Preventing homelessness before it begins

Case studies from the homelessness sector
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Produced by
The Homeless Link Research Team, January 2018

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Introduction

This report presents analysis of data gathered from three sources: Homeless Link’s call for evidence on innovative responses to homeless prevention¹; qualitative semi-structured telephone interviews with ten service providers²; and case studies with five service providers who responded to our call for evidence.

The report begins by providing some context on the history of homeless prevention in England, before exploring different ways of categorising homeless prevention services. The report then moves on to explore a range of innovative work being undertaken by the homelessness sector to prevent people from becoming homeless. We then explore the key challenges that are presented by this work, from the perspective of service ethos, set up and delivery, and the wider political and economic environment. Although the sector is able to innovate and to provide high quality and successful services it does not exist in a vacuum and policy decisions, the housing market and other external factors also impact on how services can prevent homelessness. The report then draws together key success factors highlighted by organisations participating in this research. Finally, we present key findings and conclusions.

¹ Homeless Link put out a Call for Evidence on the Homeless Link website in August/September 2016 asking for examples of innovative responses to move on. We received 64 responses, of which 63 were usable.
² Indicated through responses to Homeless Link’s Annual Review 2016, or by responding to our call for evidence
Background

There has been a growing recognition of the importance of preventing homelessness across Government, Local Authorities and within the homelessness sector. Increasingly, it is understood that failing to prevent homelessness is not only costly for the public purse, but hugely damaging and destructive for individuals who end up homeless.

The approach to homelessness prevention in England

Local authorities have an obligation to prevent, as well as to respond to homelessness. This is longstanding both in law and in good practice advice. Ever since the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977, local authorities have been legally required to take reasonable steps to prevent people who are under imminent threat of homelessness, and classed as ‘in priority need’, from losing their existing accommodation. Since 1997, central Government has increasingly encouraged local authorities to adopt a more pro-active stance in tackling homelessness. Under the Homelessness Act 2002 local housing authorities must have a strategy for preventing homelessness in their district. This strategy must apply to everyone at risk of homelessness, not just those who fall within a priority need group for the purposes of Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended).

Local Authorities have also been encouraged to take steps to relieve homelessness in cases where someone is found to be homeless, or at risk of homelessness, but is not owed a duty to secure accommodation. According to Shelter, while many local authorities accept the spirit as well as the letter of the law, some have persisted in complying only with the legal minimum, in some cases because of the volume of demand. Shelter concludes:

“The legislation has embedded a welcome – but limited – safety net, generally offering assistance only when homelessness is imminent, or has already happened, rather than targeting activity at a much earlier stage. We must move away from a crisis-driven approach to prevention to a more strategic and targeted approach.”

The prevention of homelessness was a stated priority under the Coalition Government and in 2012 the Ministerial Working Group on Homelessness published Making Every Contact Count: A joint approach to preventing homelessness. This report brought together the Government’s commitments to:

- tackle troubled childhoods and adolescence, including promoting innovative approaches to youth homelessness;
- improve health, including improving outcomes for homeless people with dual substance misuse, and mental health needs; and helping improve hospital discharge practices;
- reduce involvement in crime;
- improve skills; employment; and financial advice;
- and to pioneer social funding for homelessness – through a Social Impact Bond for rough sleepers and support to local commissioners to turn social investment propositions into a reality.

The current context

“We know there is no single cause of homelessness but I am determined to do more to prevent it happening by supporting those facing challenging issues like domestic abuse, addiction, mental health issues or redundancy, whilst also being prepared to offer a safety net to catch those who might simply be struggling to get by.” (Theresa May, Prime Minister, 17 October 2016)

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3 The priority need categories are set out in Part 7 the Housing Act 1996, and were amended in 2002. The categories include households with dependent children, households where a woman is pregnant, and people who are vulnerable due to old age or physical/mental illness.
4 Shelter (June 2016) Preventing Homelessness: Why a strategic approach and early intervention can stop people losing their homes, p. 2.
The current Government has stated its commitment to investing in and supporting work to prevent homelessness, and this is reflected both in the funding that has been made available, and in suggested changes to policy.

In October 2016 the Government announced a £40 million homelessness prevention programme focusing on the underlying issues that can lead to homelessness. The programme includes: £10 million in Social Impact Bonds to help long-term rough sleepers with the most complex needs; £10 million for targeted support for those at imminent risk of sleeping rough or those new to the streets; £20 million for Prevention Trailblazers with local authorities piloting new initiatives to tackle homelessness in their area.

The Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer areas are expected to go over and above what they are funded to do through existing Homelessness Prevention Grant funding. Trailblazer funded areas are expected to develop new approaches to early intervention, and to work with a wider group of people i.e. not just those deemed to be in priority need and therefore owed a duty by their Local Authority. The overall Homelessness Prevention Programme focuses on:

- Universal prevention: timely support for all about housing and financial issues.
- Targeted prevention: better identifying those at risk and providing early interventions.
- Crisis relief: effective interventions and advice to resolve a crisis.
- Recovery: accommodation and support targeted at helping people to exit homelessness rapidly.
- Move-on support: longer term support to sustain independent living.

Most recently, and significantly, the Homelessness Reduction Act has been introduced which strengthens the focus and responsibilities at a local level to the prevention of homelessness.


The Act places a new duty on local authorities to help prevent the homelessness of all families and single people, regardless of priority need, who are eligible for assistance and threatened with homelessness. The Act signals a significant shift from previous legislation in that it puts renewed focus and responsibility on preventing homelessness earlier on, with requirements for a wider group of public and voluntary bodies to work together in fulfilling these duties. The Bill also presents an expansion of the rights of single homeless people who are not currently owed a duty. It aims to prevent non-vulnerable single people from being turned away from a local authority without meaningful assistance. It is hoped that, in its implementation, this legislation will engender a move away from a crisis-driven approach to prevention to a more strategic and targeted one.

Key measures in the Act include:

- An extension of the period during which an authority should treat someone as threatened with homelessness from 28 to 56 days, and clarification of the action an authority should take when someone applies for assistance having been served with a section 8 (1) or section 21 (2) notice. These provisions represent a shift in focus to early intervention, and aim to encourage local housing authorities to act quickly and proactively, addressing some concerns that some previously only intervened at crisis point.
- A new duty to prevent homelessness for all eligible applicants threatened with homelessness, regardless of priority need. This extends the help available to people not in priority need, with local housing authorities supporting them to either stay in their accommodation or help them find somewhere to live and should mean fewer households reach a crisis situation.
- A new duty to relieve homelessness for all eligible homeless applicants, regardless of priority need. This help could be, for example, the provision of a rent deposit or debt advice. Those who have a priority need will be provided with interim accommodation whilst the Local Housing Authority carries out the reasonable steps.

7 This research was conducted prior to the Homelessness Reduction Act becoming an Act of Parliament.
• A new duty on public services to notify a local authority if they come into contact with someone they think may be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. It is hoped that this measure will ensure that a person’s housing situation is considered when they come into contact with wider public services, and encourage public services to build strong relationships based on local need and circumstances.

• Requirement to provide everybody with free advice and information on preventing homelessness, securing accommodation, rights, available support and how to access it.

• All eligible people will now receive an assessment of the circumstances that caused them to become homeless or threatened with homelessness; what accommodation would be suitable and crucially, what support they may need to obtain and keep this accommodation. Based on this assessment, they will get a personalised housing plan, outlining the steps individual and council must take to get or keep suitable accommodation. Other services can be involved in developing and agreeing reasonable steps and in delivering the personalised housing plan.

English councils will receive a total of £72.7 million in funding across 2017/18 and 2018/19 to help them meet the costs of the legislation. Additional money may be made available for those in high pressure areas to manage the transition as the new duties take effect.

There will be a review of the implementation of the Act, including the resourcing of it and how it is working in practice, after two years.

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8 For more information about the act, please see our Webinar [https://www.homeless.org.uk/webinar-homelessness-reduction-act](https://www.homeless.org.uk/webinar-homelessness-reduction-act) and see the MHCLG Code of Guidance [https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities)

What do we mean by homelessness prevention?

A succinct definition of homelessness prevention is provided by the Government which states: "Homelessness prevention means providing people with the ways and means to address their housing and other needs to avoid homelessness." 

Categorising homelessness prevention services

Homelessness prevention can be helpfully categorised as primary, secondary and tertiary.

- Primary homelessness prevention involves action to avoid a household becoming homelessness. This is applied to activities that reduce the risk of homelessness among the general population, or large parts of the population. It is at this level of prevention that general housing policy (supply, access and affordability), and the overall ‘welfare settlement’ (such as the availability of income benefits, housing benefits, employment protection and so on) are most relevant.

- Secondary prevention is defined as action to prevent future homelessness from occurring. It is focused on people at high potential risk of homelessness because of their characteristics (for example, those with an institutional care background) or due to their experience of crisis situations which are likely to lead to homelessness in the near future (such as eviction or relationship breakdown).

- Tertiary homelessness prevention involves measures targeted at people who have already been affected by homelessness. The preventative emphasis at this level is more often focused on minimising ‘repeat homelessness’, that is, avoiding the occurrence of entirely new homelessness episodes.

The Government’s Code of Guidance further identifies three stages at which homelessness can be prevented:

- Early identification. Identifying people who are at risk of homelessness and ensuring that accommodation and any necessary support is available to them.

- Pre-crisis intervention. This can take the form of: advice and mediation services; proactive interventions, such as negotiating with landlords to enable people to retain their tenancies; and targeted services at known risk points, such as those leaving care, prison or the armed forces.

- Preventing recurring homelessness. Ensuring tenancy sustainment is central to preventing repeat homelessness where there is an underlying need for support to keep someone in their home.

Table 1 below presents an analysis of the stage at which the services participating in this research were targeted. The category ‘primary homelessness prevention’ was added to the Government stages of homeless prevention in order to capture services that reduce the risk of homelessness among the general population, but do not target groups at special risk of homelessness. Please note that a number of services provided interventions in more than one area and so the total count is greater than the total number of participating organisations.

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12 For more examples of work undertaken in the homelessness sector, please see Homeless Link’s report examining the role of day centres in preventing repeat homelessness as part of its national Day Centres project. https://www.homeless.org.uk/connect/blogs/2018/jan/26/day-centres-and-homelessness-prevention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Primary homeless prevention</th>
<th>Early identification</th>
<th>Pre-crisis intervention</th>
<th>Preventing recurring homelessness</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Count of services</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a % of total services</td>
<td>6.35%</td>
<td>49.21%</td>
<td>69.84%</td>
<td>23.81%</td>
<td>12.70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interventions delivered to people who are currently homeless, but which focus on solving a current housing need and preventing the escalation or continuation of homelessness, rather than on providing support to prevent recurring homelessness are classified as ‘pre-crisis interventions’. These services provided activities that sit within the definition of ‘pre-crisis’, for example providing advice to people who are sofa surfing to enable them to quickly access accommodation in the private rented sector through a rent deposit scheme.
How are services meeting the challenge of preventing homelessness?

Models of Homelessness Prevention

There is limited evidence about the effectiveness of homelessness prevention interventions and approaches. This is mainly because the outcome of homelessness prevention (i.e. not becoming homeless) is unobservable and immeasurable. The most comprehensive review of homelessness prevention schemes in the UK was published in 2007, and found limited monitoring and evidence of cost-effectiveness for homelessness prevention interventions. Without specific evaluation of individual prevention services, it is not possible to show which approaches achieve better outcomes than others. However, the review identified that the most widely adopted approaches to homelessness prevention are the following:

- ‘Enhanced’ housing advice – aimed at helping households to gain access to, or to retain private or social rented tenancies. Housing advice work often includes liaison with private landlords, and may also have an ‘outreach’ dimension targeted at vulnerable groups.
- Rent deposit schemes, or other schemes to increase access to private rented tenancies.
- Family mediation. This tends to focus on preventing youth homelessness, with attempts made to reconcile parents and young people in order to prevent eviction from the family home. It can also involve facilitating young people’s access to family support to assist them with independent living.
- Domestic abuse support. This includes a range of interventions such as ‘sanctuary schemes’ (security measures to enable victims to remain in their own homes after the exclusion of an abusive partner), supporting planned moves, crisis intervention services and resettlement support.
- Tenancy sustainment support, to help vulnerable tenants to retain their tenancies. These services often provide ‘floating’ support to people living in mainstream accommodation, but are very diverse with respect to the intensity and duration of support they offer and the client groups targeted. Typically, help is provided with claiming benefits, budgeting, furnishing accommodation, accessing health and other services, in addition to seeking ‘purposeful activity’.
- Prison-based homelessness interventions, and interventions to prevent homelessness at other critical transition points e.g. leaving care, the armed forces, or hospital.

The prevention of homelessness can be undertaken by a wide range of services and sectors beyond housing, and interventions often target the factors which can put people’s housing at risk – e.g. debt problems, poor mental health. A review conducted by Homeless Link in 2015 on behalf of Public Health England identified a number of interventions which targeted these and other risk factors associated with health and wellbeing. The review found these were largely led by housing providers and focussed on secondary and tertiary prevention. There was omitted evidence of primary prevention.

From Homeless Link’s Call for Evidence on Homelessness Prevention for this research, the following additional categories were also identified:

- Advice services and support beyond housing advice, including debt management and financial/budgeting advice
- Health focused prevention interventions
- Specialist interventions focused on specific cohorts, e.g. young people, women and those who are LGBT
- Befriending and mentoring services

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14 H Pawson, G Netto,, F Wager, C Fancy & D Lomax  (2007) Evaluating Homelessness Prevention, Department for Communities and Local Government

15 Homeless Link (2015) Preventing homelessness to improve health and wellbeing: Evidence review into interventions that are effective in responding to health and wellbeing needs amongst households at risk of homelessness
- Access to accommodation beyond access to the private rented sector (PRS)
- Pre-tenancy support and training

**Typology of services**

The services responding to Homeless Link’s call for evidence and the services interviewed as part of this research are categorised according to these service types below.

Table 2: typology of services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service type</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>% of total services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'Enhanced' housing advice</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>49.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent deposit or other schemes to access private rented tenancies</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family mediation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic violence support</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenancy sustainment</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interventions focussed on specific key transition points e.g. leaving prison, care, the armed forces, or hospital</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice services and support beyond housing advice including debt management and financial/budgeting advice, etc.</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>39.68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health focused prevention interventions</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interventions focused on specific homeless cohorts, e.g. young people, women and those who are LGBT</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Befriending and mentoring services</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to accommodation beyond access to PRS</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-tenancy support and training</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Overview of services**

This overview of key elements of service set up and delivery is based on analysis of telephone interviews conducted with 10 organisations and case studies with a further five organisations providing services to prevent homelessness.
Target client group
Interventions generally had few exclusion criteria. Exceptions included services targeted at those with multiple needs (BCHA HISS) and services targeted at people with low needs (Homeworks). People with specific language requirements may also be indirectly excluded from services. Half of the services participating in this research provided services targeted at young people (16-24) and this reflects the need to address prevention issues as early as possible. This broad inclusion criteria reflected the difficulty of identifying, and targeting services to, people who may experience homelessness in the future.

“This is broad because it is difficult to predict who may become homeless in the future.” (YMCA Suffolk)

Where services provided support in a specific area, inclusion criteria often reflected this i.e. tenancy training was restricted to those who had recently moved into, or were soon due to move into social housing (The Hyde Group); debt advice services were limited to people currently in arrears (Cardinal Hulme Centre).

Referral routes
The majority of interventions offered multiple referral routes, including from local authorities, support workers, partner organisations, and self-referrals. Local authorities in particular are a common referrer for many services. One organisation mentioned that referrals could be made by a particular group of organisations only. However, even in this case, it was seen as important that referral routes did not restrict access and if people approached the service via a different route, arrangements would be made to make a formal referral into the service.

“If young people came to us outside of these routes, we would set them up with the most suitable referral agency and hand over their details, to allow them to get referred.” (staff member, Depaul UK)

A small number of the services participating in this research are delivered to a wider group of people (i.e. in school assemblies) and so require no referral. In these cases, more relevant than referral criteria is the targeting and recruitment of schools and other community settings that services are delivered within.

How services are delivered
Most services participating in this research delivered their services in multiple settings, including people’s homes, community settings, and public spaces. Some services had also developed the ability to provide support online and by phone to increase accessibility.

Tenancy training was the service type whose delivery was most often restricted to one setting. This was to create an active learning environment for participants. Empty social or council housing properties were often used by this group:

“They can read a real electricity meter, meet real neighbours, cook a real meal, etc. This really brings the training alive.” (Your Own Place)

How services are funded
Services drew funding from a range of sources. The main sources of funding included Local Authorities, Trusts and Foundations and the Big Lottery. Less commonly, services had been funded through social investment, payment by results, and social enterprise.

Evaluation/ monitoring
Participants used a wide variety of tools to monitor outcomes and to evidence the impact of their work. These included Outcome Stars, Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS), In-Form, and questionnaires. A range of outcomes were collected across participating services, including: engagement with employment, training or education (ETE); moving into safe and secure accommodation; resolution of benefit problems; wellbeing; maintenance of repayment plans; onward referrals.

Replicability of services
Most respondents considered their initiatives to be easily replicable in other contexts. Taken together, participants’ responses suggest that the following are key factors that should be taken into consideration when replicating these models:
The level of awareness of the services among potential clients. It was felt that replication would work best if services established relationships with known organisations who could provide referrals: "With CWH we were already well known to them, they already knew the quality of advice and trusted us. I think in another area if you wanted to replicate it you should start by replicating it with an organisation that you already have quite a crossover of clients with." (Cardinal Hulme Centre)

Linked to the above, having access to potential clients as well as the availability of appropriate settings was seen as key. "Having access to the young people, access to youth clubs or buildings that young people use is also very challenging" (YMCA Suffolk).

It was thought that whilst key elements of what made interventions successful should stay the same, other elements could be flexible to meet the needs of different areas. For example, one service suggested that their tenancy training could work successfully without a permanent training flat.

“One way of navigating these issues might be to have a floating training team, who can move around the country to offer the trainings on an ad hoc basis”. (The Hyde Group)
Case study 1: The Bridge (East Midlands)

“The outcomes for young people, they are just brilliant in terms of it doesn’t just get people back home, it gets people into work, it gets people into college.”

The Bridge is an early intervention and homelessness prevention and support service based in Loughborough. The Bridge delivers a range of housing related advice, support and assistance to homeless and vulnerably housed people in the Borough of Charnwood, Leicestershire and Rutland. The focus of this case study is the two youth homelessness prevention services they operate: talk²sort Mediation Service, and Single Access Point (SAP) for 16/17 year olds.

1. Key Principles
There are a number of shared principles across these two services, and across The Bridge as a whole. These include:
- Putting the individual at the centre of the service and empowering them to make their own decisions
- Using a rights-based approach
- Providing a holistic service that identifies all presenting needs and seeks to support these, either within The Bridge or by linking to other specialist services
- Flexibility
- Treating people with dignity, respect and honesty
- The importance of relationships, with positive relationships underpinning effective partnership working
- Genuinely caring about the people the service works with and a passion to make a difference.
- Providing an independent, impartial and non-judgemental service.

2. Service development and delivery
talk²sort Mediation Service
talk²sort is a homelessness prevention mediation service, providing early intervention for young people and their families to improve relationships and communication, and to prevent future homelessness. It works with young people aged 11-19 and their families in the county of Leicestershire and was one of the first young people’s homelessness prevention mediation services in the UK.

The Bridge identified the need for a mediation service in 2003 in response to gaps in local service provision, especially in relation to mental health support. The service was initially funded by the Local Authority homelessness grant and is now also funded by Public Health and Children in Need. The cost of the service is approximately £90k per annum and feedback from Public Health is that the service offers good value for money and that if the service didn’t exist more people would end up using crisis services.

talk²sort works holistically with young people and their families and is not time limited, working with them for as long as they need the support and where they are actively working towards what they want to achieve. The service requires only one person to engage with it at the time of referral, this could be a parent or carer rather than the young person themselves. The service is flexible in its delivery, offering appointments Monday to Friday at The Bridge in Loughborough, at a mutually agreeable venue (i.e. community centre), at the client’s home address or at their school/college. It also offers evening appointments. Some of the key issues the service helps people to address include relationship breakdown, problems with communication, rules, boundaries, mental health and substance misuse.

The service supports young people and their families to reach mutual agreement through open and frank discussion and, through this, to identify and implement realistic and achievable steps towards positive outcomes. Written agreements are made to outline agreed steps and these are regularly reviewed with all parties. The service has also developed a package of creative participatory tools which are used with the young people and their families to explore issues, problems and conflict in a way which places less emphasis on verbal communication.
talk...sort will refer on to other specialist services if young people have needs that the service cannot support them with, for example serious mental health issues, or problematic substance use. The service works closely with a range of other agencies including the Youth Offending Service, GPs, School Nurses, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and Turning Point.

The service has evolved and adapted over the years in response to the changing needs of the young people it works with. One development is establishing Drop In services at schools and colleges in the County. These provide an opportunity for young people to gain a clear understanding of the service and how it could support them, and has ensured that non-engagement rates remain low.

“Mediation is at the core of what we are doing but we are doing so much more than just that now and it is always changing and adapting, which is exciting.” (Staff member, The Bridge)

Single Access Point (SAP) – Specialist Homeless prevention service

SAP provides a single gateway for young people aged 16 or 17 who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, and who have a local connection to Charnwood. SAP provides intensive and holistic support with the aim of preventing homelessness amongst 16 and 17 year olds living in Charnwood: to reduce the use of B&B accommodation for this age group; to improve young people’s life chances; and, to motivate and empower young people to make appropriate decisions based on the available options. The service is funded by Charnwood Borough Council and The Bridge and costs approximately £71,000 per annum to deliver (approx. £46k from council). SAP works in partnership with Charnwood Borough Council, Children and Families Services and supported accommodation providers to ensure consistency in housing pathways for young people. SAP receives referrals from a range of organisations including Housing Needs, Children and Family Services, and local education providers, along with a high number of self-referrals.

The service was established in response to the historically high use of B&B accommodation for young people aged 16 and 17 facing homelessness in Charnwood (1,598 nights in 2006/07). In recognition of the unsuitability of this accommodation for this age group, Charnwood Borough council worked with The Bridge and colleagues from DCLG to develop the SAP service in 2008. The need for the service was further highlighted following the G vs LB Southwark judgement in 2009 which set out that children’s law takes precedence over housing law in the case of homeless 16/17 year olds.

As a unique and specialist service, SAP faced some challenges at implementation, particularly around establishing joint working agreements and understanding about the legal duties owed to young people aged 16/17. The service has grown from its initial development and the council recognise it as a good ‘spend to save’ initiative, not only saving money but also producing better outcomes for young people. Using learning from SAP, The Bridge has developed the county homeless 16 and 17-year-old protocol to which housing and social care across the County and all 7 District Councils have signed up to. This has improved communication and relationships between housing and social care, as well as stopping young people from being shunted between housing and children’s services.

Another development has been a multi-agency eviction protocol. A young person at risk of eviction now triggers a multi-agency meeting (accommodation provider, council, social care and The Bridge) to try to prevent eviction, and to identify alternative solutions.

SAP strives to ensure that young people accessing the service can plan for their future accommodation needs by exploring realistic housing options and supporting them to make informed decisions. Each young person who engages with the service receives a holistic needs assessment to establish not only their housing need, but any other needs. The service then provides a tailored response based on individual circumstances. This includes advice and support on housing needs, as well as around family, health, benefits, education and employment where relevant. Referrals are made to other specialist agencies where appropriate.

Support provided around accommodation is personalised and there is a focus on providing a ‘reality check’ for young people in terms of the accommodation options available to them, as well as their skills to live independently. This ‘reality check’ often prevents a young person from leaving home. In more complex cases,
The Bridge can provide support for young people to try to improve the situation and relationships at home, and support them to access emergency accommodation through statutory agencies where necessary.

If the service cannot prevent the young person’s homelessness then a safeguarding referral, based on imminent risk of homelessness, is made to children’s social care requesting an urgent assessment. Accommodation is then provided whilst the assessment takes place. In very few cases a homeless application is also made to the council. In the majority of cases, young people are supported to return to their parent/carer or other family members, or are placed in supported accommodation.

Where appropriate, SAP clients are signposted to the talk²sort Mediation Service. Given that the two services share many aims in terms of providing an effective service to young people, with a focus on homelessness prevention, the two Team Plans are now merged, which has enabled identification of additional joint progress and development actions.

3. Outcomes

talk²sort

Talk²sort uses both qualitative and quantitative methods for evidencing outcomes. This includes observations, note taking, Wellbeing Star, SWEMWBS, Blob Tree and questionnaires. The ‘Wellbeing Star’ and SWEMBWS are completed with clients following each mediation appointment, in order to monitor outcomes achieved and general emotional wellbeing.

In 2015-16:
• talk²sort supported 119 young people to improve communication and relationships, and to resolve conflict within the family home, reducing the likelihood of homelessness.
• 83% of young people who accessed the service remained at home, with the remaining number being accommodated by other relatives.
• 92% of young people reported feeling more positive as a result of engaging in mediation
• 90% reported an improvement in communication within the family home
• 87% of young people reported feeling better able to deal with problems
• 94% of young people reported feeling better able to handle their emotions.

SAP

In the first 6 months of operation, SAP reduced the number of nights spent in B&B by 93%. In 2015-16, SAP received 78 new referrals. The service is evaluated at the end of each financial year, producing a report to share with partners about the successes and achievements of the service. The following are the SAP Outcomes for 2015-16.
• 2 homeless applications were made to Charnwood Borough Council, a 50% reduction from 2014/15
• 36 young people returned to, or remained living with, parents/carers
• 9 young people were accommodated by other family members
• 4 young people accessed specialist health services
• 19 young people were identified as having increased their support networks
• 4 young people were accommodated by Children and Family Services
• 24 young people remained in education, whilst a further 4 young people gained either employment or education
• 8 young people gained access to benefits/allowances during their involvement with the SAP
• 17 young people secured supported accommodation
• 97% of young people had their homelessness prevented
• 1% of young people were subject to a custodial sentence, demonstrating the complex and multiple needs of this very vulnerable client group
• Last year, 100% of young people accessing the SAP stated that they had a better understanding of the options available to them and what they needed to do next.

4. Contextual factors/ externalities affecting the project

A range of challenges were identified, the top three mentioned were:
The reduction in the number of supported accommodation bed spaces available to young people, especially for 16-17 year olds. There has been a 55% reduction in the number of young people securing supported accommodation when compared with 2014/15 data. Prior to recommissioning last year there were between 35-40 bed spaces available in Loughborough but this has now reduced to 30 across the whole of the county of Leicestershire, with only 10 in Loughborough.

The difficulties in accessing affordable accommodation for young people to move on to including the shortage of shared housing.

The impact of welfare reform changes, in particular, the rates of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) being substantially lower than rental prices.

Other challenges were also identified including: an increase in the complexity of the needs of service users; and, a major gap in provision for young women and girls where there are concerns around child sexual exploitation, putting themselves at risk and/or displaying inappropriate sexualised behaviour.

There was seen to be a culture of mistrust between housing and children’s social care and there are still issues in some areas with homeless 16 and 17 year olds being passed backward and forward between the two services. Allied to this, many services continue to work in silos.

5. Learning points

What works well

- Both services have strong evidence of their effectiveness. They prevent more children and young people from becoming homeless or being placed in care, and keep families together. By intervening at an early stage, the services prevent situations from reaching crisis point, and result in reduced demand for higher cost services such as mental health services.

- Having a specialist staff team who are highly trained, skilled, passionate, committed, and who build trusting relationships with the young people helps contribute to this success.

  “We’re really passionate about what we do for people, we care genuinely about not just the people we work with but the people that work for us. It is about a real commitment and compassion that drives people to be as good as they can be. We don’t want to fail people. When we fail people or other services fail people, people die.” (Senior staff member, The Bridge)

- The approach of the services, empowering young people to take steps for themselves rather than doing everything for them, offering one-to-one tailored holistic support, and helping navigate and broker access to other services is also positive. So too is the flexibility of the services on offer, and that staff take time to listen and understand the young person’s situation.

- SAP was instrumental in creating a Memorandum of Agreement to provide a framework for delivering the service and from this other joint protocols have been developed. A key outcome is the well-established, easily accessible and bespoke pathway to services for 16 and 17 year olds. Young people benefit from a “one front door” approach to housing and homelessness services within Charnwood.

- Regular review and monitoring of the service, including consulting with clients is another factor contributing to the services’ success.

- The Bridge has positively shared their experience and learning and have supported many local authorities around the country to develop protocols for homeless 16 and 17 year olds. The service is also looking at using the SAP model as a basis for developing pathways for different client groups, and is working with a range of other organisations to explore this.

Replicability

There was consensus that the mediation service and SAP could be replicated, but that it would need the ‘right’ organisation to drive and deliver the services and this should be an independent voluntary sector agency. Critical factors that would need to be in place to ensure successful replication include: positive relationships, buy in and trust between organisations especially the lead agency, the housing authority and children’s social care; the backing of the council, including support from elected members in the local authority; and clear agreed processes, procedures, and service level agreements.

Learning points

Effective partnership working, and ongoing communication and dialogue with the local authority and statutory
services is a key learning point from The Bridge’s work. Their partnership with the local authority has brought not only the benefits of funding but also the ability to create County-wide change through the development of a pathway for 16 and 17 year olds. From the local authority perspective, they see The Bridge as “integral to the way we provide our homeless and prevention services”. Strong leadership from within the service and having senior buy in from elected members and senior staff in the local authority was also identified as a key learning point.

The organisation and its staff are tenacious and take a problem-solving approach, continuously battling obstacles and demonstrating impact. This is especially important in a tough funding environment, which increases the importance of continually demonstrating quality, innovation and outcomes. There is a strong learning environment within The Bridge with investment in coaching, training and support of staff. This is connected to the organisation’s commitment to continuous improvement and development and the importance of innovating, changing and adapting:

“We are keen to learn, we’re innovative and we never have a service where we just think, ‘Oh yes, that’s great let’s just tick along’. We push our teams and services... and we push at the barriers in everything we do.”

(Senior Staff Member, The Bridge)

Staff knowledge is key in their ability to play the crucial role in local homeless prevention services that they do and in representing the interests of young people at borough and county level. Staff have good understanding of the legislative, political and operating environment of the local authority and statutory services. They also know and build relationships with key people at a senior level within these services.

Kai’s* story

Kai was referred to SAP by Prospects as he had left the family home and was temporarily staying with his Aunt in one room in a shared house. The landlord found out that Kai was staying there and he was told he had to leave.

Kai had no other family in the area and spoke of the family home as dirty, cold, mouldy, and bare. SAP would usually offer telephone advice for a young person with no local connection, but there was a suspicion that there was more to this case that warranted inviting Kai in for an initial appointment. From listening to Kai during his appointment the next day, it was clear that his basic needs had not been being met, he had dropped out of college and he disclosed that for 6 months prior to leaving home he had been selling cannabis to try to provide for himself.

Kai disclosed that he had spent a number of years in care, and, upon leaving care, had been subject to physical and sexual abuse from a family member. Kai spoke of his desire for a brighter future and shared his concern of what his life would be like if he continued to live with his Mum. SAP made a safeguarding referral via telephone and requested emergency accommodation due to concerns about Kai’s vulnerability and lack of suitable and safe accommodation for the evening. Going against the advice of First Response who told Kai to return home to his Mum’s, the SAP negotiated with Kai’s Aunt to allow him to stay there for a few more nights over the weekend. The Bridge also provided Kai with a food parcel and food vouchers.

The telephone referral was followed by an online referral which was passed to the Strengthening Families Team the next day. The allocated social worker met with Kai within a couple of days and began an assessment. Kai was referred to a supported accommodation project who agreed to interview him the following morning. Kai and a SAP worker attended the interview together and agreed with the project that he could move in the same day.

*name changed to protect anonymity
Case study 2: New Horizon Youth Centre

“A holistic approach where people work interdisciplinary under one roof, where resources are pulled and teams share their practice, that benefits young people.”

A voluntary sector organisation of more than 50 years, New Horizon Youth Centre (NHYC) provides holistic, multi-disciplinary services for homeless young people aged 16 to 25, pan-London, to help young people to avoid, and to move on from, homelessness. Prevention work at New Horizon Youth Centre has three focuses: to prevent young people from becoming homeless; to help homeless young people to find a home; and to prevent repeat homelessness.

1. Principles/ ethos of the service
There are two overarching service aims: for young people to be in safe and appropriate accommodation, and to move into employment.

- Key to the ethos of NHYC is that it welcomes young people warmly and treats them with respect. This approach is valued by both staff and service users.
- The Centre recognises the complexity of young people’s lives, the challenges they encounter and supports them to make changes, fully cognisant of the difficulties they might face in so doing. A critical element is the encouragement of young people to fulfil their potential.
- Holistic, multidisciplinary service provision. Staff understand that young people are often going through a difficult, emotionally and physically draining time when they access NHYC and so services are set up to make it as easy as possible for them to access the support that they need.
- Age appropriate services, provided using a youth work framework. This principle is underpinned by an understanding of the cognitive development of young people and is thought to be key in engaging the young people who use the Centre.
- Treating young people who are homeless with respect. This leads to working in a person-centred and age appropriate way; taking the young people and their needs seriously; recognising their willingness to interact and engage and build upon it; sticking with the young person, building trust; inviting their views on services.

2. Service delivery
The backgrounds of the young people who attend NHYC are varied. Around 20% of service users do not have English as their first language and a relatively high proportion of service users identify as LGBTQ+. Referrals to the Centre come from NHYC outreach in prisons and on the streets, as well as from statutory or voluntary agencies, including schools and colleges, and self-referrals, often after personal recommendation.

Broadly speaking, young people who access the New Horizon Youth Centre tend to be: 1) young people with relatively low needs who need information and initial advice, often attending a couple of appointments before exiting the service; 2) young people with more complex needs, who typically engage with the service for between 3 and 6 months for counselling, life skills and general support; 3) young people with more complex needs and challenges, such as gang members, victims and perpetrators of violence, and ex-offenders, who may remain with the service for a long time.

The Centre’s approach differentiates it from other services: upon arrival, procedural and administrative tasks take second priority. The first questions staff ask are focused on the needs of the individual in that moment. As one respondent noted, they ask “Do you want something to eat? Have you got sanitary protection? Do you need to have a chat? Do you want a shower?... It’s not the same [as in other services], is it?” Once those initial needs have been addressed, a thorough assessment follows which might take several visits to complete as trust develops between the young person and workers. Based on the assessment, a plan is agreed to move forward. The Centre addresses priority needs first. Underpinning delivery are strong links across the service, between the Drop In, the Advice Team and the Education, Employment and Training (EET) team. Together, they provide a calm and open environment which encourages young people to access and use their services and other agencies’ services too.
Key Services Provided
Homeless prevention runs as a strand throughout New Horizon’s services. Within this, three key projects focus on homeless prevention:

- **Under 25s Housing and Employment Project** – This is a partnership project between Local Authorities in the North London Housing Partnership (NLHP) (Harringay, Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Islington, and Westminster) and NHYC. The project sees referrals from the NLHP made for homeless young people who are not in priority need. Once referred, young people are able to access the full range of support offered by NHYC, including access to short and long term accommodation.

- **Bringing services together through the London Youth Gateway** – A partnership with Alone in London, Depaul UK, Gallop, Albert Kennedy Trust, Shelter, and Stonewall Housing to provide support for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness pan-London. Through partnering, the London Youth Gateway provides young people with a “seamless journey” through the services provided by partners, including: emergency accommodation, advice and information, mediation services, and support with employment, training and education. The idea is to join up services to provide support that may not be available through the local authority in every London borough.

- **Project Vista** – New Horizon Youth Centre also offers accommodation and ETE support directly to young people in precarious employment through their partnership with a Housing Association, with properties provided to NHYC under a management agreement. This project was developed in response to an increasing number of young people moving into unstable employment and the decreasing availability of affordable accommodation. In marrying the provision of affordable accommodation with ETE support, this project provides stable accommodation in the present, whilst allowing young people to build the skills and experience that will prevent future homelessness.

“particularly those young people who were actually in employment but they were low-wage or precarious employment, and therefore the PRS sector for them was really prohibitive.” (Service Manager)

New Horizon’s approach to prevention is multidimensional and holistic. It has several critical elements:

- **Reaching out into the community** - visiting schools and other youth services, encouraging schools to visit the centre; raising awareness and identifying what swift action young people can take if they find they are at risk of homelessness; building understanding and empathy within the community; managing expectations - leaving home will not automatically result in being rehoused.

- **Working with young people contemplating leaving home** - taking swift action wherever the situation demands; for others, working hard to improve the quality of family relationships to encourage reconnection with family members and to allow the young person to remain in the family home where possible. Mediation plays an important role in this work.

- **Providing relevant and timely support** - responding on a case by case basis to each individual’s needs, for example in relation to disability, sexuality and language, as well as specific challenges such as autism and learning disability; focusing on improving communication skills; modelling good behaviour through services which are tolerant, consistent, boundaried and empathic; offering counselling services; building resilience.

- **Developing life skills** - developing life skills through Independent Living Workshops, including job finding, CV writing, money management, bill paying, getting on with your neighbours, disposing of waste, ESOL; teaching young people the importance of following rules and regulations and how to communicate effectively with authority figures.

- **Helping young homeless people to achieve and maintain successes** – supporting young people to maintain work, college and university; preventing homelessness from rupturing their routine and undermining the steps they have taken to secure a better future. Secure employment is key in finding and securing accommodation and preventing homelessness

- **Advocating on behalf of homeless young people** - helping them access the range of services they need, including primary care, drugs services and mental health services and ensuring that they are in
receipt of their entitlements; helping them navigate the system which can be frustrating and can undermine young people’s confidence.

- Supporting transitions – starting as early as possible to anticipate the changes that young people face in making transitions between services, “once [they are] 18, there is a bit of a cliff edge”. (Staff member)

3. Outcomes

1044 young people accessed the day centre service in 2015/16. Young people also access NHYC services through preventative work in schools, colleges, prisons, on the street, and via telephone. The following outcomes were achieved by NHYC in 2015 and 2016. They are broken into three categories: overall NHYC outcomes, outcomes for the HLHP Under 25s Housing and Employment Project, outcomes for the London Youth Gateway.

**New Horizon Youth Centre - 2015/16 outcomes**

- 186 young people accessed accommodation
- 90 young people were prevented from rough sleeping by accessing emergency accommodation
- 37 young offenders were prevented from becoming homeless on release
- through all NHYC services (including telephone guidance, prevention sessions at colleges etc), 2,536 young people reported gaining homelessness prevention skills
- 233 young people were linked in with in-house counselling services
- 476 young people accessed one or more opportunities of employment, apprenticeship, work placements, education or training.

**NLHP U25s Housing & Employment Project – 2016 Outcomes**

265 referrals were made to the service by local authority housing options services, of these 141 people engaged (54%) in the service. Of these:

- 57 were rough sleepers, and 84 were in some form of accommodation and were thus prevented from rough sleeping
- 22 young people accessed emergency accommodation
- 27 young people accessed long term accommodation
- 15 young people accessed paid work
- 35 young people accessed work placements, apprenticeships and voluntary positions (not including NHYC’s own Social Enterprise Project).

**London Youth Gateway – 2015/16 Outcomes**

A total of 9,717 service users were worked with in this period across the partnership. The main homeless prevention outcomes achieved around include:

- 611 people secured suitable accommodation
- 316 people were prevented from sleeping rough by accessing emergency accommodation
- 70 young offenders were prevented from becoming homeless on release
- 102 young people had sustained tenancies for 1 year or more
- 516 young people secured employment, apprenticeships, placements, training and/or volunteering opportunities as a result of support received
- Of the 1026 people who gave feedback on the service they received, 90.5% reported that they were either very satisfied or satisfied with the London Youth Gateway.

4. Contextual factors/externalities affecting the project

A number of issues affect NHYC’s ability to prevent a young person from becoming homeless. The lower national minimum wage for young people was mentioned by a number of staff members as a key issue affecting the affordability of accommodation for young people. The Shared Accommodation Rate for people under 35 was also raised as a very significant barrier affecting young people, and the removal of automatic entitlement to housing costs under Universal Credit for people aged 18-21 is expected to make this worse. Taken together, these policies were seen to create “a punitive, disproportionate system that is heavily weighted against young people.” (Manager)
Supporting young people to navigate the benefits system was also cited as a key challenge, in particular the introduction of Universal Credit had been challenging for young people and there is seen to be a lack of consistency of service within different benefits agencies. Advocating for young people to get the benefits they are entitled to is taking an increasing amount of time and this affects the ability of staff to spend time with young people building their skills.

"Increasingly we’re doing advocacy, individual advocacy work that can take all day for one client, and we’ve got fifty kids." (Manager)

5. Learning points

What works well

- Service users variously described their experience of the Centre as 'a turning point', 'great', and 'life changing'. They spoke warmly about the staff and responded positively to their consistent engagement with service users. Making friends with other young people at the Centre was an important aspect of building a new life.
- Being a youth centre, rather than a statutory service helps young people to engage in the centre. It is a choice for young people to come to the centre and services are very much provided using a 'youth work' framework.
  "Us not being statutory, us being youth workers as opposed to social workers or probation officers, it’s different." (Manager)
- The communication skills provided by the centre are seen as crucial in young people building the skills that they need both now, to navigate the complex systems they are involved in, and in the future to gain and maintain employment and accommodation. These are seen as key 'soft skills' that will help young people to avoid repeat homelessness.
  "[It is] key for them to be able to deal with communicating their needs, how they communicate, how they manage their emotions and how they communicate them, especially because they need to navigate such complex systems." (Manager)

Challenges

NHYC staff collect data about service users, however, there was a recognition that data could be used more effectively at a strategic level. Discussions are underway to develop a new tracking system, which will give an indication of the long-term impact of services at the Centre. There are several difficulties in tracking young people, whose phone numbers and emails change frequently. Notwithstanding these challenges, a system is being designed which will be able to monitor what progress service users have made, for example, their employment and accommodation status.

Replicability

It was thought that much of the work at NHYC could be replicated. In particular, it was thought that the Under 25s Housing and Employment Project was replicable in other areas. There are current plans to expand Project Vista.

Learning points

Staff are trained and experienced in giving advice and youth work and have complementary skills, such as mental health first aid. They are supported through fortnightly reflective practice sessions. Focus is placed on maintaining staff morale and acknowledging their commitment, which is critical in securing the project’s success.

New Horizon Youth Centre provides a range of services to young people in a holistic and multi-disciplinary way, including hosting ‘satellite’ services which provide support around migration advice, and advocacy for care leavers. This means that young people are able to access a range of services under one roof and without the need to navigate different referral routes “because we work in a holistic way and we’re kind of a multidisciplinary team, there are lots of different ways that we can provide interventions that stop things from getting worse”. (Manager)
CASE STUDY 3: Porchlight Primary Care Link Worker Service

“If you have any kind of anxiety, any kind of worry around mental health, or you’re suffering from mental health and you’re not getting help, Live Well Kent is for you.”

The Primary Care Link Worker Service (PCLWS) is a short-term advice and signposting outreach service delivered by Porchlight, a charity working across Kent to support vulnerable and homeless people. Since April 2016 Porchlight has been a Strategic Partner under a newly commissioned framework for mental health service, Live Well Kent. Live Well Kent is a primary care service that aims to improve the wellbeing of the community and minimise people’s transition into secondary mental health services. The PCLWS is an integral part of this network delivering individually tailored support to people with mild to moderate health problems, helping them to access appropriate services and address the practical issues that impact on mental health and wellbeing. Live Well Kent operates across 7 Clinical Commissioning Group areas and 12 local authority districts and boroughs.

1. Principles of the service
   - PCLWS and Live Well Kent operate a ‘no wrong door’ approach to service delivery, which is based on having multiple entry points into the delivery network and no restrictions on referrals.
   - PCLWS aims to provide a broad service across a range of life areas, including healthy living, arts and community activities, education and training and substance misuse. By providing a holistic wraparound support service, Live Well Kent aims to prevent people being sent from ‘pillar to post’ between different services.
   - The provision of a seamless pathway within this delivery network and to other services is an additional key principle of the PCLWS. Link Workers operate in close partnership with a range of agencies and groups to promote recovery and community participation of people with mental health needs.

2. Service delivery
   The PCLWS provides support to people with low mental health issues across a range of issues including housing, benefits, debt, and mental and physical health. Link Workers offer signposting and internal referrals within the Live Well Kent delivery network, which consists of over 60 partner agencies. Live Well Kent focuses on supporting people to engage with mainstream activities and the wider community. Porchlight’s Thanet Health Inclusion Service (THIS) operates alongside the PCLWS, providing a targeted and enhanced signposting and support service to Margate Central and Clintonville West Wards. THIS focuses on reducing health inequalities in the UK’s 10 most deprived areas.

The service developed from a GP Link service, which identified that people presenting at GP surgeries with mental health issues were often experiencing an array of underlying issues.

“It was seen as a way of coming together to do more around prevention and early help to prevent people needing more intensive specialist services later on … offering more practical support around housing, finance and debt management [and] getting involved in all the wider determiners of mental wellbeing”. (Commissioner, Live Well Kent).

Individuals usually access the PCLWS through a phone/email Central Referral Unit (CRU), with a face-to-face appointment offered within one week following initial contact. The PCLWS and THIS additionally provide a drop-in service at community centres and GP surgeries. Delivering services within a range of community settings and individual’s homes is reported as key in addressing the barriers that people face in accessing and engaging with services. Following an initial needs assessment, Link Workers offer advice and guidance for a maximum of eight weeks, with a focus on providing practical help (e.g. liaison with landlords and benefit agencies), and assistance in navigating the pathways through the Live Well Kent delivery network.

“If it’s something we know somebody can do better, or we actually don’t offer that support, then it’d be very much making calls and putting a full onward referral through, and signposting on. It’s very client-focused.” (Staff Member)
A recent evaluation by the McPin Foundation showed that 37% of the 3,048 clients who accessed the PCLWS in 2016 presented with housing related issues. Benefit issues (11%), mental health issues (22%) and need for onward signposting (11%), are additional key reasons for initial contact. Staff at the PCLWS however report that people will often present with a complex array of multiple and overlapping issues.

“People very rarely come to us with one issue. It’s usually a cacophony of issues that intermingle with each other, and before you know it they don’t know where one problem ends and another one begins.” (Staff member)

The McPin evaluation indicates that Link Workers provide a form of ‘active guidance’, offering support whilst also empowering clients to take active steps to address their situation. The results of this study also indicate that the holistic wrap-around model of service provision can result in feelings of client empowerment.

“You’ve got somebody covering every aspect of her need, and that person has gone from here and elevated into a position where they’re all of a sudden empowered, because so many different issues have been solved, if not at once, but simultaneously.” (Staff Member)

3. Outcomes

Improvements in wellbeing are measured using the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS), which is completed with each client at the beginning and the end of the eight-week service. The McPin evaluation suggests that the PCLWS has brought significant and sustained improvements in client’s wellbeing: 82% of participants reported improved WEMWBS scores, with a mean increase of 8.1 points. Scores that remain the same can also represent a positive outcome for clients.

“Often we find people who do the wellbeing scales and they say, ‘I’m still the same. I feel the same as I did, but had it not been for your intervention, I would’ve gone all the way down.’” (Staff member)

Additional key outcomes reported by PCLWS include income maximisation (following support with benefits) and housing sustainment (preventing evictions and help with benefit appeals). A total of 90% of participants in the McPin evaluation also reported a move into independent housing following engagement with the PCLWS. Additional “softer outcomes” as highlighted within the McPin evaluation include increased confidence, improved independent living skills, increased physical activity and reduced feelings of isolation. THIS outcomes include improvements in mental health (77% of clients), relationships (60%), identity and self-esteem (89%), physical health and self-care (64%), addictive behaviour (44%), trust and hope (90%) and social networks (62%).

4. Contextual factors/externalities affecting the project

- The PCLWS and Live Well Kent have experienced unprecedented demand which, in turn, has impacted the speed with which people can transition from the PCLWS into other delivery partner services. Staff will carry out regular follow-up correspondence with people on the waiting lists to ensure that they don’t ‘fall through the gaps’ (Staff Member).
- Staff report highlighted a number of key contextual factors that are currently impacting on the housing-related support provided by the PCLWS. Clients often contact the service at the point of crisis, which can limit what can be achieved within the eight-week timeframe.
  “If we were trying to get someone housing, to try and house someone in eight weeks is sometimes impossible.” (PCLWS staff)
- Additional key challenges faced by the PCLWS are: the unwillingness of landlords in the private rental sector to let to people in receipt of Housing Benefit; a lack of housing options for people who do not meet the Priority Need criteria; and a significant shortage of affordable social housing.

5. Learning Points

What works well

Staff report that the key successes of the PCLWS include benefits advice and creating a heightened awareness of available support services.

“What the Link Service is very, very good at is opening up a well of what is available, either us doing it or making service user aware that it’s there. So many people fall into so many problems because they just do not know what resources are out there, and there’s no one to tell them.” (PCLWS Staff member)
A thorough knowledge of local support services, and successful partnership working were additionally highlighted as key to the success of PCLWS.

“I think it would be challenging to arrive into a community and delivery an intimate service with general impacts without some sense of that community.” (Commissioner, Live Well Kent)

Challenges
Staff reported a lack of services for people with learning difficulties who require additional support (e.g. with filling out forms). A local commissioner additionally reported a need for stronger alignments with accommodation providers. PCLWS is also currently seeking to improve the process of identifying clients that can be referred directly to other delivery partners.

Learning points
The PCLWS provides a valuable service in navigating the support available to individuals who often require support in a number of areas. In doing so, and through its no wrong door policy, it provides a holistic service. The PCLWS is able to act as a pre-crisis intervention, supporting people who make contact about a housing issue, as well as an early-intervention service where people contact the service about another issue which could in time impact on their housing situation.
CASE STUDY 4: Youth AIMS

“Our role largely is to empower the young person to find their own opportunities.”

Youth AIMS is a service provided by the organisation Step By Step which works across the rural borough of Hart and the more disadvantaged borough of Rushmoor, Hampshire. It focuses on finding long term solutions for homeless young people.

1. Principles/ethos of the service
   - The Youth AIMS team works in a client-centred way, focusing on young people’s assets and strengths and engaging with their aspirations.
   - The Team take young people seriously and works hard to establish trust.
   - The service is non-judgmental and young people can attend without fear of stigma or discrimination. It differs from other services because of its “face to face … voice to voice … person to person” nature.

   The key principles are identified as:
   “Having an open-access approach for young people, and around working in partnership with other organisations to resolve young people’s crises and needs, and about providing a very respectful and practical approach.” (Senior manager)

2. Delivery of the service
   Youth AIMS is a busy, first stage, quick response service for young people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness. Referrals are made by both statutory services and voluntary organisations when they encounter young people in crisis and young people can also approach Youth AIMS directly. Assessment and triage takes place and signposting to relevant resources follows (such as landlords, Local Authority housing departments and CAMHS). It offers encouragement, advice, information and guidance. Overall, the project works to prevent situations from escalating and to intervene positively where young people with care and support needs are vulnerable.

The support that the Youth AIMS team provides depends on the needs of each individual. For some young people contemplating leaving home an initial step is to provide realistic advice about their accommodation options if they were to leave home, and this can be enough to prevent homelessness. Where family relationships mean that a young person is at risk of homelessness, Youth AIMS provides support to improve the quality of relationships and to encourage reconnection with family members, so that the young person may remain in the family home. Mediation plays a strong role in this service and is often key in enabling a young person to stay at home.

For young people who need accommodation, services include a rent deposit scheme, benefits advice, and tenancy support. Referrals are made to a wide range of services that can support the young person, either to stay at home, or to move onto accommodation if necessary. Youth AIMS can also take quick action where needed, including providing access to their own accommodation. Throughout the service there is a focus on safeguarding and providing a place for young people to access services and feel safe.

As a result of funding changes the Youth AIMS service has had to be scaled down, reducing from 8 members of staff (4 full-time and 4 part-time) to two (1 full-time, 1 part-time), with volunteer support. Step by Step has maintained a strong presence locally and is resolutely focused on maintaining critical services for young homeless people, despite on-going financial constraints and system pressures. As a way of increasing capacity Step by Step is looking to recruit volunteers to help provide some services, it has also developed an online advice service.
3. Outcomes
About 400 young people use the service each year. 95% of all cases are resolved; client satisfaction is high. There has been a reduction in numbers over the past 5 years, since Hampshire County Council withdrew funding. Whereas once 700 young people used the service, now 400 do so annually.

4. Contextual factors/externalities affecting the project
Issues differ across the two boroughs. Young people from Rushmoor often present with challenges that face excluded communities such as unemployment, low aspiration, drug addiction, family violence and poverty. There is very little social housing.

Funding has been a challenge for this service. Staff note that there is a continued need for this service and the drop in the number of young people accessing Youth AIMS is a direct result of reduced resources, rather than of reduced demand. Youth AIMS have also previously run education sessions in schools about homelessness. This was thought to be a useful and successful preventative service, however cuts in funding have meant that this service has ceased.

5. Learning points
What works well
There is a strong focus on consultation with young people, which was noted by service users. Service users were positive about their time with Step By Step. They like the general approach of staff – commending their availability and willingness to talk - and the opportunities that being there brings, such as training and support with mental health.

Relationships with commissioners are strong. The Chief Executive has weekly contact to address strategic and individual issues, with a view to improving both systems and services. There is a focus on achieving better strategic coordination of all parties so that more can be achieved. Commissioners are supportive of Step By Step’s suggestions to improve services and this reflects the trusting relationship that has been built and the respect that commissioners have for Step by Step’s knowledge of its client group.

Staff and volunteers are well networked (they attend forums, for example, and ‘always speak up’), which is a critical element of their success. Relationships have been built over time; the service – and its staff - are well known and respected. Youth AIMS is also well regarded by the community.

The team have expertise in assessment, as well as housing related issues and appealing against housing decisions. They are trained in mediation, reflective practice and advantage thinking.

Working in partnership is a strength of the service – “it’s a core principle for us here”. Good relationships have been built over many years with rural Hart and Rushmoor Borough Councils who see Step By Step as experts in the field of engaging with and delivering services to young people.

Challenges
A key issue is the dispersed nature of young people across the county, who might find it difficult and costly to access services at Step by Step if they have far to travel. As such, they have developed a web based facility StepChat, which allows young people to engage with the service and access information and advice from anywhere.

Replicability
It was thought that the service could be replicated in other contexts and that key to success is be collocation with other services, in particular being located within youth services rather than homeless services. The need for sustainable funding was also emphasised.

“It needs to be continuous provision that is sustainable, so that young people build up that sense of knowing where they can go to if they need to. It’s not a stop-and-start provision” (Manager)
Learning points
Step By Step has tried several approaches to effectively meet the needs of excluded young people from Rushmoor. Management is prepared to take risks and make difficult decisions. A longer term financial commitment from funders is sought. Resources have reduced but need has not diminished and there is a commitment to continuing to provide a service that Step by Step see a clear need for.

“Youth AIMS is so important in terms of delivering that drop-in, wraparound advice, information, guidance and mediation for young people that we’re sticking to it anyway, despite it being very difficult to make that function on a financial footing year in, year out.” (Senior Manager)

If funding were increased, certain functions – such as mediation – would be expanded, a peripatetic service would be developed and the waiting list would be reduced.

Other services could learn from Youth AIMS’ respectful and practical approach to working with service users. In addition, there are examples of innovation in partnership working from which others could learn. For example, Step By Step is training the Housing Teams in Hart and Rushmoor in advantage thinking.

Saira’s story*

Saira was living with her boyfriend at 17 when she was asked to leave and moved in with her mother. This was a temporary solution. Her mother was due to move to another area into a smaller property that did not have room for her, leaving her a short amount of time to find alternative accommodation.

Saira had been working with a social worker, but felt abandoned when she stopped working with her at this time. This was particularly difficult for Saira, whose personal circumstances were additionally difficult at this time, having recently found out that she was pregnant. Step by Step was known to Saira, whose brother had lived in its supported accommodation, and she approached them for support.

Saira had a meeting the next day with Youth AIMS, who were able to work with her to get the references that she needed to gain access to their accommodation services.

“They could have just been like, “No, you don’t have a reference.” But they’ve - they contacted, I think it was a - I think it was a family social worker or just someone to be able to do my reference and come in and spend a lot of time and fill out a lot of forms for me”

Saira was also helped to fill out applications for benefits and was moved into Step by Step accommodation shortly before her mother moved and she was made homeless. Through her accommodation Saira is able to access a range of services and daily sessions cover topics from employment, to cooking, to healthy relationships. She is learning life skills and credits Youth AIMS for enabling her to avoid homelessness and to move on in this way. “If Youth AIMS weren’t here, I probably wouldn’t be able to progress in steps.”

*Name changed to protect anonymity.
CASE STUDY 5: Brighton Women’s Centre partnership with Worthing Churches Housing Project

“They are able to get things done from the inside, but they are on my side”

The partnership between Brighton Women’s Centre (BWC) and Worthing Churches Housing Project (WCHP) began in July 2015. The partnership provides a women-centred and gender and trauma informed service within WCHP’s already well established community provision. The service delivers a weekly Drop-In, open ended 1-2-1 case work for those who need it and fortnightly street outreach. The services work with women who are rough sleeping, vulnerably housed or at risk of losing accommodation and who have multiple complex needs.

1. Principles of the service
   - Women-centred
   - Gender-specific
   - Trauma informed
   - Flexibility, with services managed in a way that increases accessibility for women with multiple complex needs
   - Peer support - Women support each other both within the Drop In and through continued relationships built at the service.

2. Delivery of the service
BWC has a well-established model working with women with multiple complex needs. As part of this work BWC were supporting women with housing issues, since this was a significant issue for many of the women (80%) accessing their service. BWC’s experience in achieving positive outcomes for this group led them to look for opportunities to share their learning with the homeless sector. This is both because accommodation was such a common issue for women they were supporting, and because they identified that many of the women that they were working with self-excluded from mixed gender services. Brighton Women’s Centre approached WCHP, a well-established local homelessness service provider, at a time that WCHP had identified an increase in the number of homeless women locally and were looking to increase their capacity to respond to this. The partnership formed and joint funding was sought and awarded for this partnership. DCLG and Sussex Community Foundation funded the project, with SHORE commissioning the service.

The service provides a weekly women’s group at WCHP, delivered by BWC. This is an open Drop In group session which women are able to attend without referral and without being sober, as long as they are not disruptive to the group and do not pose a risk. This is thought to be an important element of the safe space that the service provides.

“They can come into the women’s group. They can act how they need to act, as long as it’s not putting anyone or themselves in danger, and they can just kind of release onto the women’s group.” (Frontline staff)

The service also offers access to wider WCHP services, including a counselling service, a substance misuse worker, a mental health support worker, and an accommodation support worker. WCHP also offers some access to accommodation through its own accommodation services and through relationships it has built with local private landlords. Technology enables staff to work together effectively, as each worker can see what others have done through a case management system. Women can continue to receive support, including home visits, once they are in stable accommodation.

Peer support is a key element of the women’s group. Frontline staff spoke about women entering the group in crisis and other women supporting them and sharing their own experiences. The relationships that have been built continue outside of this group, with women meeting and setting up other groups outside of this provision.

In addition to the Drop In, one-to-one personalised casework is also provided by a Brighton Women’s Centre staff member on issues that service users identify. This support is not time limited and varies based on the needs of the individual.
“We have a really holistic approach, and it's very women-centred. So, the things that the women want to work on, that's what we will work with them on.” (Frontline staff)

Both through the Drop-In and one-to-one casework women are supported to access services. Relationships have been built with some local support services attending the Drop-In. However, at times ensuring women can access the services that they need is challenging. For women with multiple complex needs services need to be flexible in their delivery and advocating for this also forms part of the support role.

“There's quite a lot of systems change stuff going on in there, as well, because the support worker is having to advocate for why somebody needs to make that service more accessible.” (Manager)

3. Outcomes

Drop-in

28 women have attended the Drop In during its first year of running. The main outcomes that women report are increased feelings of confidence and self-esteem and the ability to communicate more assertively and to open up. Referrals had been made to a total of 16 different services, both internal and external including to Turn2Us, the Jobcentre and health services.

“Women have attended the women’s group and been given assistance that would never have engaged with [organisation] without this group existing.” (Frontline workers)

Casework

14 individuals have been supported through casework, including 5 women who have received intensive wrap-around casework support. The outcomes for women receiving intensive support include:

Outcomes directly related to accommodation:
- Number of Women Securing Accommodation: 8
- Number of Women Sustaining Accommodation: 3
- Number of Women Moved into Permanent suitable accommodation: 1

Additional outcomes include:
- Improved Psychological well being: 62%
- Improved Financial Situation: 66%
- Improved Access to services: 86%

Reduced Risk:
- Number of Women Supported with domestic violence: 9
- Number of Women moved to Refuge: 2
- Women support with sexual violence: 4
- Women supported around exploitation: 7
- Self assessed: Improvement based on Impact Questionnaire: 60%

Organisational

There have also been positive outcomes for both organisations involved in the partnership. WCHP have learned from BWC’s approach and as a result have made changes to their own services:

“We are embracing Trauma Informed Care and Psychologically Informed Environment approaches and being more gender informed and we benefit as an organisation.” (Manager, WCHP)

BWC are using knowledge gained from this partnership to advocate for women’s accommodation issues at a higher level, for example to gain more female-only supported accommodation:

“It's absolutely trying to improve that person's experience now, but it's also about trying to improve other people's experiences into the future.” (Manager)
4. Contextual factors/externalities affecting the project

Cuts to services and welfare reform, in particular the introduction of Local Housing Allowance, were identified as drivers of increased homelessness. So too was the lack of affordable accommodation in the local area. “Property prices in the South-East are extremely high, rented accommodation is really difficult to find, social housing is almost non-existent.” (Funder)

The local authority’s definition of vulnerable was challenged by staff for not including women who, in their assessment, were clearly vulnerable but had been deemed not to be owed a duty when they presented as homeless. This was thought in part to be because women are often not comfortable disclosing personal information about support needs or traumatic experiences in this context. Staff have tried to find a way around this by attending appointments with women to make their needs clear and present a support plan, but this can be a double edged sword: “At which point, ‘Oh, it sounds like they’re doing really well. They’re not priority.’” (Frontline staff)

Mental health support is becoming more difficult to access and this has had a big impact, including on women with high mental health needs. Staff reported occasions of women being told that they needed sectioning, but that there were no beds available and would be called when this changed. Staff also reported service users going to great lengths to access mental health support, including committing crimes to access mental health support in custody.

5. Learning points

What works well

➢ Women are able to receive support for a number of issues through the service.
  “It’s so wraparound, so someone can come here and get the majority of their needs met, just in one building” (Frontline staff)

➢ The Drop-In has created a safe space for women and this was identified as a key benefit of the service and in particular key in enabling the women attending it to start to move forwards.
  “Their world is, actually, a very unsafe place. They are in that sort of either hyper- or hypo-arousal quite a lot of the time. So to go somewhere where they actually don’t have to be looking over their shoulder on hyper-alert is- Like you say, to be able to go into that place means that you can start to make much better informed decisions about things.” (Manager)

➢ Time is taken to build relationships with women within this group, who are often wary and slow to build up trust.
  “It can take quite a long time, actually, of seeing them every single week, having a 10-minute chat with them every single week. And then, a couple of months down the line, that’s when they will start coming in and actually engaging. So, it does take a lot of time.” (Frontline staff)

➢ Joining up services and working in partnership, both with each other and with other support organisations, is a real benefit of the project.
  “We have been able to join all the ideas and the organisations together resulting in more power and more resources for the clients.” (Manager)

Challenges

The main challenge that the service has faced in its delivery is a lack of capacity to deal with the demand. Staff identified that they had developed a service with real opportunity to support people, however, this approach took specialist staff and few people could be supported compared to the demand for the service.
  “I think we have more of an opportunity to keep hold of them [service users] — especially bringing in a PIE and trauma informed approach — getting under their behaviour rather than just excluding them from services.” (Manager)

The sustainability of the service was also a challenge and multiple issues were identified as contributing to this, including reduced funding at County level, concerns over the future of supported housing rents, and a lack of strategic pulling together of funding for people with multiple complex needs.
  “What’s really concerning is the lack of strategic pooling together of resources. That’s the kind of thing that I find. I suppose, sitting in meetings, where people go, “Well, that’s not my problem; that’s a housing problem.” Or, “That’s not our problem; that’s somebody else’s problem.” (Manager)
There are real concerns about what will happen to the women supported by this service if funding is not secured going forwards.

**Replicability**

It was felt that this model could be replicated in other areas, as well as other contexts. Participants felt that key to successful role out of this model is finding appropriate partners. In particular, partners that are established and trusted in the local area. One of the key drivers of replicability was thought to be the holistic nature of the BWC’s model.

“We put women at the centre, we build the care around their needs. We’re not looking at them through the lens of a specific need, which means that we can use the model in quite a flexible and adaptive way.” (Manager)

**Learning points**

- A key piece of learning from this project for Brighton Women’s Centre is that their model is adaptable to different contexts.
- A key learning point for WCHP has been that a gendered approach was needed for this client group.
- The need for more joined-up funding was a key learning point from this service. Services supporting people with multiple complex needs need to bring together funding from different streams. This was identified as a message for commissioners, in understanding the need for services that support people with multiple complex needs and the difference and importance of female-only provision.
- The approach of BWC has been crucial in achieving the outcomes seen by the women involved in this group, and the partnership with WCHP has enabled cross-organisation learning that will benefit many more people. Key to this approach is being trauma informed, gender-informed and psychologically informed. Within this, trusting relationships are vital and it is acknowledged that although these may take time to build, they are essential.
Challenges and success factors in preventing homelessness

Success Factors

A number of key factors were identified as important in enabling services to prevent homelessness.

Building relationships with service users
Many organisations cited the importance of building relationships with service users and for some this was a critical first step in an individual’s engagement with the intervention.

“When we started our first training, none of the 10 invited young people turned up. We realised that this was due to the fact that we had not gained the trust of the young people.” (Manager, The Hyde Group)

Organisations were differently able to build up trust. For example, The Hyde Group tried several strategies to engage people in their services before going through a trusted partner, the young person’s social worker.

“Our short term response was to start sending taxis to pick the trainees up, but this was too expensive a solution. So to access the young people, we decided to work through their social workers.” (Manager, The Hyde Group).

In contrast, Brighton Women’s Centre, who work with women over a longer period of time, were able to build up a trusting relationship that allowed service users to engage.

“A lot of the women who I work with, especially initially, are really wary and they don’t trust people. So, it can take quite a long time, actually, of seeing them every single week, having a 10-minute chat with them every single week. And then, a couple of months down the line, that’s when they will start coming in and actually engaging. So, it does take a lot of time.” (Frontline staff, BWC)

Building these relationships clearly led to positive outcomes for the women involved, but working in this way requires the resources to put into relationship building. Long term funding is needed, since this can take time, and funders should recognise that for some client groups outcomes will not be immediate.

There was a feeling shared by many of the organisations that often people coming into their services were distrustful of the help available, lacking confidence that someone would ‘come through’ to support them. Many individuals had previous experience of not getting the help that they needed from other services, including statutory services, and building a relationship was in part about breaking down the assumptions that the same would be true of their service.

Flexibility
Adopting a flexible approach was cited by several participants as key to the success of their project. This was true across different dimensions, including: the delivery of the intervention, for example the length of the intervention; content, particularly of educational programmes; working patterns of staff; and the issues addressed by the intervention.

“You need to be flexible and creative with mediation. Single mediator is better, makes people feel less intimidated, especially with Young people. I think you need to be available and offer to help them with other issues where relevant.” (Mediation Service, Depaul UK)

Flexibility was also key in making services inclusive, shifting interventions around the person in order to make them as accessible as possible. Examples of this include, making appointments available in the evenings and on the weekend, and making the service available in different locations.

The partnership between Brighton Women’s Centre and Worthing Churches Housing Project is an example of how creating a flexible service, with provision for specific needs, has enabled a group of women who had been known in the area for a long time to engage with services and start to achieve positive outcomes.

“The service provided by Brighton Women’s Centre has been successful in engaging and making a difference to the lives of women that have been known to other services like the police and probation for years, without these kinds of outcomes being achieved, or this kind of engagement being achieved.” (Funder, BWC & WCHP partnership)
Working in partnership
Most participants attached high importance to building strong links with organisations that provide services that meet a range of needs, including: mental health, physical health, housing, ETE, Local Authorities and other statutory services. Working in partnership with this ‘network’ of organisations facilitated a two-way referral process; clients were referred into prevention services from other services, and signposted or referred onward to other services as needed. In the best examples, this partnership working created a network of support for the individual, with fluid referrals meaning that individual needed only to access one service to gain access to others that meet their needs.

This in turn helped to create a ‘wrap-around’ and holistic approach to homelessness prevention. Service users were often assessed for more than their housing need, with support provided to meet non-housing needs through this network of support. This support was formalised to different degrees within different services and respondents emphasised that establishing these networks took time and commitment.

“Having a joined up approach is really great. Getting the commissioners on board and having good ones, is really helpful. Everyone accepts that there is less money, but being able to be creative and work together is really important.” (Depaul UK)

More formal partnerships also provided learning opportunities for the organisations involved. Within the partnership between BWC and WCHP, both parties were clear that they had gained new skills and knowledge that would be taken into their wider work, as well as achieving positive outcomes for service users.

“There are clients coming in [name] this morning who, two years ago, would be on long-term no access just because of their unpredictability and their behaviour, whereas now, it’s something that is a lot more worked with.” (Frontline staff, BWC/WHCP)

Partnerships with local authorities also enabled services to impact the way that services are made available to people in their local area. The Bridge, through its partnership with Charnwood Borough Council, has developed a pathway for homeless people aged 16-17. NHYC through its partnership with the NLHP, have effectively pulled together services available for young people who are not deemed to be owed a duty by their local authority, with referrals to NHYC resulting in access to services within NHYC and partner organisations.

A holistic approach
As mentioned above, partnership working enabled many of the organisations participating in this research to provide holistic support and this too was key success factor in interventions preventing homelessness.

“The holistic approach offered by our service is extremely helpful to most clients. As we offer the clients the possibility to address any number of interrelated issues, it is a unique service in this respect … This holistic approach allows us to identify the causes of problems and all possible consequences of them, not dealing with issues in isolation.” (Homeworks)

This was true of services that support people with high as well as with low level needs. For example, Porchlight’s Primary Care Link Workers act as navigators through its delivery network to provide a seamless pathway for people with low to moderate needs. Brighton Women’s Centre, working with a higher needs group of women, provide a holistic approach by bringing many of the service that the group needs to them.

“It’s so wraparound, so someone can come here and get the majority of their needs met, just in one building.” (Frontline worker, BWC)

This approach is also taken by NHYC, who aim to be able to meet many of the needs of service users within the centre. There was a recognition by many of the services providing holistic interventions that: housing problems do not often occur in isolation and many of the individuals they work with have a range of presenting needs; that it was difficult for people to navigate the environment to identify where to get support for each issue from; and that the fewer barriers there are to services the more likely it is that an individual will get the support that they need.

Providing appropriate services
A key theme emerging from this research is the importance of providing services that meet the distinct needs of individual groups. The partnership between Brighton Women’s Centre and WCHP created a gender-informed service and in doing so enabled women who had not been known to services for years to achieve positive outcomes.
It was also recognised as important that services for young people be distinct to those for adults. This was true for the way that services are provided, with a ‘youth work’ approach seen as crucial to working with this age group. It was also the case for the kind of advice, information, and support provided to young people. There was a strong emphasis on providing a ‘reality check’ to young people thinking about moving out of home and this was enough in many cases to prevent a young person from becoming homeless. Where a young person could not stay at home, it was seen as important to equip them with the skills that they need to live independently.

“We owe young people from the care system the skills to deal with financial issues, which are a major source of problems in the long term.” (The Hyde Group)

In particular, it was felt by organisations with a youth focus that Councils were not in the best position to provide the specific support required by young people when they present as homeless. In particular, the skills required to speak to young people and creating an environment in which young people are able to disclose was thought to be better suited to youth-specific services than to local authorities, who must cater to a broad age group and need range.

Skills and expertise of staff
Several participants cited the skills, experience and expertise of staff as key drivers of success. Within this, it was crucial that staff have appropriate and up-to-date training, and best practice organisations provided many learning opportunities, both formal and informal, to staff. The skill of staff members was also seen to be key to encouraging client engagement.

“Also, the experience of the staff members is huge, some of the floating support workers have upwards of 15 years’ experience in the sector, and still turn up every day fresh and very enthusiastic.” (Homeworks)

Setting in which support is delivered
The setting in which interventions were delivered was also a key factor in their success. Whilst it is clear that the setting needs to be appropriate to the nature of the project, flexible and non-formal locations were often prioritised by services and this was thought to be key to individual’s willingness and ability to engage.

“The group work of the training is usually very good; as young people respond well to it. Also, the venue is really important, mainly that it is not school” (The Hyde Group).

Also important is the feeling that that the setting creates. For example, it was important for NHYC staff that the day centre had been built to specification with the input of young people in order to provide a space that young people wanted to be in: that was welcoming, light and open. It was important that this space felt like it was for young people, distinct from many statutory services. For the partnership work between BWC and WCHP the provision of a women’s only space, where men were not allowed for the duration of the Drop In, was crucial in allowing the target service user group to access the service. The impact of providing services within the right setting was positive, not just for those accessing the service, but for other staff members and the wider client group too.

“Seeing people who have been excluded from many services doing well under a different approach is making a difference to other people on the street and to the staff here.” (Manager, WCHP)

Key Challenges

Participants identified challenges which can be grouped in three main areas:

Welfare Reform
Welfare reform was cited as a key challenge to preventing homelessness by a number of participating organisations. The introduction of caps to Local Housing Allowance (LHA) was a crucial factor in rendering housing unaffordable for many people, since LHA rates do not meet rental levels in many areas. Allied to this, the introduction of the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) for people under 35 further pushed accommodation into unaffordability. The withdrawal of automatic entitlement to housing costs under Universal Credit for those aged 18-21 is a further concern.
In addition, successfully claiming the benefits that people were entitled to was also a challenge. The benefits system was thought to be complex, even by experienced staff and navigating this added an additional level of complexity to achieving the stable income needed to retain accommodation.

“[Navigating the system is] incredibly frustrating for the most resilient of people, never mind people when they’re rough sleeping and they’ve got mental health issues or don’t speak English as a first language.”

(Manager, NHYC)

Particular difficulty was associated with the need to remember a password in order to access Universal Credit systems. There is also a perceived inconsistency both within and across different benefits agencies, with outcomes dependent on which individual person picks up the phone.

Access to housing
A shortage of affordable housing was cited as a challenge to preventing homelessness, both in keeping people in their homes and in avoiding repeat homelessness. Many services reported a lack of social housing and also found a lack of specialist supported accommodation for particular groups i.e. young people (The Bridge) and women (Brighton Women’s Centre).

In many areas, the shortage of social housing meant that most people were looking to the private rented sector for long term accommodation. As well as the affordability issue created by the gap between LHA rates and market rents, there was a particular challenge in landlords being reluctant to let to people on Housing Benefit.

Young people faced additional challenges around finding affordable accommodation. The introduction of the SAR for under 35s, a lower minimum wage for those aged below 25, and now the removal of automatic entitlement to housing costs under Universal Credit for people aged 18-21 conspire to make findings and sustaining accommodation challenging. In particular, a shortage of shared accommodation was cited as a key issue for this age group.

Access to services
A number of services mentioned that support that their service users relied on to sustain their accommodation, or to improve their situation, had become less accessible. This was particularly the case for mental health support and substance misuse support. In an extreme example one woman, after presenting to A&E three times in a week to gain access to mental health support, had committed a crime in order to be taken into custody where she knew that she could access mental health support.

“In the end, she committed an offence so she could go into custody, and saw a mental health nurse. And she came out the next day and said, “Yes, that was brilliant. I got some support.”

(Frontline staff, BWC & WCHP)

This situation is not only damaging to the individuals who are forced to take extreme action to gain access to services that they need, it is also extremely costly.
Key learning

- It is difficult to evidence the effectiveness of early intervention services, for example work in schools, colleges and universities. Anecdotally staff see positive outcomes such as increased engagement in services after these events. However, it was difficult to prove that engagement led to the prevention of homelessness, since it is impossible to say what might have happened without the intervention. This poses challenges to funding and in some cases, these services had ceased.

- There is a need for more nuanced outcome measures to be made available and to be understood. Many outcomes that services collected were thought to measure an ‘end goal’, i.e. gaining employment, and not to recognise as an achievement the steps taken towards this. While many service users did achieve these ‘end goals’, others did not, but did take great strides towards them in the face of significant personal challenges. It is important both for service users and services that these steps are recognised, to allow services to demonstrate their impact and to celebrate individual’s successes.

- Getting into employment was seen as a key way to prevent homelessness, especially for young people. As a result of this Education, Training and Employment (ETE) was a key part of many of the youth-focused services participating in this research. For services, moving into employment was seen as key to gaining economic stability in the long term.

- Increasing access to accommodation was also seen as key to preventing homelessness. This was especially difficult to achieve for services supporting young people because of LHA, SAR, the lower minimum wage rate for under 35s, and now the removal of automatic entitlement to housing costs under Universal Credit for those aged 18-21.

- Related to this, welfare reform is a key challenge to preventing homelessness, including preventing repeat homelessness. This is both a result of the practical difficulty in claiming benefits and the gap between market rents and benefit levels in many areas.

- There is a need for specific services that meet the needs of particular groups, for example young people and women. Where appropriate services should work closely with local authorities to ensure that processes, such as evaluating a homeless application, are done in such a way as to meet the needs of these groups.

- For many people, preventing homelessness is not simply about access to accommodation and to this end partnership working is key to preventing homelessness. Many services acted as a ‘navigator’ through the myriad of services that each individual may require to meet their needs. Services build relationships with organisations outside of the homelessness sector, both to provide early interventions around homeless prevention and to ensure that people can access support to address their needs.
Conclusions

There is an unprecedented challenge in preventing homelessness, with the number of people rough sleeping increasing by 169% since 2010\(^\text{16}\) and a 25% increase in statutory homeless acceptances in the same period\(^\text{17}\). Welfare reform, in particular, the below market rate of LHA and SAR, and the lack of affordable housing is making it increasingly challenging for people to find and to sustain a home. However, the sector is innovating to meet this challenge. It is important to note that work to prevent homelessness is carried out not just by the homelessness sector, but by a range of other services too. This research saw evidence submitted from social housing providers, providers of security technology, providers of low cost furniture, individual grant givers, and money advice services.

This research saw many examples of organisations working together to achieve outcomes for service users. It was notable that many organisations had a significant network of organisations to draw on support from. Nevertheless, it was a constant challenge for many organisations that people accessed services when they were already in crisis. Some services were able to reach people before this point, for example, by targeting prison leavers, or receiving referrals from Housing Associations for people who are in rent arrears. These were positive examples of early intervention and the sector should continue to seek opportunities to work with those outside it to increase the success of this work.

Taken together, services provide: specialist interventions that provide information and advice on housing and other issues; support people to navigate the complex systems that they must interact with; and work with Local Authorities and other partners to build pathways and support networks for people at risk of homelessness. Across all organisations there is a focus on providing transformative services that help people to avoid homelessness for good and to build the knowledge, skills and resilience for a successful future.

With the Homelessness Reduction Act becoming law on 3 April 2018 we hope there will be a significant shift in the way Local Authorities and their partners put in place action to prevent homelessness far earlier. The Act will require improvements to the provision of both advice and support to prevent homelessness upstream, as well personalised assessments and plans for those groups who find themselves at risk of or experiencing homelessness. It will require cooperation and partnership working with a range if community and public bodies who all have a role in offering support to an individual so they can remain safely in their accommodation. As the Act is implemented, we will be learning more about what is effective and how partners can further work together to ensure prevention is the first step to ending homelessness.


## Appendix 1: Organisations that responded to Homeless Link’s Call for Evidence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Service</th>
<th>Organisation name, if different</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>@home scheme,</td>
<td>Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to PRS</td>
<td>North London Housing Partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Violence and Abuse One Stop Shop</td>
<td>Barnet Homes Housing Options Service</td>
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<td>Youth AIMS (Advice, Information, Mediation service)</td>
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### Appendix 2: Organisations participating in telephone interviews

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<th>Name of Service</th>
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What we do
Homeless Link is the national membership charity for services working directly with people experiencing homelessness, or living with housing with health, care and support needs. Representing over 700 organisations across England, we work to improve services through research, training and guidance, and to promote policy change that will ensure everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.