

Partnership working around homelessness event – lessons learnt and actions for the future

Event report

Contents

Introduction	2
WMCA Homelessness Taskforce Commitment to Collaborate	2
Workshops	4
What has worked well in relation to partnership working during the pandemic?	4
Picture of homelessness	4
Accommodation types	4
Technology and digital tools	4
Improved partnership working and valuable existing partnerships	5
Partnerships with health	6
Working towards the same goal, flexibly and efficiently	8
Local authority/housing provider partnerships and accommodation provision	9
What do we want to hold on to from the new ways of working and how can we change our practices to make that happen?	14
Collaborative approach and cross-sector funding	14
New partnerships with health	14
Settled accommodation	14
Partnerships in commissioning	15
What policy changes do we need to help us to do this?	15
Homelessness prevention	15
Longer-term, consolidated, tailored funding	16
Local authorities and housing providers working together strategically	16
Addressing housing market challenges	18
A housing and support solution for people with NRPF	19
MHCLG Response	19
Conclusion	21

Introduction

This event, hosted jointly by the National Housing Federation (NHF) and the Local Government Association (LGA), brought together representatives from housing associations, local government, central government and the voluntary sector. It built upon the NHF and LGA's work to promote partnership working on homelessness, including [events and a report](#) in 2018-2019 and a [webinar](#) in 2020. See also

- [Housing people who were rough sleeping and those at risk who have been accommodated due to covid-19.](#)
- [Partnership working to house people in urgent need.](#)
- [Lessons learnt from councils' response to rough sleeping during the pandemic.](#)
- [NHF articles on partnership working to help homelessness.](#)

The pandemic has shone a light on the effectiveness and importance of partnership and multiagency working among councils, housing associations and local services in preventing and relieving homelessness. Housing associations and councils speak proudly of their joint working to house homeless people and of their prevention work. This work is made more effective by positive relationships with one another, with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), health, voluntary organisations, and with the police and criminal justice system. The government has encouraged this partnership working in its [review of the Homelessness Reduction Act](#), and through the cross-sector funds made available with the [Changing Futures Programme](#).

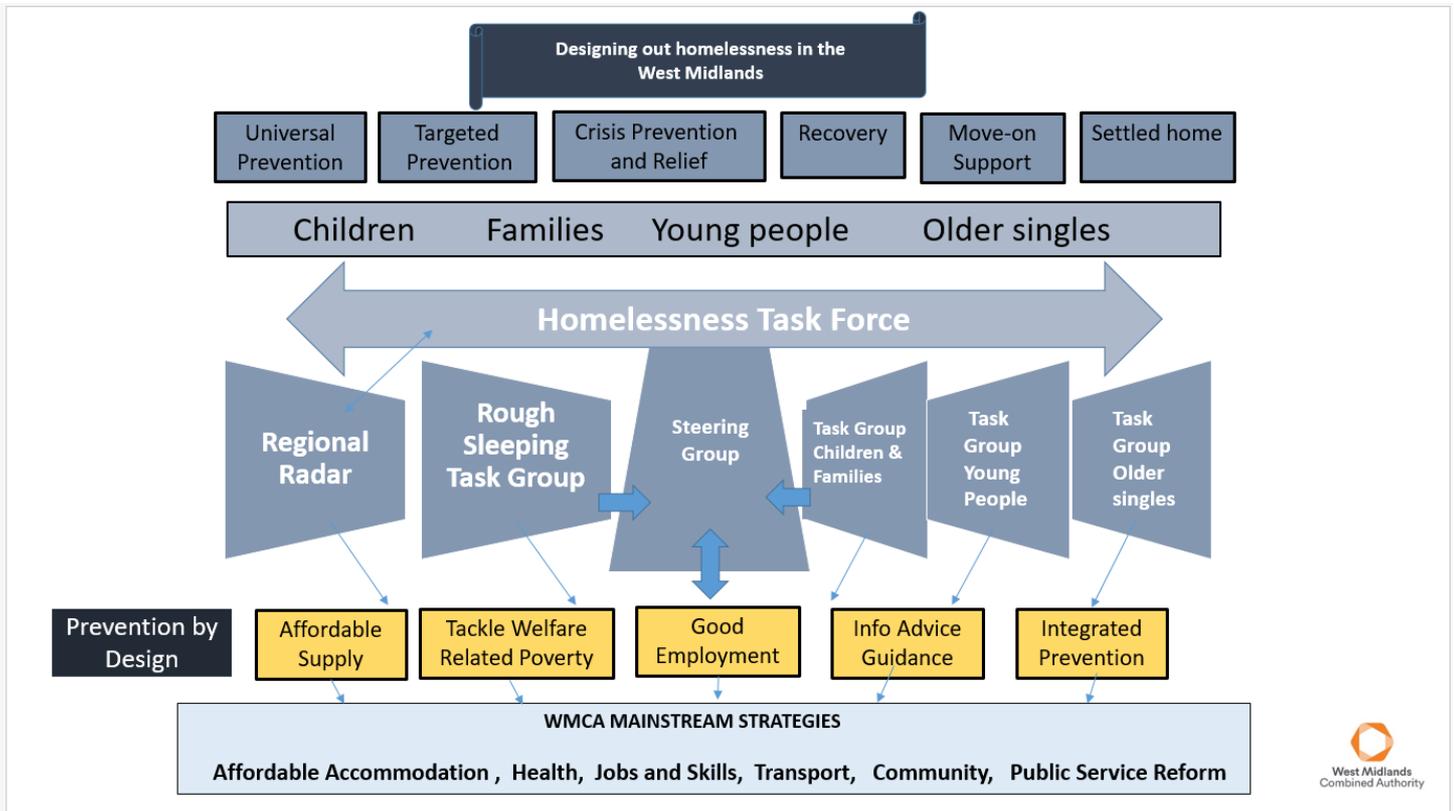
This event showcased an example of joint working: the West Midlands Combined Authority Homelessness Taskforce Commitment to Collaborate. It also included workshops for delegates to share experiences and a response from MHCLG.

This report brings together some key take away points from the event and some case study examples of partnership working on homelessness during the pandemic.

WMCA Homelessness Taskforce Commitment to Collaborate

Neelam Sunder, Programme Manager, Homelessness – Policy and Implementation at the West Midland Combined Authority (WMCA) presented the [WMCA Homelessness Taskforce](#). This is a multi-organisational taskforce, bringing together seven local authorities, and representatives from the public, voluntary, community and business sectors. The Taskforce focuses all members on the issue of

homelessness in all its forms. It took around a year to set up, following impetus from the West Midlands Metro Mayor. The Taskforce aims to prevent homelessness through its [Commitment to Collaborate](#) and its guidance around “[designing out homelessness](#)”.



The structures created by the Taskforce meant that when the coronavirus pandemic began, WMCA did not need to create extra provision for its rough sleeping population. Instead, the Taskforce were able to deal with the unfolding situation by meeting more regularly.

In terms of successes, WMCA have greatly reduced rough sleeping during the pandemic. They have however identified a need to sustain that and move away from crisis mode, focusing instead on prevention. There has been a lot of funding and effort to rehouse rough sleepers but WMCA want to focus on how to work with households in rent arrears and keep people in their homes too. The WMCA will continue to gather learning around this and will soon launch a [toolkit on the Commitment to Collaborate](#).

Workshops

The workshops addressed three questions:

1. What has worked well in relation to partnership working during the pandemic?
2. What do we want to hold on to from the new ways of working and what do we need to do/change in our practice to make that happen?
3. What policy changes do we need to help us to do this?

What has worked well in relation to partnership working during the pandemic?

Picture of homelessness

Delegates felt that by allowing a wider group of people to access temporary accommodation, a more accurate picture of homelessness levels emerged.¹ The imperative to accommodate everyone in need, including those with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), ensured a clearer understanding of the numbers when compared to temporary accommodation statistics alone. Delegates had managed to reach people they hadn't engaged with before. There was a spotlight on hidden homelessness, especially among young people and 'sofa surfers'.

Accommodation types

Delegates applauded the change in accommodation types on offer. The risk of infection in shared settings made changes to Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEPE) provision imperative. In response, there was a move from communal, one-night provision to self-contained accommodation.

Technology and digital tools

Delegates felt that technology contributed to the success of the pandemic response and had opened the door to more partnership working. There was a feeling that technology had enabled a national conversation around homelessness through wider access to webinars and conferences. Online training at accessible prices was an opportunity for those unable to afford the travel associated with accessing traditional

¹ See <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmpubacc/934/93402.htm>

face-to-face training, especially those based outside London. Digital tools (e.g. messaging apps and video conferencing) also allowed service users to access support while face-to-face meetings were not available. This worked well with some target groups and has led to increased engagement. There was consensus that in the future we should give service users a choice of digital or face-to-face engagement options.

Improved partnership working and valuable existing partnerships

Delegates found that partnership working improved and professional relationships developed during the pandemic. There was a strong focus on partnership working across the voluntary, charity, local authority and housing sectors. Many delegates mentioned how partners had managed to work at speed and with creativity.

Delegates wanted to retain ways to work creatively and innovatively in future.

Case Study: Leeds City Council and partners

In March 2020 when we entered into lockdown, Leeds City Council and Emergency Accommodation partners St George's Crypt and St Anne's had to act quickly to keep some of the city's most vulnerable homeless people and rough sleepers safe. St Anne's and St George's Crypt are commissioned providers within Housing Related Support, supporting homeless people and those rough sleeping. Clients were moved over an afternoon into hotels in the city so that they could have individual rooms for isolation from the virus. Roomzz in the city centre has become a home for female clients and has supported over 130 women over the last year; Britannia Hotel in Seacroft housed over 200 people at its busiest. The partners have supported over 800 people and feel they have saved lives by working together and working flexibly.

St George's Crypt and St Anne's worked tirelessly to keep clients safe in the hotels with support from Forward Leeds, Turning Lives Around, Barca, Engage, Beacon, West Yorkshire Police, Joanna Project, Basis Yorkshire, and Leeds City Council partners including Leeds Housing Options, Adults & Health Commissioning, Mental Health Homeless Team (MHHT) Adult Social Care and more. Partnership working has been at the heart of the support and weekly virtual partners meetings were key to keeping communication going in a time of social distancing.

One support worker described their time working at the Britannia:

“You never know what you might walk into in the Britannia. Some days were heart-breaking, and others filled with genuine joy at the achievements of some the residents. So many people and agencies have pulled together for the same cause and it worked. I genuinely feel honoured to have been a part of it.”

But it's not just the staff who have felt positive around working at the hotels over the last few months. Most importantly, many residents have reported long-term positive changes in their life as a result of being placed at the hotel accommodation.

One resident said:

“I came to the Britannia hotel and had a drink and drug problem. Staff helped me to work with Forward Leeds and the Mental Health Homeless Team and they also supported me when my mum died. I had plenty of late night conversations with staff and they got me the support I needed. I'll be honest, at first I thought 'what's the point?' but after these conversations I was persuaded to try the support. I'm glad I did because it really helped me. I no longer drink and am on regular medication which has reduced my anxiety. I am waiting to move into my own property with support from Engage Leeds there when I need it. I don't know what I would have done if I wasn't put here. I would probably be dead. Thank you!”

The opportunities for learning will continue as Emergency Accommodation looks forward to new accommodation at Kirkstall Lodge which opened in early May 2021. It offers supported accommodation for males run by St George's Crypt. This will be followed by Ladybeck, a supported accommodation facility for females run by St Anne's.

During the pandemic, existing relationships and partnerships were foundational for quick and effective partnership working around homelessness in a time of crisis. Support provision worked well where there were existing pathways and less well where there were not. For example, Walsall Housing Group (WHG) already had a well-structured Housing First partnership with Accord and Walsall City Council. This allowed them to identify properties suitable for providing emergency accommodation easily, and therefore take on rough sleepers.

Partnerships with health

Many delegates pointed to improved relationships between housing and health colleagues, which led to better outcomes. The feeling was that 'Everyone In'² raised the profile of homelessness and as a result the health sector now has a greater understanding of the issue. Key health and wellbeing partnerships (e.g. substance misuse), for example, worked with housing associations in their services, while primary health care support helped people stay in their emergency accommodation and move on to permanent housing. This freed up space in emergency accommodation.

Other partners were brought in too, such as police, and businesses. Local restaurants, for example, were able to provide meals.

Case study: Coastline Housing and health partners

As a result of the pandemic, it was identified by a range of Coastline's Homeless Service key health partners in conversation with the homeless team, that people in Coastline's accommodation services had been unable to access usual specialist health care checks due to lockdown preventative measures.

Agencies put their heads together and came up with a plan to offer a flexible package of joint BBV (Blood-Bourne Virus) checks, liver scans and general health care check appointments at the Homeless Service accommodation. Crucially, existing coronavirus safety measures meant it was possible to screen, meet and support individuals.

Lots of new partnerships were formed to deliver these events and health and housing professionals would come together to work alongside each other in a new way. People in the service would receive specialist healthcare help and be reminded of the importance of their health and wellbeing.

We held our first event in December 2020, for those people accommodated in Chi Winder, Coastline's 18-bed Crisis Accommodation facility. 20 people received individual assistance and had liver scans, physical health checks, BBV tests and Liver scans. Those who had not received coronavirus jabs were also able to have them.

² See <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9057/>

We held our second event in April 2021, for those accommodated in Chi Winder and other supported accommodation around Mid-West Cornwall. 61 BBV, liver scans, Hep A/C screening, general health care and advice appointments and checks were carried out, including more coronavirus vaccinations amongst a group with multiple disadvantages.

Agency involvement: Coastline Housing Homeless Service, NHS, Health for Homeless service, Hep C Trust, We are With You Addiction Service.

Outcomes

- Partnership has been developed and will continue to offer these events into the future for the homeless population.
- Greater understanding of all the services involved for all agencies.
- Positive and flexible delivery of checks and scans ensured everyone managed their appointments well.
- Participants enjoyed a supermarket voucher and food parcel as a take away benefit for attending.
- Coronavirus vaccinations were dispensed to the homeless population.
- Feedback from recipients was that they really appreciated the help and advice they received, loved the community atmosphere created in the homeless service. Fantastic comments were also made about how they felt their healthcare and concerns had been valued.

Good Practice

- Joint healthcare and housing professional work, building positive events together to deliver solutions for a vulnerable population.
- Shared work has created a sense of safety and being valued for people in crisis.
- Great communication between the agencies has built confidence in the teams for future events and working.

Working towards the same goal, flexibly and efficiently

Delegates felt that partnership working improved for a number of reasons:

- Everyone's work crystallised around the same issue, rather than dealing with myriad pressing issues.
- The value and speed of working together (rather than in competition) became apparent, as did understanding of partners' pressures.

- Online working, while not without its challenges, allowed for greater efficiency. This freed up capacity and made multiagency meetings easier to coordinate and therefore more likely to happen. These meetings are continuing.
- Bureaucracy and barriers to efficiency were removed across sectors. More agencies were allowed to make direct referrals for support, for example, rather than this going through the local authority. Furthermore, working in the same hotels as each other allowed for quick joint working: being able to go and speak to someone was much better than having to go through a long referral process.
- Flexibility was encouraged. People felt empowered to work in a way that was person-centred and based on greatest need rather than service-centred or dependent on strict agreements or eligibility. This challenged people to proactively reach out to tenants with offers of support.
- Targeted funding was made available, which streamlined procurement. This allowed for offers of accommodation to bring rough sleepers indoors quickly.

Local authority/housing provider partnerships and accommodation provision

One of the key benefits of improved partnership working was getting to understand one another and what each partner could provide. Local authority delegates spoke of housing associations being an integral part of partnerships and planning around 'Everyone In'. They provided accommodation for move on, and were able to work flexibly and responsively. Housing associations are keen that the understanding of the value they can bring, and the knowledge of how to work together to bring creative solutions to problems is retained in the commissioner/provider relationship.

Partnership working helped free up resources and helped move rough sleepers into settled accommodation quickly. Direct lets (into housing association properties) rather than Choice-Based Lettings sped the system up and could be timed for when people were coming out of hotels. This helped to rehouse people quickly and free up space for more people needing temporary accommodation. This approach has led the rapid rehousing of hundreds of people in some local authority areas. Some housing associations furnished their accommodation, which enabled people to move in quickly, and provided ongoing support for resettlement and tenancy sustainment. It was felt that, because allocations were made with strong advice and support, move-ons have been more successful than if no support had been provided.

Case study: Liverpool City Council and Liverpool's social housing and support provider partners

Registered office: Lion Court, 25 Procter St, Holborn, London WC1V 6NY
020 7067 1010 | housing.org.uk | National Housing Federation Limited,
trading as National Housing Federation. A company with limited liability.
Registered in England No. 302132

**NATIONAL
HOUSING
FEDERATION**

The City Council adopted a proactive approach to the accommodation of homeless households and households at risk of becoming homeless during the coronavirus pandemic. This involved embracing the 'Everyone In' principles to secure hotel placements and bed and breakfast accommodation to prevent people being homeless.

Like all local authorities, however, Liverpool saw an increasing demand on already stretched services during the pandemic:

- The Council's continuing commitment to the 'Everyone In' principles resulted in households being provided with temporary accommodation who would not have been offered this under normal circumstances.
- Increases in the overall numbers presenting to Housing Options during the current year when compared to the previous year.
- A sharp increase in the number of domestic abuse cases.
- More family breakdowns arising from coronavirus issues such as the need to shield vulnerable household members and inter-generational conflicts.
- Presentations from out of area placing further pressure on temporary accommodation.

There was a recognition that a joint effort and partnership approach was needed to tackle some of these issues in order to move people on from the emergency or temporary accommodation and into permanent social housing. The City's main social housing providers have fully supported this and it has been effective in keeping the numbers of rough sleepers to a minimum and preventing homelessness among the most vulnerable people.

In order to facilitate effective, person-centred move-on, the City Council has worked with the city's main registered housing providers and housing support agencies. This resulted in a commitment to make all accommodation that became vacant available for moving households on from hotel and hostel placements. This included people with a history of homelessness and/or rough sleeping, people fleeing domestic abuse, homeless families and young people leaving care. An operations group was established to oversee the matching of these properties to the affected households and to ensure that adequate support was available throughout.

This approach was a change from the usual choice based lettings (CBL) system whereby vacancies are advertised via the PropertyPool Plus website. Instead, households needing to be moved on have been directly matched to the vacancies

that become available and when allocated a property. Where necessary, they have also been provided with a furniture package and ongoing floating support.

We have seen a huge positive impact from this joint work:

- 745 households (singles, couples and families) have had the cycle of homelessness ended through being rehoused. This amounts to approximately 1400 people.
- Tenancy sustainment has been exceptional, with a more than 99% success rate.
- Whilst there have been some subsequent rent arrears, these are small amounts and most often as a result of the automatic delay of Universal Credit claims being awarded.
- A review of the cost benefit of this approach has identified that the savings in terms of temporary accommodation costs for single people housed in this way were net circa £500k. This included the costs of furniture packages, however, much of that was grant funding (Next Steps Accommodation Programme). Therefore, we estimate that the overall saving to the council through the reduction in Length of Stay in temporary accommodation for single people was in the region of £1.1m.

Positive learning opportunities:

- Excellent strategic leadership from CEOs across Registered Providers has been instrumental in driving forward this work. This has helped to ensure stronger partnership working with the City Council more generally and we are now exploring how we would expand some of the approaches into other areas e.g with support for offenders and options around increasing employment opportunities.
- Operational management of the panel was very focussed and practical. It required systems and processes to be simple and to operate as swiftly as possible.
- The approach meant that there was an opportunity for discussions to be had that enabled sensitive lettings, in a way that just isn't possible through choice based lettings systems.
- The partnership approach meant that any emerging issues with the tenancy post-allocation could be addressed almost immediately. This included bringing people back into a supported housing environment if that was needed, rather than individuals being evicted.

Challenges:

- The process is resource intensive however, the buy-in of all the panel members and representatives across registered providers and support providers couldn't be faulted for levels of commitment.
- To work well, the process needed to include an offer of furniture packages and a link to ongoing support, where necessary, which has financial implications for the council and partners.
- The lack of one bed accommodation, particularly in some parts of the city, has been an issue.
- The focus on rehousing people in emergency accommodation will be building up pressures elsewhere in the system, e.g. those in other types of housing need such as overcrowding.

In conclusion, we are currently reviewing this approach as part of our wider Homelessness Strategy, which is due for publication later in summer 2021.

Local authorities appreciated housing associations' flexibility around allocations and the ability to 'flip' properties from temporary to general needs accommodation. The crisis gave the leeway to do this because there was an imperative to house one specific group and increased levels of funding to make tenure flipping possible.

Case Study – The Havebury Housing Partnership

Havebury owns and manages over 6,800 homes for both affordable rent and shared ownership across the east of England. We work with local authorities, agencies and other housing associations to meet the local housing need. This includes the Tayfen Service provision of a supported housing 24 bed hostel and 26 bed spaces in the community for 18-65 year olds at risk of homelessness.

Following on from the 'Everyone In' government initiative in 2020 we were aware that the local district council had a number of homeless individuals that required supported accommodation to be able to move on from the temporary accommodation that was coming to an end. Within the Tayfen service, we had a significant number of residents that were ready to move on from the service. They had been unable, however, to secure independent accommodation. There was a real barrier to being able to make vacancies available for those most in need of supported accommodation.

As we benefit from being part of the larger organisation of Havebury we approached our Head of Service to ask if we would be able to take advantage of the organisations agreed allocation of direct lets. We also informed the local authority of the number of current residents we had ready to move on and the ambition to get these residents into independent accommodation. This would then allow us to house some of their temporary accommodation residents.

Internally we engaged with all relevant departments involved with new tenancies, this included the allocations team and the income team. We worked together to identify suitably located properties and match these properties to our residents ready to move on, and then worked to move through the verification process as swiftly as possible to minimise delay.

Externally, we engaged with the Local Authority's Housing Team to utilise some suitable direct lets to other social housing providers in the area. We also started to identify individuals in their temporary accommodation that we could move into our service as soon as accommodation was available. We kept in close communication with the Housing Team and made the most of the referral information that they held on potential residents and their experience of them in temporary accommodation to try and match the applicants appropriately with the current mix of needs in the hostel.

We were able to move on 12 residents in a short space of time to wonderful opportunities in social housing. This meant that we could then accept residents from local authority temporary accommodation. This ensured they were not asked to leave the accommodation with no other housing prospects.

While the residents who we put forward for direct lets were considered ready to move on to independent accommodation some were more physically equipped than others in their preparation. As the process of the direct lets moved swiftly some residents were anxious about the practical implications of furnishing a property. We had already established links with local charities to provide the basics if required and were able to organise other items if needed. We did reflect, however, that as part of the process of getting residents ready for move on, we could introduce these concepts at an earlier stage, so that the resident could take more ownership of the process.

The successful lets led to a sudden influx of voids and accommodation to turn around for new residents, in a volume that we were not used to working with. This led to us having to seek assistance from a wider base of contractors to try and

minimise the waiting times for necessary works such as re-flooring and re-decoration of rooms.

We are now in a position of experiencing a high volume of residents ready to move on again and are looking to repeat this process. Sadly, however there is a severe lack of realistic move on opportunities in our area. Currently 40% of the people in our service are ready to move on and actively looking but not being successful.

What do we want to hold on to from the new ways of working and how can we change our practices to make that happen?

Collaborative approach and cross-sector funding

There was a desire to hold on to the collaborative approach and not lose the relationships that have developed, to ensure a positive legacy from the pandemic. There was a keenness to retain the openness and willingness to share information and reduce silos through true integration of services across sectors. To do this, all partners will need to sustain ways of working linked to trust, sharing expertise and involving communities. This will allow organisations and people to be used to their strengths and not just because they are linked to specific contracts. There will need to be a commitment to system change where needed, to deliver positive and joint solutions for clients. The challenge to doing this will be if funding streams are short-term and temporary. Grant funding has helped when it has been designed in a cross-sector way, and it was felt that this should be retained.

New partnerships with health

There was a desire among housing associations to harness new partnerships with health and there was interest in the opportunities afforded by the new Integrated Care System model.

Settled accommodation

There was an appetite to keep rough sleeping figures down by continuing the principle of 'Everyone In' and keeping accommodation options available. It was felt that by retaining a public health approach, the default position would be to accommodate people and provide them with support. It was acknowledged that

service users being in settled accommodation had helped enormously in terms of providing support. Although there was still support for an element of shared accommodation, it was also felt that moving away from non-self-contained accommodation had led to better outcomes for clients. It was felt to be more effective at engaging rough sleepers as the setting was more homely, the person's methadone script and food could be delivered, and people felt settled and looked after.

Partnerships in commissioning

Sharing risk and being outcomes-focused for individuals was seen as a way to help providers always offer long-term accommodation to people with complex needs. This could also help overcome some of the challenges identified such as geographically differing priorities and welfare reform. It was understood that the local commissioning environment needs to permit this – competition in commissioning can mean that a less robust service is offered because the focus is on competition rather than collaboration. One idea that received positive attention in the workshops was that local authority commissioners could draft tenders with partnership working built in, and use social value commissioning tools to ensure services are person-centred. This would also need a long-term funding settlement for support services. Another idea was that perhaps charitable funds could be found if public funds were not forthcoming.

What policy changes do we need to help us to do this?

Homelessness prevention

Delegates were keen for there to be a significant focus on homelessness prevention, rather than reactive measures, to deal with the risk of homelessness following the end of lockdown. This included:

- A change to prevention duties such as expanding the Duty to Refer into a Duty to Cooperate.
- Setting up prevention panels with outreach workers.
- Preventative work further upstream.
- Looking at the causes of homelessness including poverty, supply of affordable accommodation, domestic abuse, sofa surfing, and people in the PRS once the coronavirus protections end.

- Procedural changes, e.g. the Home Office currently gives 28 days' notice when someone's asylum accommodation is due to come to an end after they obtain refugee status. There was a feeling that this should be lengthened to 56 days in line with the Homelessness Reduction Act prevention duty.

Longer-term, consolidated, tailored funding

Funding, from government and from local authorities, needs to be longer term and consolidated, and must be tailored to people's needs. There was a feeling that local authorities are currently having to reduce services because of budget constraints, that longer-term action was needed and that the current short-term procedures and projects (because of short-term funding) were inefficient and expensive and don't work for clients. Funding needs to meet clients' ongoing needs safely, and give providers certainty that they will be able to keep staff or carry on provision – they want to be able to plan. Flexibility needs to be built into funding because some clients take more time to engage with support and there needs to be a recognition in homelessness and rough-sleeping funding that service users have long-term, complex needs. The mind-set of long-term health funding should be retained here.

Funding was also felt to be too fractured and prescriptive. As one provider put it: "there are always separate funds and streams aiming at subtly different things but we have properties that could be used for all of the income streams". Funding was felt to be a "chase for units" rather than for provision which can safely meet need. The pandemic situation seemed to have made thinking more joined up and there was agreement that this should be retained. It was felt that this would also save money for the future.

With regards to specific funds, it was felt that the 2020 Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme (RSAP) fund had had challenging timescales, which had affected the ability to coproduce bids. The longer lead-in time built into this round should help build up necessary partnership bids and lead to better commissioning.

Local authorities and housing providers working together strategically

There was a feeling that there needed to be more strategic thinking and a move away from just crisis provision, towards needs audits and a recognition of the value of housing (not just accommodation) and the role of housing providers. Delegates advised that the focus should be on strengths, upstream prevention, and identifying those with the highest level of need. There was also a recognition that providers are

now hosting people with more complex and chaotic needs. Local authorities and providers could reach out to each other and have a conversation around longer-term housing options for vulnerable people and how to do that safely, with support that meets their ongoing needs.

Case study: Newcastle City Council

Newcastle City Council believes that stable homes are at the heart of residents' lives and Newcastle's neighbourhoods. We also know that many residents can face financial and personal challenges in sustaining their home. Our aim is to proactively support all our residents to sustain their tenancy and to not evict anyone into homelessness.

Our ALMO and housing associations are key partners to realising our aims. [Your Homes Newcastle](#) (YHN), Newcastle's Arms-Length Management Organisation (ALMO), manages 26,700 council homes and acts as an exemplar social landlord. It shows social housing's value as an anchor institution by providing affordable homes for those who need them, and importantly advice and support to sustain those homes.

In 2003, our first Homelessness Strategy made homelessness prevention our key aim and working in partnership our key approach. This requires a culture of proactive 'risk' management: assessing risk at the pre-tenancy stage, providing support to meet risks during a tenancy and to prevent eviction into homelessness if the tenancy is at risk.

We've continued to build on and refine this approach. In 2008 we developed a Prevention from Eviction Protocol, which in 2012, was revised into [Sustaining Tenancies Guidance](#), to encourage landlords to support residents to remain in their home. This approach has helped YHN to reduce evictions by 75% since 2008, to just 50 in 2019-20.

In 2013 we developed our [Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach](#) to support residents to have a stable LIFE – somewhere to live, an income, financial inclusion and employment opportunities.

In 2017 we became one of the Government's three 'early adopter' [Homelessness Prevention Trailblazers](#). In 2019 we established our corporate debt review to respond to problem debt – moving from 'collection to connection'.

In July 2020 our Cabinet approved the Council and YHN leading the wider housing sector to develop an approach of having no evictions into homelessness.

Our long-term approach to homelessness prevention was recognised when Newcastle won the World Habitat 2020 Gold Award. We aim to extend our approach of no evictions into homelessness to all social landlords in the city, and to inspire other places to make the policy and practice changes to support their residents to have a stable LIFE.

Also on joint working, it was felt that it would be helpful if government looked again at allocations legislation to adapt it to current realities, such as the need for family-sized homes, affordability issues and unmet support needs. There was also appetite to work together to co-produce allocations policies. Working together will help partners understand each other's rationale for their allocations policies and work together to find solutions that suit everyone. This will require local authorities and housing associations to continue the conversations and collaborations that have come about during the pandemic. In general, there was a feeling local authorities and housing associations needed to get to know each other better. The NHF have invited delegates interested in regular joint meetings to get in touch.³

Addressing housing market challenges

It was felt that social housing supply and planning issues need to be addressed so that there can be more of a focus on move-on, permanent accommodation of the right type. Temporary accommodation was reported to be often unsuitable, with too much reliance on bed and breakfast and hotel rooms. There were also challenges in some areas around the types of property available (specifically, a lack of one-beds). To remedy this, capital investment is needed, along with revenue funding.

Delegates identified current and forthcoming housing market challenges that make finding property difficult. There was a worry that temporary accommodation used during 'Everyone In' is being converted back to holiday use. This is particularly prevalent in some areas, such as rural and coastal locations like Cornwall. This

³ If you are a local authority or housing association representative and you would like to be involved in these meetings, please email homelessness@housing.org.uk

makes it hard for people in temporary accommodation on low-incomes to afford to move on, for charities to support them to move on, or for housing associations to buy homes to refurbish. People are moving to the countryside out of the city as a result of coronavirus and this has driven up demand and prices in areas where prices can already be high.⁴ This is felt to be compounded by delays in housebuilding and planning difficulties around building enough affordable housing and supported housing. In areas like this, it was felt that rough sleeping was back to the same levels as before coronavirus but it is affecting different population groups.⁵ It was felt that more grant would be needed to solve these issues.

A housing and support solution for people with NRPF

There was strong feeling that there needed to be a resolution for people with NRPF, with clear direction and funding from central government. Local authorities and support providers have worked hard to help people access their rights through immigration advice but there remains a group of individuals for whom the long-term housing outcome is unclear. Without government direction, different authorities will likely act differently, driven by local priorities. Finding a workable housing solution for people with NRPF will be necessary for government to meet its target of ending rough sleeping by 2024.

MHCLG Response

Lorna Fraser, Head of Homelessness Strategy and Policy, MHCLG
Reflecting on the impact of the HRA and what has been achieved through partnerships

It is three years since the Homelessness Reduction Act came into force. Prevention and partnership working are important to central government and this has been the theme of this event. Through the HRA and the partnerships that have been established, people who would have received little or no help before are now being helped. There are challenges with bedding in the Act, data collection and joint working, and MHCLG is taking action to address this.

⁴ See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-56359865>
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/articles/priceseconomicanalysisquarterly/january2021>
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/bulletins/housepriceindex/march2021>
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-57313700>
<https://www.homebuilding.co.uk/news/house-prices>

⁵ See for example <https://www.npi.org.uk/blog/housing-and-homelessness/rough-sleeping-london-back-old-normal-not-building-back-better/>

This event has been helpful to learn about local partnership responses to the pandemic, such as: all partners coming together to rehouse people; housing associations pledging not to evict residents experiencing hardship because of the pandemic; wider evictions prevention; working in a trauma informed way; multiagency working to support people with complex needs; direct lets to rehouse people through Everyone In; prevention panels.

Government intervention

- The pandemic rough sleeping response had supported 37,000 people by the end of January, with over 11,000 in emergency accommodation and over 26,000 already moved on into longer-term accommodation.
- There has been considerable welfare support from government this year, such as the increase in the Local Housing Allowance to 30th percentile, the Universal Credit uplift until September and the furlough scheme.
- Government has increased the Homelessness Prevention Grant for local authorities, investing £310m nationally in 2021/22 to help local authorities manage pressures and take early action to prevent homelessness
- The Rough Sleeping Initiative is continuing and being expanded in 2021/22 and has been shown to reduce rough sleeping by 32% in the areas it funds.
- Government is funding Housing First pilots to help support some of those with the highest needs and other Housing First style interventions through the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI).

Recognising the challenges

- There will still be challenges and increased demand on services e.g. from tenants in the private rented sector. Government is considering how to transition back to usual rental market conditions*. It will be important for local partners to work together to help tenants repay arrears and help find solutions where possible.
- 'Everyone In' is a considerable achievement and represents progress towards our ambition of ending rough sleeping. However it is not the only, nor the most sustainable, long-term means of achieving this ambition. Which is why government announced the Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP) and Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme (RSAP), to help ensure that people accommodated throughout 'Everyone In' do not return to the street.
- We recognise the desire for long-term funding certainty – future funding plans will be set out by the Treasury at the next Spending Review.

- There are pressures in the housing market and regional variation depending on the local market. That is why it is important partners work locally together to address the challenges in their area.
- Government will be setting out its approach to ending rough sleeping in due course, as we update our strategy in line with the manifesto commitment, taking into account the impact of Covid-19, and the response to it.

*Note – on 12th May, Government announced that renters would continue to be supported as national coronavirus restrictions ease, with longer notice periods in place until at least October. As part of a phased approach, notice periods – previously extended to 6 months as an emergency measure during the pandemic – were set at 4 months from 1 June.⁶

Conclusion

The feedback from these workshops capture the positive effects of the pandemic response on partnership working around homelessness between local authorities and housing associations. There is appetite to hold on to partnership as a means to tackle homelessness. We hope the examples in this report will help stakeholders to do that at a local level. There is also appetite to work together to overcome potential barriers to retaining this way of working post-pandemic. To build on this work and mitigate these challenges, the NHF and LGA will continue to share learning and case studies and will seek other ways to bring the various agencies involved in housing and homelessness together. We will also continue to work collectively with government on the support needed to end homelessness.

⁶ Further information can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/support-for-renters-continues-with-longer-notice-periods>