next steps and move on plans. Key recommendations being outlined include personalised [housing plans](#), wrap around support, [multi-agency collaboration](#), and support for people with NRPF. Needs assessments have started taking place in some areas to inform move on plans and to help understand the staffing structure needed. Many organisations have stated the need for long-term funded support to ensure people receive housing and specialised wrap around support with the Housing, Communities and Local Government committee outlining at least a 100 million pounds a year would be needed.

Key policy responses

2 May - Government announce specialist taskforce led by Dame Louise Casey created to lead the next phase of the Government's support for people who rough sleep during the pandemic.

- UK GOV Communities Secretary announces £76 million extra funding to support survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence and vulnerable children and their families and victims of modern slavery ensuring they are automatically considered as priority by their council for housing.

11 May - Cabinet Office release 'Our plan to rebuild: The UK Government's COVID-19 recovery strategy'.

24 May - MHCLG announce plans to produce 6,000 new supported homes backed by £433 million of government funding with 3,300 homes to be made available in next 12 months. Increasing the revenue support of the total programme by 37% to make sure that people who are rough sleeping are supported.

- Department for Education will be providing more than £700,000 for councils to support care leavers at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping.

28 May - Welsh Government pledges £20m to help 800 homeless people move on to longer-term homes.

1 June - Schools start to reopen and groups up to 6 people can meet up as long as they are adhering to social distancing rules.

3 April – Crisis writes an open letter to the Prime Minister on next steps needed to protect people experiencing homelessness during COVID-19.

5 May - Public Health England launch review into factors impacting health outcomes from COVID-19 with a focus to look vulnerable groups such as people experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping to understand how the virus affects their health.

6 May - Scottish Government announce an extension to the Unsuited Accommodation Order ensuring anyone facing homelessness will spend no longer than a week in unsuitable accommodation.

14 May - The COVID-19 Homelessness Response Fund containing MHCLG's £6 million funding opens for frontline organisations.

27 May - Department of Health and Social Care launch the NHS track and trace system.

29 May – NHS release updated Standard Operations Procedure for general practice including the role in supporting people who are homeless.

- Minister for rough sleeping and housing writes to Local Authorities on next steps in the rough sleeping response and requests initial move on plans.



Data Collection so far

We began gathering insight rapidly from the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and have gradually expanded our data collection methods to extend our reach over the last two months. From the offset of the project (23 March) until the preparation of this briefing (23 May) we have received 275 daily diaries and reflective logs which continue to illustrate key issues highlighted by the Groundswell team and conversations with stakeholders from across the UK.

We have also carried out 34 telephone interviews with people experiencing homelessness. We have spoken to people from across the UK, including Newcastle, Birmingham and London. People have been in a range of accommodation situations, with people living in temporary accommodation, hostels and emergency hotels, and others currently sofa-surfing or living in their own housing association accommodation. Many of the people we have spoken to have significant existing health needs but only a small number of people we spoke to reported to have had COVID-19 symptoms.

What are we hearing?

A key theme in our last briefing was people's varied experiences of living in emergency and temporary accommodation during the outbreak. This briefing draws upon people's experiences throughout the COVID-19 pandemic but focuses on how such experiences can be utilised to inform planning around transition and next-steps.

Concerns for the future

"[I'm] worried that the world will never be the same"

The future impact of the COVID-19 virus has been a key concern for most of those we have heard from. The ambiguity over how long current lock-down measures stay imposed, the easing of measures and its impact have meant people are facing increased anxiety over what the short-term and long-term future holds for them.

A common concern among participants was the easing of measures and the potential for this to cause a 'second wave' of the COVID-19 virus. This was especially a worry for those with existing long-term conditions.

"[I'm] concerned about allowing everyone out immediately... no-one knows who has it. People are getting angry and [I'm] scared for the children going back to school of a 2nd wave"

People also noted their worries about the broader economic impact of the pandemic and how this will impact those already struggling to meet their needs.

"[I...] wonder what the world will be like when this is over. The economic impact is going to mean that poor people will be struggling more"

Narratives from people during the pandemic have often been characterised by increased need, as existing support and services adapt or cease, and the struggle people experience to [meet their basic food, accommodation and wellbeing requirements](#). This is likely to continue following the easing of lock-down and post-COVID-19 and continue to affect those experiencing homelessness. It is acknowledged that the impact of COVID-19 will mean more people experiencing poverty and potentially leading to an increase of people experiencing homelessness. This means a tighter stretch on already struggling support services.



The significant impact of COVID-19 on people's mental and emotional wellbeing has been evident throughout the project. People discussed how the pandemic has led to a worsening in mental health conditions which will consequently place increased demand on already-stretched services and support.

"[I'm] scared that so many people have died and [I] can't wait for a vaccination. [I] predict self-harm and mental health problems will rise"

Several people have described changes to the way care and treatment was delivered for them. This included changes to routine appointments, the way recovery and medication was managed and in some cases cancellations to operations and treatment. Therefore, it can be assumed that people's physical health has also been impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak, especially for people experiencing homelessness who often face a multitude of physical health conditions.

The exacerbation of both mental and physical health conditions due to COVID-19 and the response to the pandemic means future planning must consider how to best support people to engage with health care as a priority. Furthermore, it is important to consider that people experiencing homelessness are not immune to the devastating impacts COVID-19 may have had on their friends, families and social connections. Therefore, support to cope with loss and the exacerbation of mental health conditions is even more vital.

Hopes for the future

Throughout the project we have asked people about their hopes and goals for life post-COVID-19. For some people, the pandemic provided an opportunity to reassess their future, whilst being supported, for others this was often not the case. People often just expressed they wanted "normality" or hoped "everything gets back to normal".

One person explained that they would hope to get somewhere to live:

"I hope I get somewhere to live. I'm not giving up my dog though. If it comes to it I'll have to walk the streets and wait till my money comes through so I can get my own place but I'm over £1000 in debt with the council so I don't know if they will help me"

Several people described hoping to go back to work. However, also raised concerns about the security of their jobs post-COVID-19:

"Want [my] job back... seen on the news that everyone losing their jobs"

"He was working earning 800 a month doing security work. He's been laid off and now he's on universal credit so it's a big shock to go universal credit. It was difficult when he first signed on. He was working part time so he was getting benefits, but he is now much poorer. He really misses going to work and he worked in student accommodation so really enjoyed. Not sure if he's going to get the job back when this is over...He's worried that he won't have his job which he has had since November and it's the first job since he was 16. He couldn't work before he was in a hostel which is why he was so desperate to work"

Another person explained how they hoped to see a family member before they passed away:

"Being locked away and not being able to see family is very difficult. His nan might die soon, and he really needs to see her and resolve that relationship. She can't use the phone so he can't talk to her and having lost his mum recently he really realises the value of finding resolution with someone before they die. He hopes, more than anything else that he will be able to see her before she dies"



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However, some people were feeling more positive for the future. The support that was provided during the pandemic had caused a significant improvement in people's wellbeing and provided an opportunity to move out of homelessness.

"[I] was in a hostel until recently but have just been housed in a one bedroom flat very recently and [am] happy with life"

"Feel more positive and want support with [my] mental health and possibly rehab"

Opportunity for lasting change

The pandemic has sometimes meant people have had the opportunity to access support and engaged with services. Staff working to support people in emergency accommodation have discussed how the response to COVID-19 has led to positive outcomes for people who have 'had a break' from rough sleeping or connected with a range of services who have provided care during this time.

"I think there is a lot of people that... On the street, just needed a break. And this might be their break that they needed. They are in a room, they have got their own TV, they have got three meals a day. They haven't got to brave the hard conditions out there. So this could be a good thing. For a lot of people this is just what they needed and it gives them a chance to access mental health services, psychotherapists. And key workers. And reliably talk about their stuff. If we can get that into the hostels, that would be incredible. It could be a really good thing"

These narratives have illuminated how the response to COVID-19 has, in some cases, positively impacted people and provided an opportunity for lasting change.

"It's an opportunity. Accessing mental health services, drug addiction. ... when you're on the streets it's really difficult. Because you have got lots of other issues. But having this safe space, where they haven't got interruptions, it's going to be totally beneficial. They get a good night's sleep without being woken up"

The movement into accommodation is just one opportunity which has impacted people's wellbeing. However, if crucial support to help people to transition into suitable accommodation not ensure the positive impact is maintained and allows for a lasting change.

We have also seen an increase in the amount of people who have engaged with support services during the pandemic. Specifically, people have increasingly engaged with drug and alcohol recovery services and began a script. Additionally, front-line staff have noted the increase in people who are 'long-term' rough sleepers coming in and working with services - "I am aware of people that are real long term rough sleepers who would always refuse to come in, refuse to work with services and because of this, they have".

"I hope that the homeless population have seen the hard work that everyone is putting in. I mean we have scooped up I think... across London I think we are looking at 1100 people into hotel rooms. So I am hoping that it will bring us closer together, because clients will say do you know that? The local authorities, the GP practices, the specialist ones, all tried really hard to protect them and get them in. And hopefully that forms a relationship moving forward"



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Example responses to COVID-19

Exeter Homeless Partnership response to COVID-19

Exeter Homeless Partnership (EHP) is a project that takes a 'city wide' approach seeks to tackling homelessness in Exeter. The partnership, funded by Comic Relief brings together statutory, voluntary and business sector partners, lived experience and the wider community; with an onus on coproduction as a tool for creating impact. When the COVID-19 pandemic began the partnership saw the need for a coordinated and collaborative response to homelessness in Exeter and adopted [Groundswell's 'cluster management approach'](#) based on those used to coordinate responses in non-refugee humanitarian emergencies. The process is ongoing and has been a learning process for all involved; ensuring that all parties work collaboratively and 'learn as we go'. Partners in the project report that the process has forged new relationship and new dynamics in existing relationships and has created a unified response to COVID-19 across the city. The approach is now being employed to plan the next steps for the city to recover from COVID-19. To find out more go to:

www.exeterhomelesspartnership.org.uk/latest-news

What next?

We have started an exciting new phase of the research which employs new data capture methods and increases the reach of the project. Alongside our daily diaries and telephone interviews we are using a 'Citizen Journalism' approach that uses mobile technology to engage people from the homeless community. This is a new approach to coproduction and research around homelessness and is being supported by funding from NHS England and NHS Improvement. The research will directly inform the way the NHS responds to COVID-19 for people who are homeless.

In partnership with [On Our Radar](#) we have recruited a team of 'Mobile Reporters' being trained and supported to collect and report information from their local areas. Our first group of mobile reports are starting their training shortly and will be feeding back what they are hearing locally through voice and text messages. In the coming months there will be more opportunities for people who are homeless and the services that support them to get involved in the project.

If you want to find out more or get involved in our project, contact Groundswell's Research Manager Jo: jo.brown@groundswell.org.uk

If you want regular updates about this project and other related work, please subscribe to our #HealthNow newsletter [here](#).