

General context

Panel members noted that it appears that more people than ever were rough sleeping. Reasons for this included a lack of trust with accommodation offers that are being made to people (particularly entrenched rough sleepers), and poor processes akin to gatekeeping within local authorities leading to people being delayed support they are entitled to.

“It’s busier than ever on the streets, all the doorways filled with boxes from the older generation.”
Member of National Advisory Panel

Nobody is taking up the offer to go in, they’re saying, ‘You go in, you get acclimatised, and then they throw you out when the funding runs out.’” **Member of National Advisory Panel**

“Rough sleepers can’t access until verification. The team doing verification are dragging their heels. There is one example I know where someone bare face lied about it.” **Member of National Advisory Panel**

Changes during Lockdown

Those Panel members who worked within services noted a very different response from services in this second lockdown than the first. Whereas previously many services had dramatically reduced face-to-face contact, this time using PPE and other measures meant that places had maintained a similar service to that provided before the beginning of lockdown.

“For [SERVICIE], nothing has changed. Still going out talking to people. We do reflective practice in person. Get together in person. Going in to the office if want to. Your choice if you want to.” **Member of National Advisory Panel**

“There’s been adaptations since first lockdown. There’s a risk assessment in place, such as wearing PPE, social distancing where possible, using hand sanitizer... A lot of other services have changed dramatically, so we have to spend longer doing things like taking assessments over the phone.” **Member of National Advisory Panel**

There has been some positive practice, particularly within a drug and alcohol services, which had maintained a lot of outreach work and effectively utilised their data gathering mechanisms. There was some cynicism, however, that some positive outcomes achieved through housing options teams were incentivised by the forthcoming street counts.

“We’ve [DRUG AND ALCOHOL SERVICE] adapted really well with the support that has been offered. Workers are going in to hotels. A lot of people who were assessed during the first COVID Lockdown - if people need treating now they don’t need assessing, just triage. Can use telephone in rooms. People on the street are prescribing.” **Member of National Advisory Panel**

“There has been extra flexibility in [CITY], but I think that’s because there’s a street count coming up!”
Member of National Advisory Panel

“We’ve been arguing for ages about accommodating couples, and now [that the street count is coming up] they’ve suddenly found a hotel to do it.” **Member of National Advisory Panel**

“There’s been a lot of money distributed. The Government will not want numbers to go up, especially when there has been a promise to the public that rough sleepers will go down.” **Member of National Advisory Panel**

Although much service delivery has moved online and been positive for some, it continues to be a challenge for many, and should not be considered a silver bullet in providing support.

*“There’s a lot of people who can’t use online. And those that can aren’t using it effectively.” **Member of National Advisory Panel***

Test and Trace is also affecting some parts of the homelessness sector. Public Health were praised for their response to an individual reporting positive in a night shelter. The risk of staff having to self-isolate could be extremely high within some organisations, which would potentially lead to services not being able to operate.

*“The local night shelter had it [Track and Trace]. Council called everyone in, including the plumber! But they just told the guy [who tested positive] to stay in a room. Other people came in and used stuff. They tested everyone, though. Public Health were good.” **Member of National Advisory Panel***

*“As long as carrying out PPE, we advise to turn off app. We talked to [TEAM] – if everyone had the app on, we would have 90% off work.” **Member of National Advisory Panel***

Winter provision

With temperatures falling people are extremely concerned about the support that will be provided to people rough sleeping. Some areas are noting a lack of available accommodation for people. Another area noted that although night shelters will not be operating, there is no alternative support being provided that will meet people’s needs.

*“We’ll be out every evening in severe weather, if there’s an offer. It’s not looking clever on bed spaces. There’s a serious conversation to be had with commissioners.” **Member of National Advisory Panel***

*“There’s no [winter] provision. The COVID provision continues, but it’s not the same people. People would go to church shelter, but this isn’t happening.” **Member of National Advisory Panel***

*“[Last year] Clients were being delivered cold Christmas dinners – one woman just threw it back at them, saying ‘Do you think I’m a dog?’” **Member of National Advisory Panel***

There was little understanding around the Protect programme. Announcements that have been made appear vague, with support only limited to people in areas ‘of high demand’ and prioritising those who ‘were clinically vulnerable.’

*“Not heard much.” **Member of National Advisory Panel***

*“Heard its extra funding. Hoping that [CITY] will be on the list. As with everything, the Government will leave it till the last minute.” **Member of National Advisory Panel***

*“It’s a political thing. So they can say ‘Oh we’re doing something.’ But it’s just for specific people, not in general.” **Member of National Advisory Panel***

It was noted that the request to local authorities to update rough sleeping plans was positive, as was the requirement for Bailiffs to suspend work over Christmas. It is recommended that having updated rough sleeping plans, local areas should ensure that these are publicly available, to support effective scrutiny, as this is not always the case.

*“They have to update rough sleeping plan. It would be good if it had to be posted up locally too.” **Member of National Advisory Panel***

*“Bailiffs can’t do anything over Christmas period. What counts as Christmas?” **Member of National Advisory Panel***

Suspension of derogation

The suspension of derogation scheme has been broadly welcomed, and we urge that this is extended. However, there is concern that the scheme does not recognise the reality of rough sleeping for those who are being supported. The vast majority of people experiencing rough sleeping have experienced traumatic incidents, so moving into employment within 12 weeks is unrealistic. However, the fear that people will lose their accommodation means that workers are having to hurry people into gaining employment.

*“The derogation scheme is a farce and a headache.” **Member of National Advisory Panel***

*“It’s almost as if we’re treating non-British nationals differently in regard to the circumstances [of being homeless]. We all agree people [experiencing homelessness are] experiencing trauma, but the derogation scheme doesn’t recognise that.” **Member of National Advisory Panel***

*“They’re given 12 weeks in accommodation, then it’s get a job. It’s bad practice to get workers to have employment conversations when it’s not suitable. We have guys who’ve been rough sleeping for years, who are doing brilliant, and now we’re hurrying them, because we know that they could lose their accommodation.” **Member of National Advisory Panel***

*“I think it’s a get out, the derogation scheme, so they can turn the public. Will probably be used as propaganda in 12 months’ time.” **Member of National Advisory Panel***

*“When I came off the streets for the first time, that was the first thought [getting a job]. Going in to a meeting – they didn’t speak about accommodation, they just spoke about getting a job.” **Member of National Advisory Panel***

*“We’re hoping that going in to severe weather, it [suspension of derogation] will be extended.” **Member of National Advisory Panel***

Implications of Councils declaring Bankruptcy

There has been attention on specific local authorities declaring bankruptcy, and much speculation that many others will follow. There is concern amongst the Panel that the many non-statutory services that are crucial to the countries response to homelessness, such as some drug and alcohol services and outreach, will be completely stripped back. This will have a huge impact on the Government’s pledge to end rough sleeping by the end of this Parliament.

*“We’re not allowed to spend any money on detox – have to go to the Receivers!” **Member of National Advisory Panel***

*“What’s going to happen to outreach teams?” **Member of National Advisory Panel***

*“If we’ve got soup kitchens and that doing outreach, do we need to be paying services to do that.” **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

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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.