REMOVING BARRIERS TO SERVICES
A guide to inclusion for homeless people
REM Removing Barriers to Services: A Guide to Inclusion for Homeless People

93%¹ of homelessness services refuse access to clients for set reasons or criteria – and this figure is rising.

Is this a problem? Or in the current context of reduced resources and increased demand, is further exclusion of homeless people with varying and often complex needs inevitable? One thing is certain: at a time when priorities are set locally, only service commissioners and providers can tackle this issue to ensure that everyone within their communities gets the help they need at the time they need it.

Purpose of This Guidance
We have produced this guidance to support commissioners and providers of services for homeless people who want to ensure that services are as inclusive as possible and respond appropriately to homeless people’s needs. In particular, we answer the questions:

• Why are people excluded from the services they need?
• What are the consequences of their being excluded?

We also outline our good practice guidelines for inclusive services. So take the test: how inclusive are you?

Who Is Excluded From Services?
While almost all the services we spoke to were adamant that they did not operate ‘blanket bans’ almost all (9/10) mentioned that there were some ‘categories’ of client that they would not allow to access their service. These tended to be related to ‘serious’ convictions that services felt defined a client as a continued risk to other users. The most common reasons for exclusion² were as follows:

1. Arson 36%
2. Sexual Offences 25%
3. Violence 25%
4. Criminal Record 2%
5. Schedule 1 11%
6. Other ASB 2%
7. Previous Bans?

On average, projects refused access to one person per week.

¹ Survey of Needs and Provision (SNAP) 2012
² SNAP 2012 and Homeless UK database of 1,872 homelessness services
WHY ARE PEOPLE EXCLUDED?

Cause of exclusion one: risk

Services excluding clients did so following a risk assessment of the client’s behaviour. Risk centred around three areas: risk of harm, risk of inability to sustain accommodation, and risk based on previous behaviour. There were also a number of misconceptions underlying some of these exclusions policies.

- **Potential harm:** Projects assess the client’s behaviour as presenting too high a risk to staff, other clients, the service, stakeholders and the client themselves. The SNAP 2012 report showed 47% of services refusing access because of risk of harm to staff. Other projects reported their reasons for exclusion being to protect vulnerable clients, either from the presenting client or to them from other clients accessing the service. Larger services were found to be more concerned about risks of harm due to difficulties monitoring client behaviour in large premises with a low staff to client ratio. In accommodation based services self-contained cluster accommodation was deemed higher risk due to no staff presence.

- **Inability to sustain accommodation:** Accommodation providers are assessed by commissioners on planned moves on from their projects. A history of unplanned moves from accommodation in the form of evictions or abandonments was seen by staff to be a signifier that clients would not sustain their accommodation and affect the likelihood of projects meeting commissioner targets. Similarly projects scrutinised clients’ rent arrears to assess the financial impact of clients accessing services and move on accommodation.

- **Previous exclusions:** The SNAP 2012 report shows 15% of services refused access to services on the basis that clients had previously been banned from other services. Five services spoken to said that if an individual had been previously evicted from the same service, they would not allow them to return to the same service no matter what the circumstance of the exclusion. One manager explained that this is to prevent ‘rewarding bad behaviour’ and to demonstrate to other clients that challenging behaviour would not be tolerated.

Misconceptions and ex-offenders

There were a number of misconceptions and some confusion about the reasons behind projects’ exclusion policies. A common example was the understanding that ‘arsonists’ were not allowed access to accommodation because of criteria set out in insurance policies. Other misconceptions stemmed from the difference between schedule one offenders and schedule one sex offenders.

Cause of exclusion two: support needs too high or low

The SNAP 2012 report indicates 38% of services excluded clients because their support needs were too high or low. Clients with multiple complex support needs and those with needs in only one area were similarly excluded as services considered themselves not suited to their needs. When asked how decisions on service suitability were made, half of services judged on past experiences with some clients not even receiving an assessment.

Cause of exclusion three: no local connection

The SNAP 2012 report showed 22% of projects refused clients access to their services as they had no local connection. Where local authorities fund homelessness projects there may be a requirement to restrict access of services to those able to demonstrate a connection to the area.
WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF EXCLUSION?
Excluding clients from services has a detrimental impact on the client, services and local areas.

For the individual:
Banning or excluding people considered to have ‘high needs’ leads to a situation where the local options for many clients, in particular those with complex needs, become increasingly narrow. At a time when many services are being reduced and providers are being required to demonstrate increasingly competitive outcomes, there is a real risk of this particularly vulnerable, and often most difficult to work with, group of people falling through the gaps. The impact of this on clients is immediate and significant, resulting in:

- longer periods of sleeping rough or staying with friends
- being forced to leave support networks in order to seek services further afield
- a lack of resolution or support to tackle their issues
- being unable to demonstrate or work towards positive changes in behaviour
- feeling judged and disenfranchised due to a lack of choice and control over their lives
- routes into other accommodation, work or volunteering, may be similarly blocked
- a return to previously negative behaviour, such as offending or drug use
- decreased likelihood of escaping the cycle of homelessness
- exclusion from specialist services that would be better suited to their needs.

For services and local areas:
Without any services prepared to take risks rough sleeping and anti-social behaviour will exist without any solution. However, for services that do not implement such barriers, consequences such as 'ghettoising' can occur. This is when a particular service becomes overloaded with the most complex clients leading to less ability to manage risk or do effective work. Additionally, due to the significant difficulty in moving on clients who face barriers, these services often have to accommodate them for longer than they would other clients. The risk for these services is that they can become stigmatised by commissioners, clients and other providers. They may also find it harder to meet the outcomes expected of them from their commissioners. Projects consequently fail to meet their targets, when in actual fact they are demonstrating flexibility and preventing rough sleeping by working with the most high risk clients. However this can also increase incidents and anti-social behaviour, putting vulnerable clients at even higher risk. There can also be an impact on the local community as rough sleeping and potentially anti-social behaviour increase within an area.
GOOD PRACTICE STANDARDS: TAKE THE TEST
Reduction in the number of services met with increased demand and limited resources exacerbate the impact of client exclusion. 58% of projects received a reduction in funding between 2011 and 2012, affecting projects’ ability to work with other services and meet client needs.

In a changing landscape of reform and with the introduction of payment by results it is important that services adjust delivery to provide services to those with the most complex needs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXCLUSION</th>
<th>GOOD PRACTICE STANDARD: SERVICES</th>
<th>Does your service meet the standard?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Risk</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Decisions to offer clients services are based on more than client’s previous behaviours</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The service focuses on risk management not risk assessment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The relative likelihood that an offence or harmful act will occur and the relative impact or harm of the offence is considered during risk assessment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>When risk assessing clients the service considers both risk and triggers and asks what exactly might happen, to what or whom, under what circumstances, and why?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Services work with clients to identify triggers to mitigate risks</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Risk management plans aim to minimise risk rather than entirely remove risk</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The service does not operate blanket bans</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Risk assessments consider dynamic risk factors such as previous circumstances, motivations and conditions surrounding an act or crime and the time elapsed since</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Services assess clients individually on a case by case basis and have risk management plans in place to mitigate risks</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Services recognise the different degrees of risk posed by individuals and assess risk on a case by case basis</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Services regularly review rules, supportive actions and their approach to managing negative behaviour</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Services consider motivation, conditions and time elapsed relating to previous exclusions, abandonments and evictions when considering an offer of accommodation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Exclusions policies are regularly reviewed</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The service understands the terms of third party contracts and insurance policies</td>
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<tr>
<td>EXCLUSION</td>
<td>GOOD PRACTICE STANDARD: SERVICES</td>
<td>Does your service meet the standard?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Support needs too high or too low</strong></td>
<td>The service operates as part of a pathway of services to ensure client needs are met</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The service works in partnership with other services and can refer clients if appropriate</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>No local connection</strong></td>
<td>The service is familiar and works with local reconnection protocols</td>
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<tr>
<th>EXCLUSION</th>
<th>GOOD PRACTICE STANDARD: COMMISSIONERS</th>
<th>Does your service meet the standard?</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Risk</strong></td>
<td>Blanket bans are not accepted in commissioned services</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Services are commissioned that accept clients on a case by case basis and are not risk averse</td>
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<td>Commissioners ensure high needs clients are distributed equitably and appropriately amongst services</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Services are commissioned that have a personalised approach to risk that looks at a person’s</td>
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<td>circumstances now and ways to work with them going forward</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Commissioners are intelligent with targets for commissioned services and recognise services that</td>
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<td></td>
<td>take risks</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Training and resources are provided for services on the law around blanket bans and refusal due</td>
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<td></td>
<td>to arson and other criminal offences</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Commissioners ensure services have policies in place that are updated regularly and do not</td>
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<td></td>
<td>exclude individuals</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Training on working with offending behaviour across services in partnership with the local criminal</td>
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<td></td>
<td>justice sector is available to all commissioned services</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Support needs too high or too low</strong></td>
<td>There is a joined up strategic approach that ensures provision for all and a pathway of services</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>No local connection</strong></td>
<td>A reconnection protocol is in place that is supportive, signed up to by all, and accounts for those who cannot be reconnected</td>
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MYTHS AROUND CRIMINAL OFFENCES

To support you further, this guidance includes a more in-depth look at the myths around criminal convictions in general and previous convictions of arson, which as we’ve seen are common reasons for preventing move-on from hostels and supported housing units into independent accommodation. For example, some housing associations have been known only to allow move-on if someone has been conviction free for two years - even though this may mean that a client is kept in a situation and location where they are more likely to offend. A report by The National Offender Management Project (NOMS) highlights the difficulty that ex-offenders have in finding suitable and good quality accommodation. It states that:

“Offenders find it difficult to access and sustain housing for a variety of reasons. This reinforces social exclusion and increases the likelihood of further criminal behaviour… Many offenders have a poor tenancy history and appear to be treated less favourably as a group by many housing providers, despite Housing Corporation regulation and changes brought about in the Homelessness Act 2002 which prohibit ‘blanket’ exclusions of particular groups.” (2008:13)

Myth: we can’t accommodate ex-offenders as they will commit crime and are an increased risk.

It is worth noting that service users who have been recently released from custody and are deemed to be high risk by the probation service are typically placed in ‘approved premises’ that provide an appropriate facility where they can receive intensive supervision and support. Typically these would be clients who have been convicted under certain categories of serious offence or have served particularly lengthy sentences. These facilities allow an appropriate level of risk management and in extreme cases would come under Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA). The majority of ex-prisoners do not fit these criteria and have been assessed by the probation service to be suitable for other accommodation meaning hostels and supported housing. Therefore services have a responsibility to accommodate these individuals where possible, completing personalised risk assessments and support plans to meet their needs.

Knowing about someone’s offending history via the probation services may make it far easier to support clients around any subsequent support needs. The information and knowledge that can be gained from probation services, can make supporting them easier than clients which you have no relevant history available. This information may help you to target external services around their needs. By looking at an offending history it is possible to discuss the circumstance of the conviction with the client and therefore highlight any trigger factors that can be used to attempt to predict any future problems. In this sense openness is the best policy. Making it clear to clients that those with criminal convictions are not going to be denied access they are much more likely to admit to past convictions.

Myth: Arsonists cannot be accommodated because of criteria in insurance policies

Many organisations reference the criteria of their insurance as a reason for not allowing ‘arsonists’ into their service, however it is very rare for insurance policies to have a specific condition that excludes those that have committed arson in the past. Most insurance policies state that staff must take ‘all reasonable steps’ to prevent arson when accommodating or offering other services to an individual with a known arson conviction or pending arson investigation. Most insurers do not define ‘reasonable’ in this connection and therefore in the event of any claim relating to possible arson, insurers will make a judgement on the grounds of whether reasonable precautions had been taken and evidenced. A procedure that can be implemented in the case of a client with a history of arson that takes steps to monitor said client’s behaviour can be seen as a ‘reasonable steps’
towards this. If insurance does specifically state that ‘arsonists’ cannot be accommodated because of an increased risk, why not change the insurance provider?

CLIENT CASE STUDY

Miss A is in her mid-20s and was convicted for committing arson in 2007. She was born partially sighted and is registered disabled. She was in foster care from the age of three, and had been in several unsuccessful placements. From a period in foster care she alleged physical and sexual abuse. When she was 19 she entered a relationship and moved away from the area to set up home. This relationship ended due to domestic violence.

Miss A was given a tenancy with the local authority and lived independently for three years. During this time she became isolated and vulnerable, and started misusing alcohol on a daily basis. She self-harmed and attempted suicide. Social services, at her request, gave her files of her time in their care; Miss A describes the feeling of fear she had during this time and could not bring herself to read them. She felt out of control with feelings of uselessness and worthlessness and during this episode she set fire to the files on her bed. The fire spread in the flat leading to £12,000 worth of damage.

In court she pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 18 months in custody. This was her first and only offence and she served 9 months of her sentence and was released on license. The probation service referred her to a number of accommodation services but had difficulty placing her because of her conviction. Eventually, they managed to find her accommodation in a service that did not operate barrier policies.

Miss A moved into a 4-bed shared house with a visiting support worker. The arson task force was contacted prior to her move and an inspection of the property took place. On arrival she was anxious regarding her new surroundings; a service was contacted regarding her eyesight, and adaptations were made within her accommodation to allow her to be independent and safe.

At first she felt very self-conscious and vulnerable, especially about going out with her white cane and she has needed encouragement and support from her key worker. She has made positive relationships with peer groups, and family relations have also improved. Lapses of self-harm have been managed with coping strategies having been put in place, including regular check-ups with her GP and medication reviews. She has completed an outreach program on personal development. Miss A is growing in confidence although she still does not like to go out unaccompanied.

Miss A has been settled in her accommodation for 18 months and is interacting in the house and the local community. During this time she has not been in any other trouble with the police or probation.
ONLINE TOOLS
Click the links or visit www.homeless.org.uk

Evictions and Abandonment Toolkit – provides practical tools for services and local authorities to prevent evictions and abandonments from accommodation based services.

Barriers – detailed information on barriers to service access including case studies.

Mental health support needs – information about how to work with clients with mental health support needs and ways to develop a Psychologically Informed Environment (PIE).

Personalised support – information on how to implement personalised services, 205 personalisation case studies that illustrate how entrenched rough sleepers with complex histories can be supported into independent living.

Drug and alcohol policies – tools to support you in developing realistic effective policies for supporting clients who use drugs and alcohol.

Better together, preventing reoffending and homelessness – research and information on working more effectively with the criminal justice system and useful tools and resources for commissioners and services.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION USED IN THIS GUIDANCE
Homeless UK (HUK) – the national database of homelessness services in UK which includes information on eligibility and exclusion criteria for 1872 services at time of research.

Interviews – telephone interviews were conducted with services who operate exclusions; 8 in-depth interviews with projects who accommodate serially excluded people; 10 in-depth interviews with clients who have been refused accommodation.

SNAP 2012 – Homeless Link’s annual survey of needs and provision (SNAP) detailing current information on the homelessness sector. The SNAP survey uses Homeless UK and telephone interviews with a sample of 500 staff managing frontline services in England.

MYTH BUSTER – QUICK TOOL
Homeless Link has put together a quick tool to support agencies break down some of the myths around barriers to accommodating people. This will enable services to evaluate their current approach quickly and establish whether change needs to happen. This can also be done at a local level, by setting up a working group or utilising an existing providers group to examine the exclusion policies across a local authority area.

Please find the tool at Appendix One overleaf.
APPENDIX ONE: MYTH BUSTER QUICK TOOL

ACCESSING ACCOMMODATION: BUSTING THE MYTHS

We can’t accommodate…

**... ex-offenders**
"They will commit crime and are too risky"

- Allowing ex-offenders to accommodation has been repeatedly proven to make people far less likely to re-offend.
- Openness means triggers can be identified and worked with to prevent future problems.
- Police checks don’t give the detail necessary to assess future risk.

**... history of arson**
“Our insurance policy doesn’t allow”

- It is very rare for insurance policies to ban arsonists—rather, most state staff must take ‘all reasonable steps’ to prevent arson.
- A procedure that can be implemented in the case of a client with a history of arson that takes steps to monitor a client’s behaviour can be seen as a reasonable step towards this.

**... schedule 1 offenders**
“They’ve committed sexual offences”

- A ‘schedule 1 offender’ refers to someone who has been convicted of an offence against a child. This should not be confused with offenders who have been prosecuted under Schedule 1 of the Sex Offenders Act 1997 who have committed sexual offences.
- Schedule 1 offenders are termed so for life, but may not pose a continued threat to children or adults.

**... high support needs**
“They are too high risk”

- To accommodate high support needs, services must have the resources and expertise to support the clients, and be able to determine whether clients, because of their support needs, pose a risk to themselves and others.
- Detailed understanding of needs can enable effective support plans, risk assessments and multi-agency support.

**... histories of eviction**
“They won’t sustain the tenancy”

- Difficulties in the past do not necessarily mean the behaviour will repeat—in fact, the knowledge behind why a client has been subject to this may form the foundations for helping them to sustain future tenancies and implement approaches to preventing evictions and abandonments.
- Excluding for this reason can lead to isolation, as clients are forced to move out of the area.

We can accommodate… by:

**... ex-offenders**
“Support is tailored to individual personal triggers”

- Identifying triggers for past behaviour to predict future behaviour.
- Discussing the context and gravity of previous behaviour.
- Developing personalised support plans based around what works for individual clients.

**... history of arson**
“We have a robust preventative procedure”

- Developing procedures for working with those with histories of arson.
- Understanding the circumstances of the offence(s)
- Moving insurance provider.

Read about how Shihay Community’s Gabriel House, Exeter has worked to fulfil insurance criteria when accepting clients with a history of arson.

**... schedule 1 offender**
“Context and future risk varies”

- Understanding the terms used
- Assessing risk in terms of likelihood to reoffend as well as impact of offence.
- Taking decisions on a case by case basis.

Read about how the Bridge Project has successfully worked with schedule 1 offenders.

**... high support needs**
“We understand and manage risk”

- Undertaking assessments that enable a comprehensive support plan to be developed.
- Having a thorough risk assessment and risk management strategy.

Read about how Broadway’s Old Theatre innovatively houses serially excluded clients with multiple needs.

**... histories of eviction**
“They will sustain this tenancy”

- Use past experiences to explore difficulties and determine approaches to prevent evictions and abandonment.
- Being flexible and creative.

Read about how Passage House successfully worked with one woman with a long history of eviction and abandonment.
http://www.homeless.org.uk/evictions-passage-house