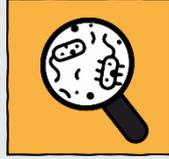
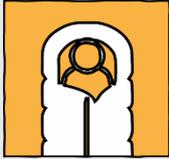




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Monitoring the Impact of COVID-19 Fortnightly Homelessness Briefing 6: Focus on emergency hotel accommodation

Introduction

Across the UK, emergency responses to the COVID-19 pandemic have seen local areas and services work rapidly to provide accommodation and support people experiencing homelessness. Despite the challenges faced, the emphasis on providing accommodation has put the issue of homelessness firmly on the public health agenda. This was most notably illustrated by the Government's statement that all local authorities in England should find appropriate accommodation for all rough sleepers. As discussed in our [previous briefings](#), the movement towards providing people with emergency accommodation has presented a real opportunity to tackle homelessness. However, three months on, reports of emergency accommodation 'winding down' and a lack of consistency in coordinated move on planning means that this could be a missed opportunity to end rough sleeping with dire consequences for those who are at risk returning to the street.

This briefing is the sixth in a series that outlines what we hear through conversations with our staff and volunteers, the #HealthNow network, telephone interviews and from the concerns logged by our network of people with experience of homelessness. This themed briefing reflects insight gathered throughout the project specifically in relation emergency hotel provision. It also considers the key questions that need to be considered when planning move-on from emergency hotel accommodation. Further details of this research project and previous briefings can be found here: ['Monitoring the impact of COVID-19 for people experiencing homelessness'](#).

What is the policy context for emergency hotels?

On 26th March, MP Luke Hall wrote to local authorities requesting they accommodate all rough sleepers by the end of the weekend. Three months on, roughly 15,000 people have been accommodated in hotels across the UK. Whilst the government deny the 'Everyone In' scheme is coming to an end, there has been reports that the scheme is 'winding down' and hotel contracts are ending across the UK. This approach varies across the country; e.g. in London residents have already been told to leave hotels, and the Greater London Authority (GLA) which have 14 hotels across London are gradually [closing two of their hotels](#). Whilst in Liverpool, the council are establishing [a plan to prevent people returning to the streets](#) by temporarily making the vacant social housing spaces available for those moving on from hostels and hotels.

Charities and local authorities have put pressure on the Government to provide further funding and action to make sure nobody returns to the streets. On the 24th June, [MHCLG announced £105 million to keep rough sleepers safe](#) and off the streets during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Government outlined that this additional money will be used to help rough sleepers secure their own tenancies as well as provide short-term housing while the delivery of long-term housing continues at pace. They



also brought forward a previously announced, additional £16 million for substance misuse support due to the challenges of the pandemic. It is important to note that whilst this funding will not provide a permanent solution, it will support local authorities to temporarily accommodate people from hotels. Whilst the funding commitment is positive, some areas have already closed hotels, some have started to close them and others are focusing on exit planning. Despite the easing of lockdown measures, there are still significant concerns regarding the re-opening of night shelters and day centres due to the lack of ability for social distancing or shielding. The Government and Public Health England are yet to release further guidance on how services should operate which makes it difficult for local authorities and organisations to plan and adapt.

Key policy responses

24 March - Department of Health and Social Care release guidance for accommodation providers including hotels to remain open if providing accommodation for people experiencing homelessness.

2 May - Government announce that a specialist taskforce led by Dame Louise Casey has been created to lead the next phase of the Government's support for rough sleepers.

18 May - Homeless Link calls for urgent action so nobody is forced to sleep rough after lockdown.

24 May - Government announces a commitment of 6,000 new supported homes backed by £433 million of government funding with 3,300 homes to be made available in next 12 months. Alongside, a further commitment to increasing the revenue support of the total programme by 37% to make sure that the rough sleepers have the support they need to stay off the streets for good.

24 June – MHCLG announce £105 million to keep rough sleepers safe and off the streets during COVID-19 pandemic.

- [Luke Hall MP writes to all local authorities in England](#) on announcement of additional funding to support individuals placed in emergency accommodation and support for EEA rough sleepers.

26 March - Letter sent by Luke Hall MP to all local authorities requesting to support rough sleepers into accommodation including people with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) by the end of week.

18 April - Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) announce that councils across England will receive another £1.6 billion in additional funding.

6 May - The Scottish Government announces an extension to the Unsuitable Accommodation Order, which currently prevents pregnant women or families with children from being placed in B&Bs and hotels for more than a week.

26 May - Mayor of London warns that the lack of funding from central government means that hotels will run out in June and there could be a surge in homeless people returning to the streets.

- MHCLG respond to The Guardian newspaper and deny that funding is being stopped for hotels.

28 May – An [open letter](#) signed by numerous charities call for the extension of the 'Everyone In' policy.

29 May – Luke Hall MP writes to local authorities requesting move on plans and insisting on a health-led approach with ongoing support.

Data collection so far

We began gathering insight rapidly from the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and have expanded our data collection methods to extend our reach over the last three months. From the start of the project until the preparation of this briefing we received **335 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 carried out **62 telephone interviews** with people experiencing homelessness from across the UK experiencing various forms of homelessness. This includes people living in temporary accommodation, hostels and emergency hotels, and others currently sofa-surfing, rough sleeping or living in their own housing association accommodation. We have also started to receive insights from our **mobile reporters** who have been feeding into the project with what they are experiencing and hearing within their communities. Many people we have spoken to have significant existing health needs, but only a small number of people reported to have had COVID-19 symptoms.

What are we hearing?

“So a lot of people are talking about anxieties, depression coming back. And that can be around physical health, but also around the general situation of society. I mean we are all wondering how long this is going to last for. What the economy is going to look like. We are all wondering what is the impact going to be. Not only in the rough sleepers, but society really”

In many areas the use of emergency hotel and B&B accommodation has been adopted to accommodate those rough sleeping from the beginning of the pandemic. The experiences we have heard have illustrated how this has had both positive and negative impacts on people’s lives. In our [fourth briefing](#) we also heard about people’s hopes and goals following the COVID-19 pandemic. This briefing builds on earlier insights to provide a timely overview of the impact hotel accommodation has had on those accommodated – or in some instances not accommodated – and how the wind-down of such accommodation is beginning to be experienced.

Hotel accommodation as an opportunity

In some instances, the movement into hotel accommodation presented an opportunity to improve people’s quality of life and health, especially for those who were accommodated in hotels where clinical support was available. We have heard stories of people moving into hotels who have previously been rough sleeping or staying in unsuitable hostel accommodation for a number of years, and this has provided an opportunity for them to engage with support services, such as starting recovery support for addictions or registering at a GP practice. One person explained they were happy to be moved into temporary accommodation in the COVID-19 response:

“[I’ve] reduced smoking roll-ups and [my] cough is going down...[I] hope to get my own bedroom or flat after lockdown”

Another described how their accommodation during COVID-19 was preferable:

“It is much better than the other place and I have a nurse who looks after me here now”

The clinical support and staff support available in hotel accommodation has been reported to be inconsistent, but when appropriate support was available it had a significant impact on people’s wellbeing. One front-line worker explained how in some hotels, services were adapting to ensure people continued to be supported in their new setting.

“In some hotels a phone service has been established and psychologists are going into hostels up to 3 times a week. [Mental health has] become more and more of a need as the weeks go on...they have a list of clients who [services had] worked with before who were raised as people that were known to mental health services. And they are providing a phone service”

The positive experiences of people being accommodated in hotels is encouraging, but also means that the importance of appropriate move-on planning and support is paramount to ensure that people’s needs continue to be met post-COVID. Another front-line worker reflected how accommodating people in hotels has led to significant engagement.

“Clients have probably engaged with services more than they ever have. And for me that is the biggest outcome, a huge outcome. It would be amazing if we could we use this to move forward kind of collectively...it shows that the model we’ve got of care and protect and get everybody off the streets, that the model is working... I know I have been part of commissioning services and ... new services and whatever and they take ages. We are talking months of work. And to do this on this scale, this quick, it is just completely unprecedented. And it’s working”

In some cases, the level of trust and engagement that was established has had a significant impact on people’s overall wellbeing. However, when hotel contracts end, if appropriate support measures are not put in place then people will be even less likely to engage in the future.

Poor experiences of hotel accommodation

Despite several people describing their positive experiences of being accommodated into hotels, many faced challenges and barriers to accessing and sustaining this accommodation. Therefore, when considering the wind-down of emergency response measures to COVID-19, it is important that appropriate planning is made, not solely to meet the needs of those currently in emergency hotel accommodation but also those who not accessed or have left such accommodation.

We heard that several people chose not to accept the offered accommodation, chose to leave or were asked to leave - as illustrated below:

“He was recently asked leave the hotel where he was placed due to the crisis. There was a complaint of him smoking in his room and him and a few others got kicked out. He was offered another hotel but refused it due to being kicked out of the first. He said the council are in touch every day and they are helping him to source a private rented flat. He says that Shelter have been really helpful. He has actually found a flat and the council are paying the deposit for him. He is just waiting for the paperwork to be completed”.

In this instance, the person was supported to find their own accommodation following this incident, however this is not always the case. Another person described a similar situation which meant they were forced to return to ‘sofa surfing’ and rough sleeping during the pandemic. Appropriate measures need to be put in place to ensure that no one should be asked to leave accommodation without support to find an alternative regardless of the reason.

People also described experiences of being moved into hotel accommodation which failed to support their basic needs. One person explained that although they were self-isolating in a hotel room they had to leave regularly to beg for food:



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“[I’m] self-isolating in a hotel, [I] was homeless before this. [I have] no food or money but am receiving benefits. [I have] a microwave and a kettle in [my] room and am begging for money for food and alcohol. [I’ve] been given a sandwich and a small carton of food a day from the hotel and [I’m] struggling with hunger... would benefit from a food bank parcel but [don’t] know how to get this”.

We have also heard experiences from people who have been moved into temporary accommodation outside their local area and communities. In some instances, this has meant difficulties with accessing services and support they need, especially in relation to [accessing GPs](#) in a new area. One person explained how they had been moved into a B&B in an area that they had previously been removed from due to being sexually assaulted. They had seen one of their attackers in a local shop and fear they will be attacked again. The safety of people who have been moved to areas outside of their local connections and familiarity is a key concern which needs to be considered in move-on planning.

Mobile report – temporary accommodation during the COVID pandemic

“I live in temporary accommodation with my disabled boyfriend while still bidding on permanent place. There seems to be less suitable property to bid on recently. Due to COVID we did not have inspection every 8 weeks which was a relief as I always feel anxious about these inspections. The inspector takes a photograph of each room and if it was untidy or cluttered, we would be reported to the council. However, a friend of mine had to move a hostel because of COVID. She works full-time and pays for her room in a hostel. It costs her the same as a studio or a small flat (most of her salary). Her hostel was closed due to being half empty. Foreign students and workers left, and tourists are not here. There were people who worked there for a free board, but those were going to lose their job and housing. My friend was moved to another hostel belonging to the same company. She does not like it much. There are about 300 people, so she feels less safe from COVID”.

Moving on from hotel accommodation

“I am happy here. It's much better than the hostel but they'll send me back soon”

Despite the challenges faced by people currently accommodated in hotels, a primary concern for most, was what happens when hotels start to wind-down or they are asked to leave. Front-line staff described:

“[A] general fear that people who are in hotels will be back on the streets soon”

“Concerns that people in hotels will be asked to leave the hotels at the end of this month - not clear if they will be housed by the Councils”

Case study – move on from COVID hotel

Dan (not his real name) was moved from emergency hostel accommodation into a COVID hotel at the beginning of the pandemic. He has a history of offending and mental health issues. He loved staying at the hotel and was excited about moving into his own property.

The hotel he was staying in closed in mid-June and his move-on property was not ready. Whilst he was waiting, he was offered temporary accommodation but after visiting felt this was extremely unsuitable. Dan left and decided to sleep on the streets.

Although people feel fearful of the move-on from hotels, especially for those who have described the positive impact this has had on their health and wellbeing, others have explained how the movement out of this emergency accommodation has made their route into permanent accommodation faster.

“... getting forward with my accommodation... But now that this has happened, the people have started to speed up things. So, in one way it’s been a blessing, but in another way, it’s been a curse”.

Over the coming weeks, we will continue to engage with people whose accommodation is changing or coming to an end. The insights we have heard so far illustrate a snapshot of people’s experiences of temporary and emergency accommodation during the pandemic. As easements are made and people begin to move on it’s important that the positive impacts of the COVID-19 response is not lost.

Important questions for move-on planning

We wanted to better understand the key issues and questions that people experiencing homelessness have about the winding-down of hotel accommodation. The questions below reflect issues raised through discussions with the Groundswell team, our reference group and peer volunteers which should be considered for move-on planning.

1. Are your pathways to accommodation clear for:
 - people who have been asked to leave temporary accommodation
 - people who chose not to return to hostel accommodation
 - people who are newly homeless
 - people leaving institutions (such as prison)?
2. Are you listening to what people want for their future and providing people with choice? If people are only offered one option - do they have a right to refuse and appeal for more suitable accommodation?
3. Are clear pathways in place to provide a health assessment and transition plan to ensure people have appropriate support in place? Especially for people who have health needs and substance issues which may have been supported during COVID-19 responses.
4. Have you ensured that people moving to different areas have proper access to services and support in their new accommodation (such as [registering at a local GP](#))?
5. Are you being clear and transparent with people about how long they can stay in new accommodation to address the impact of uncertainty on their emotional wellbeing?
6. Is a person-centred support package in place to help people sustain tenancies? Especially for people who have not had accommodation for a long period of time.
7. How will the ‘Everyone In’ policy be applied in the instance of a ‘second wave’ of the virus? How will subsequent localised ‘lock-downs’ impact access to services such as night shelters during the winter?

Example responses to COVID-19

Evaluating emergency hotel accommodation in Manchester

The Holiday Inn Express Manchester East was opened as part of the initial phase of the 'Everyone In' initiative. They were contracted to Manchester City Council to house approximately 45 people who had been sleeping rough or housed in unsuitable accommodation, with Riverside Housing Association running the hotel & providing support. Riverside commissioned an evaluation of the emergency accommodation with the aim to:

- Measure the impact on residents, including consideration of the way their health, wellbeing, financial situation, substance dependency has changed.
- Consider learning points and implications of this very specific approach and the potential for adoption of aspects of the approach by mainstream services.

The interim report for the evaluation shows that the intervention has had a positive impact on the residents interviewed, all of which had been rough sleeping prior to being accommodated in the hotel. Residents interviewed have a high level of satisfaction with the accommodation and the support they receive, particularly registering with GPs, claiming appropriate benefits, sorting out basic health issues and securing referrals to external agencies.

"I've been addicted to heroin for twenty years; this is the first time I've put my hands out for help. This has changed my life"

Residents feel safe, secure and protected and they feel more positive about their future.

"Hopefully I get my own place and start again. I'm scared cos I don't know what's going to happen from here. But everyone's like that, everyone's wary. Some might not be bothered but 90% of us don't want to go back on the streets. They've had a taste of proper life and a lot of us like it. I didn't expect to get a second chance and I'm looking forward to the future. I've smiled a lot since I've been in here"

You can view the full interim report and voice clips [here](#).

Engaging with substance misuse services in Worksop

[Change Grow Live \(CGL\)](#) Worksop have been supporting people to access and engage with substance misuse services through the Covid-19 pandemic. A person who was rough sleeping prior to lockdown who had been difficult to accommodate due to heavy use of spice was accommodated in a hotel as part of the 'Everyone In' initiative. The Outreach Recovery Coordinator who had previously been unable to engage with the individual was able to build a relationship with the client and was able to link the client in with a Clinician from CGL to develop and implement a spice reduction plan. The Coordinator also supported the client to engage with psycho-social interventions through a Community Psychiatric Nurse. The client was moved from the emergency accommodation into his own flat and the support he received moved with him and he is still meeting with the Outreach Recovery Coordinator once a week, his drug use has reduced, he is continuing to engage with mental health services and through housing support is successfully managing his tenancy.



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What next?

We want to hear from you! If you are homeless or working alongside people experiencing homelessness, we would like to hear your views and experiences. We are specifically interested in hearing from people about:

- Experiences of shielding
- Experiences of accessing Track and Trace
- Experiences of people who have no recourse to public funds

In partnership with [On Our Radar](#) we have recruited a team of 'Mobile Reporters' who are being trained and supported to collect and report information from their local areas. Find out more about getting involved or sharing your views and view our information sheet [here](#).

If you want to talk to someone about this research, 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](#).