

Current practice

There was some encouraging examples of positive work currently underway to support people into accommodation:

- **Street Buddies** (peer-led outreach) in Westminster have in the last week moved four people who had previously been long-term rough sleeping into accommodation. Three people have been accommodated in 'The Lodge,' which is achieving successful outcomes by providing long-term accommodation without placing conditions on individuals (e.g. making key worker appointments).

"People like it in the Lodge. You're not pressured. You don't have to keep to appointments with key workers else they chuck you out." **Member of National Expert Panel (Westminster)**

- Westminster Council have been adapting accommodation to meet client needs, with learnings from the success of some of the hotel arrangements.
- Some places (e.g. Leeds and Blackpool) have seen increases in the number of people accessing drug and alcohol treatment. In Leeds, frontline workers have been able to keep in regular contact with people as charities and voluntary agencies have made more phones available to them. The work of the Vicars Relief (Durham) has also been utilised to fund isolation packs and appliances (e.g. fridges) for those in shared housing.
- Many people in Leeds have been thriving within accommodation, and are receiving generally appropriate support (though struggling to engage with mental health services). People are concerned now about move-on options, given the historical scarcity of options in the region and recent rapid pace of work undertaken by the local authority, and the implications on people if current levels of support are reduced in the future.

"Just being given the responsibility of the methadone for seven days, when only been trusted with one day. That made them feel really empowered" **Member of National Expert Panel**

"It's really good to see so many people at the same time thriving, and really making the most of this opportunity. One from services, and two, most importantly, from the service users. It's been great to see them adapt to what has been a difficult time for anybody." **Member of National Expert Panel (Leeds)**

"Sometimes other services leave us [Housing, Outreach] to deal with homelessness and rough sleeping, and Social Care and Mental Health services do need to come round the table and understand that this is their responsibility as well." **Member of National Expert Panel (Leeds)**

- There have been increases in offending behaviour in some accommodation (Durham), though the empathetic response by the police was specifically commended.
- In Hertfordshire an organisation supporting young people has increased the amount of coproduction it is doing with young people. It is providing more support on-line, including daily meetings, and has received funds from an organisation and staff making personal donations to provide increased numbers of laptops, dongles and food vouchers.

Regretfully, there were a number of examples of concerning practice underway:

"Instead of putting them in hotels or Bed and Breakfasts they're putting them in a Community Centre. There's no social distancing. They're all sat round a table having dinner. And it's being pressed as something great!" **Member of National Expert Panel**

- In Bedford, to verify whether people are eligible for Hotel accommodation, people are being told to return to rough sleeping sites and wait to be contacted by outreach workers. This has included someone who had just been evicted from a hostel and had not rough slept before.

*“There’s a default suspicion of everyone. There was clear evidence of two people who were clearly in need of the [accommodation] and they were asked to return [to the streets].” **Member of National Expert Panel***

- In Blackpool, although everyone was placed in Bed and Breakfasts, little consideration had been made of the particular dynamics between different people. Regretfully this has led to unnecessary violence. Given relationships the Lived Experience Team have developed with people now accommodated in the hotel, they have been asked by the police and the council to provide support in the aftermath. If they had been given the opportunity to work with local authority initially then the violence could have been prevented.

*“It’s highlighted the need (for co-production), and it should have been done from beginning, the co-production, the talking about it. I know they had to rush, and get them all off the street, but it’s not really rocket science.” **Member of National Expert Panel (Blackpool)***

Considerations for future options and transitional arrangements

Notwithstanding the very difficult current situation, we believe a major positive can arise if the Government harnesses the resources and impetus already invested in helping rough sleepers off the street. As a Panel we have been in discussions about the accommodation and support arrangements that will be needed to ensure people have an offer that meets their individual needs.

- It is clear that work must be done now to understand fully what options will work for people who have been recently accommodated in Bed and Breakfasts and Hotels. If individuals are partners in these decisions, then the likelihood that move-on options will be sustainable is dramatically increased. Some areas are already undertaking some local work to gather this information and plan for the future.

*“The voice of the person who is entering a service does not get to the people who are making the decisions... Is anyone actually having conversations right now, asking what that accommodation looks like, what that support looks like?” **Member of National Expert Panel (Blackpool)***

- The support that is successful will be personalised to ensure it meets the needs of individuals. Current assessments undertaken by the local authority may also need to be revisited given examples of poor decisions currently being made.

*“We need to be working to where the client needs to be, not to where the worker needs to be.” **Member of National Expert Panel (Westminster)***

*“On paper, completely un-housable – physical health, mental health, substance misuse. He’s basically been in his own place for two years effectively, against what the hostels had said... We need to find a way of differentiating between people classed as having high support needs – some are finding accommodation straight away and some do need that support.” **Member of National Expert Panel (Bedford)***

- A range of accommodation options will be needed to ensure there are viable options for individuals to end their homelessness. These include both the private rented sector and social housing, and will need to be accompanied with appropriate support. The support could be provided in line with the non-conditionality aspects of the Housing First models. As we have raised previously, the model

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adopted by the Lodge in London, which provides Bed and Breakfast type accommodation without restrictions relating to engagement with key workers or alcohol use, should be fully explored given its success for particular individuals.

- Given we are now in an era in which the ability to socially distance or isolate are seen as personal and public responsibilities, decisions need to be made as to the appropriateness of homelessness accommodation which is shared and/or overcrowded (such as statutory Temporary Accommodation). Much of the winter provision in recent years has been focused on basic shelter accommodation consisting of mattresses on church floors, but this option is now clearly unviable.

About Expert Link

Expert Link is a peer led organisation championing the voice of people with lived experience of multiple disadvantages, including homelessness, mental health issues, substance misuse, offending and domestic violence and abuse. We advocate for a world where people with lived experience of multiple disadvantages are treated as equal partners in decisions made about their lives.