

There have been some really positive outcomes for people who have been recently accommodated.

*“They’re coping really well. Just amazed by them and the staff.” **Member of National Advisory Panel***

Additionally, our discussion focussed around current concerns relating to accommodating people during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the suitability of the private rented sector as move-on options for those that have been recently accommodated.

The following provides a short summary of the discussion.

## **Current concerns**

### **Negative treatment towards rough sleepers and those recently accommodated.**

As we have highlighted previously, some people have been in receipt of negative treatment, whether that be from the public or otherwise. Examples we have encountered this week include people having their property stolen and negative public sentiment.

*“They were sleeping outside the [SHOP] in [SHOPPING CENTRE]. They’re gear was chucked away... They’re getting hassled, the entrenched sleepers.” **Member of National Advisory Panel***

*“[QUOTING SOMEONE ELSE] ‘You’re not feeding them are you? [...] You’re not giving them free food as well are you? I had to work all my life and they’re giving them free food, free accommodation.’ [...] The windows in the B n B’s were open, so the clients would have heard this. So that rather upset me.” **Member of National Advisory Panel***

### **Potential introduction of conditions**

We are concerned that some conditions will be introduced for those in hotel accommodation, such as requirements around meeting with key workers or engaging in meaningful activity. For many who were rough sleeping it is these requirements which meant that they were not able to engage in previous accommodation offers, and so they are likely to return to the streets. If there is a desire to ensure people remain in accommodation, models such as the Housing First should be expanded to meet the requirements of this group.

### **Increased number of people approaching the local authority leading to poor decisions**

The number of people who are approaching local authorities is increasing, partly due to the increase in accommodation being made available, but also because sofa surfing is no longer viable with concerns around social distancing. We are concerned that the resulting increase in demand is leading to some people not being assessed effectively, so those who potentially should have been deemed Priority Need are not receiving a main duty offer.

*“Due to COVID-19, and people being scared of that, people are no longer saying you can stay due to COVID, and with extra accommodation being available we are seeing extra people reaching out for help.” **Member of National Advisory Panel***

*“There is a frustration for me in [CITY] as we have become less flexible than before, so we are getting a lot of Not In Priority Need decisions... there seems to be a concerted effort to not be as flexible, perhaps because of a concern with how many people they’ve already got in the B n B’s.” **Member of National Advisory Panel***

## Multiple disadvantages

In one area a high number of people were either being restricted from hotels, or refused offers - potentially due to a lack of support around mental health difficulties.

*“More complex service users are being kicked out of hotels, because they’re not being able to manage or due to behavioural problems. And then they get put in another hotel. And then there’s no hotels or Bed and Breakfasts left. Where do them people go now? How do you offer them support? For me there’s a lot more mental health and behavioural needs, and the support for them is not there right now.”*

**Member of National Advisory Panel**

Further, some people are being released from prison without appropriate access to support.

*“People who are being released from prison, a lot of them are being released NFA (No Fixed Abode). So no phones to contact them to do assessments with, any type of treatment assessment with. No way to contact them. They’re going to be in the city, rough sleeping.”*

**Member of National Advisory Panel**

Finally, some people are not engaging with accommodation offers because they are unsure they will be supported around substance misuses difficulties.

*“Not wanting to go into hotels, Bed and Breakfasts, because of their drug and alcohol use. They’d rather stay on the streets where they know they can score, where they know they can hideaway.”*

**Member of National Advisory Panel**

## Co-production and lack of transparency

Although we are potentially entering a new phase of the COVID-19 response (signalled by the announcement of the taskforce led by Dame Louise Casey) there is confusion about what the move-on options will be for people recently accommodated. Specifically, there does not appear to have been routine engagement with those with lived experience of multiple disadvantages in determining what the local and national response should be, or consideration for those with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF).

*“It seems like the local authority is just coming up with a plan. They’re not talking to anyone.”*

**Member of National Advisory Panel**

*“We’ve spoke to a few people. They’re concerns are they’re getting moved on and they’re not being given much of a choice. So they’re sort of getting told, there’s a bed at [LOCATION], we’re moving you there... I’ll be contacting Housing, with the concerns... it’s got to be done. If you don’t do it now, they’re going to be homeless in three or four weeks anyway.”*

**Member of National Advisory Panel**

*“They’re seems to be confusion about move-on from the Covid hotels...They’re seems to be a lack of transparency, and people don’t seem to know that should know. I’m concerned that we’re just going to have a load of people put out the door.”*

**Member of National Advisory Panel**

*“There is literally no strategy for those people (people with No Recourse to Public Funds) - even the private sector (if it were viable) relies upon people being able to claim benefits.”*

**Member of National Advisory Panel**

*“It’s very easy to look at this as numbers. We’ve got this number in temporary accommodation, we’ve got this number rough sleeping. Come on to the street and deliver those decisions to people, and I do wonder whether they’d still come to the same decision.”*

**Member of National Advisory Panel**

## Viability of the private rented sector

It is extremely positive that such a large number of people have recently been accommodated in Bed and Breakfast, Hostels and Hotels over the past few months. This presents a massive opportunity to effectively support people to meet their aspirations and end rough sleeping.

We understand that the Government will not want to see people returning to the streets, and so may see the Private Rented Sector as the move-on option for many. If this is the case, a number of factors will need to be considered:

- Financial support with housing: Currently there are huge discrepancies between the local housing allowance and the cost of renting in many parts of the country, meaning that the private rented sector is inaccessible to those accessing benefits. Given the inability for many to socially distance in shared housing, the shared accommodation rate for those under 35 is also no longer appropriate for many. **Adjustments will therefore need to be made to benefit levels to ensure that the PRS is genuinely affordable.**
- Person led principles: The recent success in accommodating so many people has in part been due to the provision of a genuine offer of accommodation, and a reduction in the rules and restrictions that have often been a part of traditional homeless offers (see previous notes relating to The Lodge and some of the private hotel provision). There are a number of Housing First pilots and projects across the country that are also adopting this model of working and are having success – giving people genuine choice, unconditional support and accommodation, recognising peoples talents rather than deficits, and allowing people to lead the lives they want to lead. **These principles<sup>1</sup> and the success that comes from them should be transferred into the private sector where this is being used as a move-on option for those currently accommodated in temporary house**
- Co-production: If people are not involved in decisions about the accommodation type and the support that may be required to go alongside it, then given historic evidence we would expect these tenancies are highly unlikely to be maintained. A shift in working will be required in some areas to ensure that people are given genuinely control – a practice that is stipulated in parts of the Homeless Reduction Act Code of Guidance and is undertaken by successful projects across the country. **Work should be undertaken to ensure that in every local authority decisions are made with people experiencing homelessness at the core. The rich expertise that people with lived experience of homelessness have should also be harnessed at a strategic level to ensure local responses to ending rough sleeping are effective.**

*“If you want people off the street you need to give people meaningful choice and decent accommodation and some sort of security. Without that, I think the whole of the last few months will unravel pretty quickly.”* **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.

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/principles-housing-first>