

Key issues

Current experiences

There have been some positive developments at an individual level, with people who have not been engaged for years taking the opportunity that has been provided to them. Also, some local authorities who have not previously resourced activities relating to rough sleeping have sought out support from particular services.

“[People who have not engaged for years] Some people are doing really well, it’s so nice to see, someone was going for a walk, enjoying himself. A lot of our service users are doing fantastic. That needs to be appreciated.” **Member of National Advisory Panel**

“There are some local authorities who have never given any time or money to rough sleeping have been in touch with rough sleeping.” **Member of National Advisory Panel**

Regretfully, there have been negative developments relating to some individuals well-being. New people are becoming homeless and remaining on the street, and there has been increasing levels of mental health difficulties from some who have been in isolation during the pandemic. There have also been negative attitudes from some working within a local areas response to rough sleeping.

“There are a few guy’s I’ve never seen before.” **Member of National Advisory Panel**

“We’re starting to see the effect of isolation. We’re going to see more and more of that. How many people will lose tenancies, or walk away from them.” **Member of National Advisory Panel**

“One guy self-neglecting really badly. One really struggling with their mental health.” **Member of National Advisory Panel**

“(Worker said) Some people are just born bad.” **Member of National Advisory Panel**

Accommodation provision

As a Panel, we are extremely concerned by the move on options that are being provided in some areas. Some local authorities are taking the approach of using high density housing solutions, such as re-purposed hotels, which are located outside of city centres. By offering little support, little access to support, and spaces which are unsafe and will likely increase tensions and conflict, we believe it is very likely that we will see a return to high level of rough sleeping before the COVID response.

“Already one of the hotels with 50 or 60 people, will move people out into another hotel with 60 to 70. So already there are issues in that area. There’s police and ambulances. They don’t have the correct staff. The individuals there aren’t getting the right support.. It’s going to become a location that our service users are going to be offered and they’ll refuse. They’re not going to want to go somewhere that’s not safe. Its chaos.” **Member of National Advisory Panel**

*“This hotel is being called a ‘mega hostel.’ And they say that if people are begging, they have no right to be begging in the city centre, because there’s a hotel that’s 6 miles away...They’re just putting people out of the way where people can’t see them.” **Member of National Advisory Panel***

Lack of available accommodation has also seen an area resorting to using landlords who have historically provided un-suitable living conditions. There has also been an accompanying pressure on individuals to take up this offer.

*“There are landlords being used that have complaints. Don’t follow up repairs, illegal evictions, etc... I’m concerned about some of the positions that we’re putting people in.” **Member of National Advisory Panel***

*“They’re being told, if you get an offer, accept it, whatever it is.” **Member of National Advisory Panel***

It is also noticeable that the increased resourcing put into the support for those in hotel accommodation has had a detrimental effect on those who have remained rough sleeping through the COVID-19 response.

*“Heavy focus on new homes for those in the hotels. There is so much emphasis on those people that there is no offer for those people still rough sleeping because they’ve ‘refused.’” **Member of National Advisory Panel***

Support provision

Although there has been some positive examples of people receiving opportunities to move-on, where people’s needs are more complex there have been instances of in-sufficient support.

*“The support that I saw looked pretty shit. It’s not enough to deal with the complex issues that our service users have, and are being basically getting fobbed off. It really upset me... You can’t put people in a hotel and try and manage their needs in a hotel by just giving them food. You need a lot more than that. The right support isn’t in place.” **Member of National Advisory Panel***

*“People have been given a fridge. Some pots. But how are they going to cook the food? How are they going to put a meal together? **Member of National Advisory Panel***

Possible drivers for lack of appropriate accommodation and ineffective support

Although there has been much work that has been commended, it is the view of the Panel that there is in-sufficient funding being allocated to local authorities to effectively meet the Government target to end rough sleeping this parliamentary term. It is already apparent that local authority budgets are stretched, and crucially services that are seeing increased demand are facing recruitment freezes.

“It is a worry that local authorities are going to go bankrupt, with their funding being reduced.”
Member of National Advisory Panel

“There’s a lack of money getting through to local authorities. They’ve spent an awful lot and have been left with a deficit.” **Member of National Advisory Panel**

“They did end the funding for our outreach worker.” **Member of National Advisory Panel**

“Staff levels are dropping and they’re being stretched really thin. Recruitment is on hold.”
Member of National Advisory Panel

“It’s all about relationships, relationship building, and many of the people who have been laid off are those people. The local authority think they can take over, but I’m worried they don’t have the skills.” **Member of National Advisory Panel**

Required changes to the support offer

It is critical that given this context, the support that is being funded by central government and local authorities is as effective as possible.

This will require an extensive review of what is needed, not just for those who are able to move out of homelessness in a short time period, but those with more complex requirements whose needs are not met by a standard offer.

This support may require increased support around skills such as cooking meals, and will require staff to be able to provide extended time with people to develop trust and relationships, and crucially equip people with the confidence that if challenges arrive in the future, they will have the tools to manage them. There are examples within the sector, such as Street Buddies, who work in this way which we would be happy to discuss.

“There needs to be more voluntary services like Street Buddies around the country that are time enriched, not ‘you can only have a year then that’s it.’ We know it works because we’ve got so many people in and they’re still in.” **Member of National Advisory Panel**

“[Some] people need to be taught how to live again. The basic skills. How do you learn when everything is done for you?” **Member of National Advisory Panel**

“How many times have I seen the support withdrawn, and they say that they are not engaging, three strikes and out. It’s you that’s not engaging! Some people need intensive support. I know some people have high caseloads, but sometimes I think that is used as an excuse” **Member of National Advisory Panel**

“People need to have the confidence that when they leave the system, they can come back to someone and sort it out. I’ve got this deep seated fear of becoming homeless again, and I know what I’m doing. If I hit the streets tomorrow I’d be off by the day after. But I’ve got the fear. And so what must the people in the hotels feel like? People need to know that things will be alright, and that’s the stuff we need to teach people.” **Member of National Advisory Panel**

The support will need to be delivered in a specific way that is engaging to individuals. This will require particular communication standards that is not othering, or judgmental, and ensures that

people are empowered and their aspirations listened too. In our experience people with lived experience of disadvantage are particularly successful in working in this way.

“If they’ve been on the streets for twenty years, they haven’t paid a bill, they haven’t cooked a meal. So we have to parent them a bit like that. But you can’t be like, ‘this is how you do it,’ else they’ll tell you to f off.” **Member of National Advisory Panel**

“It’s about being a human being – you can go on all the training, but if you haven’t got that quality... Don’t look at people as a service user, talk to people as you’d talk to people in a restaurant.” **Member of National Advisory Panel**

“They’re asking us what people need. But they should be asking them [the clients]! It’s not just budgeting support, it should be more than that. What kind of support is there going to be and who’s going to do that? They’re housing workers but whose going to teach them that? How to make a cup of tea? How to make a cheese sandwich? Because they’re the people who are going to be back on the streets, because it’s easier to beg for a cheese sandwich than to make one.” **Member of National Advisory Panel**

There may also need to be a shift in priority from some of the key services who play a part in the lives of those experiencing homelessness. This means an increased focus on people who have experienced rough sleeping throughout the COVID-19 response, and more buy in from services relating to mental health. We would be happy to support the Ministry with messaging that could make the case for increased involvement of all relevant agencies.

“I’m worried that focus away from people who are rough sleeping and more on hotels....Because the money’s not there.” **Member of National Advisory Panel**

“In regards to homelessness, we need to get everyone round the table and say ‘Its not street outreach’s issue, it’s not housing options issue, it’s not [] City Councils issue, its all of our issue.” **Member of National Advisory Panel**

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.