

The following provides a short summary of this week's discussion.

Recent experiences

There have been some positive developments over the last week.

There appears to be very few people accommodated in Bed and Breakfasts / Hotels / Hostels who have COVID-19, many people who have been accommodated are coping with the current conditions (though some face negative treatment), and some local areas have engaged in productive partnership working.

“Leeds is pulling together. The support services and partnership working is pretty good. The decision making is quick, whether that be positive or negative.” **Member of National Advisory Panel (Leeds)**

“There's a majority of people that are in temporary accommodation and they're actually capitalising on it. Moving into recovery and feeling like they've got a future. And yet they're being treated quite negatively by the authorities and the people who own the properties.” **Member of National Advisory Panel (Exeter)**

However, there were a few areas of concern, for example begging has increased, particularly around areas outside of city centres where larger supermarkets are open. Two main areas of concern relate to accessing support, and uncertainty of future funding.

Accessing support

With the ending of some traditional models of face-to-face activities, providers have moved some operations online. However, this has not in some instances met the levels of support provided previously.

“There's a lot of stuff not happening. There's things you can't do on Zoom and internet. There's a big gap in not connecting face to face.” **Member of National Advisory Panel (Exeter)**

Further, some approaches have focussed solely on moving people off the street (as part of the emergency response), with support non-existent for some people. This is of particular concern for those who have moved into accommodation after extended periods on the street.

“We are worried that they're going to walk, and they're not getting the support and help that they need.” **Member of National Advisory Panel (Westminster)**

“Individuals that haven't been engaged for years... what support are they getting with budgeting their money, cooking their food? You know the basic life skills. They need to be getting that support now, because ultimately they're going to need it when they stop getting the 24-hour support they're getting now.” **Member of National Advisory Panel (Leeds)**

The focus on crisis response to COVID-19 is also having knock-on effect with previously critical initiatives being dropped as workers are re-deployed to cover essential NHS functions.

“People with more complex needs are still continuing to end up in the city centre, rough sleeping or begging. There was a trauma informed approach, but that got pulled away because of the COVID, and the nurses got pulled away to work in the hospital.” **Member of National Advisory Panel (Leeds)**

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Although many are doing well, for others the circumstances are having a detrimental effect, particularly those with substance dependency issues and some who had not previously been engaged with services.

“Some people are struggling to deal with withdrawal symptoms, obviously drug supply routes are not happening. [To support] They are managing to medicate people with alcohol dependency, which is not ideal, but you have to manage people’s wellbeing.” **Member of National Advisory Panel (Exeter)**

“Some have intentionally made themselves homeless because they can’t handle the way it’s been managed, they’re not used to sleeping rough and living that chaotic lifestyle, and then being managed in B n B and effectively being treated like cattle.” **Member of National Advisory Panel (Exeter)**

Uncertainty

There are currently high levels of uncertainty experienced by providers, workers, and people experiencing rough sleeping.

There is the perception amongst many that there is no clear plan or strategy, at a national or local level, of what will happen once contracts with hotels expire. The funds that have been allocated to local authorities do not appear to be sufficient, or ring-fenced to support people experiencing homelessness.

“What happens when they’re discharged from the hotels? They’re doesn’t seem to be any pathways for when this goes away, and I have grave concerns that people are going to end up street homeless.” **Member of National Advisory Panel (Croydon)**

“Great fear of what happens when the money runs out. The local authority are strapped.” **Member of National Advisory Panel (Exeter)**

Due to this uncertainty, people are concerned that opportunities will be lost to support people with their aspirations. This is also leading to resentment amongst many.

“It’s really sad when people are in a prime opportunity to get the help and support and the intentions they need for recovery, and for that to be pulled from under them. It’s a great concern.” **Member of National Advisory Panel (Exeter)**

“In their words, it’s ‘What’s going to happen to us after this? Are they going to forget about us, like they usually do? Are we going to be back on the street? We’re the last they think about.’” **Member of National Advisory Panel (Blackpool)**

“They’re all worried sick...They’ve had no communication. They’re travelling back to Fareham just to talk to me. They just have no idea.” **Member of National Advisory Panel (Fareham)**

Future support

There has been some great work getting people into temporary accommodation to support them to self-isolate. However challenges remain around the support that people are receiving now (for example, some hotels are not providing free Wi-Fi which is critical for much support), and what this will look like in appropriate ‘socially-distanced’ settings.

We will be exploring in detail next week what appropriate support should look like, but some initial takeaways from the group include:

- It is still possible to conduct support at an appropriate social distance. People could explore doing more work outside, for example, which has been the case in Blackpool and Westminster

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- It is critical that for whatever approach is taken, the local authorities and providers do the basics right and make sure that the support is person centred, and people have a real choice.

*“Ensure local authorities are doing the basics right – engaging individuals around their needs and what they want.” **Member of National Advisory Panel (Leeds)***

- There is a great deal of wisdom amongst people with lived experience on how to engage effectively. This should be utilised and promoted nationally

*“I don’t find it that difficult to engage with clients... it’s easy to ensure it is in a managed way and in a safe way.” **Member of National Advisory Panel (Leeds)***

*“You need to put the humanity back... Make a cup of tea. Have the time for people... Just be human. Put the humanity back and treat them as a person.” **Member of National Advisory Panel (Westminster)***

- A common framework should be developed around support, but with flexibility for local specifics. This could take the form of initial guidance outlining key principles, but with further resources available to steer areas.

*“There needs to be some sort of guidance or advice given out to smaller charities, larger charities on how they can work 1-1 with clients that are in their accommodation at the moment.” **Member of National Advisory Panel (Westminster)***

I hope this information is helpful. We will be meeting again next week - if there are any specific questions yourself or your team would like us to gather evidence on, please let us know and we will share these with our Panel.

I look forward to hearing from you and all the best

David Ford
Founder and CEO Expert Link

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.