

## Tackling homelessness together

### Submission from Expert Link, May 2019

#### Introduction

1. Expert Link is a national organisation with a network of groups and people around the country, predominately with lived experience of multiple disadvantage. Our aim is to bring hope and change to those suffering multiple disadvantage, by amplifying their voices.
2. Our network is diverse, brought together by a programme of inspirational training “Being the Difference”. Some of the networks are informal groups of people with lived experience, while others are pre-existing groups with funding and a clear focus.
3. We welcome the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) focus on exploring local accountability structures and Homelessness Reduction Boards. Our submission focuses on the importance of ensuring that people with lived experience serve as equal partners on Homelessness Reduction Boards, and how to effectively achieve this.
4. The submission has been developed by members from across the Expert Link network of people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage. In bringing together people with a range of experiences we provide knowledge of the causes of homelessness and the complexities of local responses.
5. Expert Link has recently received funding from the National Lottery Community Fund to explore with our existing networks of groups the various ways that they are working and their successes. We would be happy to provide the MHCLG with ongoing findings from this work as they relate to improving accountability of local responses to homelessness and ensuring full inclusion in key decision making mechanisms.
6. **Expert Link would welcome elaborating further on any of the information provided.**

#### Question 13: Who should be members of Homelessness Reduction Boards?

*“Services should operate authentically within the principle that people using the services are fully able to contribute to society. If their service users are capable of being competent, creative and effective people, then why on earth would they not be encouraged to directly control how services are run?”* **Member of the Expert Link network**

7. **Expert Link recommendation: To ensure that Homelessness Reduction Boards fully understand local responses to homelessness, and have sufficient accountability, their membership should include people with lived experience of homelessness.**
8. **Expert Link recommendation: People with lived experience of homelessness should be treated equally to members from health, social care, welfare, probation, police and crime and housing. All members of Homelessness Reduction Boards should work together in a true partnership.**

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9. The purpose of Homelessness Reduction Boards should be to develop and enact a strategic approach to prevent, reduce and respond to homelessness so that everyone has a safe and truly affordable home and support to keep it. Possible objectives could include the delivery of local and national homelessness strategies and ensuring services and support work effectively by using co-production approaches with people with lived experience.

*“Funding should only be offered to services who are effectively including input from people with lived experience of the issue that the service exists to address, and funders should analyse input carefully to ensure it is not just tokenistic.” **Member of the Expert Link network***

### Meeting their purpose

10. Decisions made by Homelessness Reduction Boards will therefore need to be informed by detailed knowledge of homelessness and the local response. People who have experienced homelessness and/or used services will have a huge amount of knowledge about what is needed.

*“They bring value and real life facts to what is needed to know.” **Member of the Expert Link network***

*“Humans are not very good at grasping the breadth of difficulties that being homeless entails unless they have experienced it first hand (or indeed any form of suffered and social exclusion). That means well-meaning people miss important things, and this means that services are often designed and run in ways which ignore important facets of the needs of people who have lost their home. This then leads to ineffective services blaming homeless people for the poor outcomes, rather than looking at shortcomings of the actual service as being the reason outcomes are so poor. People with lived experience are absolutely crucial to enable services to self-evaluate completely holistically.” **Member of the Expert Link network***

### Ensuring legitimacy

11. Where the response to homelessness within a local area more closely matches what people experiencing homelessness want, as opposed to what officials and professionals may assume they need, then more can be achieved to end homelessness.

*“They know how to approach people know what people are going through that's why they make very the perfect people to know how to promote support contact and be a sponsor for someone who they're helping.” **Member of the Expert Link network***

*“I often reflect, would we expect a food critic to provide constructive feedback about a meal without first tasting the food. Perhaps they could comment/review on many things about the meal, however by tasting and experiencing the food first hand it provides another dimension of useful info/improvements/authenticity about the review.” **Member of the Expert Link network***

12. Having people with lived experience of homelessness as members of Homelessness Reduction Boards will be required to ensure the decisions made have ‘buy-in’ from the people that are affected by the decisions that are made. Boards will have legitimacy, and people who experience homelessness in an area can trust that a response has been co-designed by other people in the same situation.

*“They can give advice on giving information when it's needed; speaking to the people in [City] they have a community and have a lot of knowledge.” **Member of the Expert Link network***

*“It would be great if the board was made up of vast majority of people with lived experience, so they can chair coordinate set agendas and topics etc...”* **Member of the Expert Link network**

### **Inspiring change**

13. Local homelessness services, who will be held to account by Homelessness Reduction Boards, run better where people with lived experience of homelessness work with others to make key decisions about how they run. This process builds confidence and inspires people - staff can feel more motivated and positive and people who use services feel valued and useful and this can empower them to live fuller and happier lives. To ensure affective accountability, Homelessness Reduction Boards will also need to demonstrate this approach, further inspiring effective change in the sector to end homelessness.

*“There is overwhelming evidence that co designed/produced solutions in the reduction of any issue is better when it comes from individuals with lived experience or who are experiencing the issue. This allows for a far more thought through, comprehensive solution, with a greater degree of empathy and understanding that comes with the experience.”* **Member of the Expert Link network**

*“Co-production has been proven to work and has a genuine element to it. Systematic psychology and creating the environment and capacity for change is essential to both organization and that of the person.”* **Member of the Expert Link network**

### **New thinking is required**

14. With homelessness in all its forms having risen dramatically since 2010, it is clear that new approaches to ending homelessness need to be taken.

*“We can’t keep doing the same thing and expecting things to change it’s about time they tried something different and get the Lived Experience voice on all boards”* **Member of the Expert Link network**

*“Lived Experience will know what is working and what is not. System often is trying to do the right thing, but it is general TO people rather than with. It would be a reality check and could challenge the way we think and do things, “We keep repeating the same things we just dress them up differently and call them different names however the results are the same”* **Member of the Expert Link network**

## **Question 14: What is needed to make Homelessness Reduction Boards effective (e.g. guidance, legislation, incentives etc)?**

*“Inclusion and parity of esteem is a good start.”* **Member of the Expert Link network**

*“Specific criteria within tenders/ funding around coproduction, outcomes that focus on co-design and greater emphasis outlined in governance.”* **Member of the Expert Link network**

15. **Expert Link recommends: To make Homelessness Reduction Boards effective, people with lived experience of homelessness and other members should be fully supported to make decisions in partnership.**

16. Although people with lived experience of homelessness are already members of some Boards across the country (e.g. Homeless Link, Just Life, Poplar Harca and Thames Reach) for some areas this will be a new way of working.

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*“We so impressed the NHS with information we gleaned from meetings we had around the country and the presentation that we did for them that they invited us on to be involved in the Liaison & Diversion Project in trying to reduce the amount of offenders going in to Prison, Lived Experience Team members were then invited along to sit on their Programme Board meetings.” **Member of the Expert Link network***

## Training

17. Training and support will be required for all members of a Homelessness Reduction Board, including those with lived experience of homelessness. The training and support should look to instil genuine trust and respect for members with lived experience and other members, and ensure that everyone has the mind-set and skills that are needed to be effective.

18. Training and support should include:

- Mentoring so that people feel empowered to speak up and get involved in the conversations.
- Training to understand the different roles and functions within the Board.
- Training to ensure the whole Board work together.
- Knowledge sharing on what it's like to experience homelessness.

*“Boards/Funders/Commissioners should understand and recognise the benefits of working with and creating genuine dialogue with partners who have lived experience.” **Member of the Expert Link network***

19. This investment in the people who are providing knowledge and skills to the Board will support people to recognise their strengths and build their confidence in taking part.

## Inclusive working

20. There should be equal opportunity for all to be heard, with input from everyone involved. Work will need to be done to ensure that people know they are being listened to.

21. Consideration should be given to the language that is used. To allow all to take part there should be no acronyms or jargon - language should be used that everyone can understand.

*“Through endeavouring to embrace lived experience in the charity I work for, I note that competent people with lived experience of homelessness find it incredibly daunting to engage with charity operations due to language, settings and modes of discussion that socially included people take for granted, but are arguably only constructed to perpetuate the myth that socially included people have all the answers when it is very clear that they don't, and often operate from a 'one-up, one-down' relationship with people using the services that by definition keep those using services excluded.” **Member of the Expert Link network***

22. Importantly, Homeless Reduction Boards should recognise peoples' input and not consider the opportunity as a privilege for people with lived experience. People will require compensation for their work, and this may mean financial compensation.

## Honesty and legitimacy

23. There should be honesty from all members of the Homelessness Reduction Board about what can and cannot be achieved, the limits to what can be done, with all aware of any limitations of the Boards remit.

24. There may be concerns that ensuring all voices are heard may mean it takes longer to take decisions or make changes. However, any decisions that are made will have considerably more legitimacy and buy-in from everyone concerned

*“Quite often the engagement of those with experience can be challenging due to the very nature of any being unsettled and behaviours that are attached to it, however this should not be a barrier and greater financial resource and support in sharing experience and best practice should be made available to those who wish to ensure that people with lived experience can participate fully on Boards.” **Member of the Expert Link network***

### **Recruitment of members**

25. People with lived experience of homelessness should be involved in the recruitment of members to the Homelessness Reduction Board. This will support the development of a Board with a wide range of understanding and decision making powers.

- 26. Expert Link would be glad to elaborate further on any of the information provided.**

### **Contact**

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