

June 2020

KEY MESSAGES

The steps taken to accommodate people who were sleeping rough at the time of the COVID-19 outbreak has created a once in a generation opportunity to end rough sleeping for good. Now, with the announcement of further Government measures to help people secure long-term housing, Changing Lives makes three recommendations to the Rough Sleeping COVID-19 Taskforce to create solutions that work for everyone.

1. A focus on dispersed accommodation with community support
2. Social landlords must be a greater part of the solution
3. Specialist support is vital and must start now.

PROGRESS TO DATE

The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented pressures across our communities, and none more so than for people with existing vulnerabilities. At Changing Lives, we support people across the North and Midlands through their most challenging of circumstances, including homelessness, addictions, domestic abuse, sexual exploitation, contact with the criminal justice system, unemployment and more. The people who access our services are among the most acutely affected by the health, social and economic impacts of the pandemic.

The wellbeing of people who were rough sleeping at the time of the outbreak has been in the spotlight in recent weeks. We strongly welcome the measures introduced by Government, working in partnership with local government and the voluntary sector, to ensure their safety by opening up emergency accommodation to all people who were rough sleeping. This has included £3.2 million dedicated funding for rough sleeping services, as well as £3.2 billion for local authorities during the COVID-19 crisis, which may include homelessness services.

It is hugely encouraging that these measures mean that 5,000 people who were previously rough sleeping now have a roof over their head, and it is testament to the commitment and agility of frontline services, who have played a vital role in supporting people within their communities and thereby relieving pressure on the NHS and other emergency services.

The recent announcement of a Rough Sleeping COVID-19 Taskforce, led by Dame Louise Casey, has been another welcome step. This, coupled with an enhanced funding package for rough sleeping services and a commitment to additional housing to help people move on from homelessness for good. These measures demonstrate a willingness and commitment to creating long-term pathways out of homelessness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: A focus on dispersed accommodation with community support

We strongly welcome the Government's commitment to providing 6,000 new units of housing stock, including 3,300 units over the next 12 months, to help people currently in temporary accommodation find long-term housing. We join other leading charities in arguing that homelessness can be solved only where there is enough safe, permanent housing for everyone.

A safe, secure home is the foundation for a flourishing life. However, it is our experience that large hostels, the dominant approach to accommodating people in England who are experiencing homelessness, may not help them to build a better future. Often, hostel settings cannot provide the supportive environment necessary for people to engage with therapeutic interventions that will help them to address their wider needs. Further, we find that bringing together many people facing complex challenges under one roof can be detrimental to their health and wellbeing.

Instead, we would advocate for greater investment in dispersed, single unit accommodation located within community settings. We are currently building our evidence base for this approach, which we have been moving to as a business model over the past three years. Already, we are finding it successful in helping people to move on from homelessness because they are supported to live with dignity and independence, and can build a network of support within their communities. Additionally, it increases opportunities for people to achieve their goals and aspirations in regard to activities, training and employment. This will be particularly important in the context of an anticipated flow of people finding themselves homeless for the first time as a result of the pandemic, and a changing demographic – for example, younger people who may be particularly vulnerable where they have insecure employment.

Recommendation 2: Social landlords must be a greater part of the solution

Until now, the viability of the dispersed model has depended largely on the housing market and availability of rental stock within a given geographical area. Even in areas where the housing market is relatively accessible, we find that the greatest proportion of dispersed stock comes from private housing providers. Across all areas, the support of social landlords is vital to the increased use of dispersed housing – particularly in areas where house prices are prohibitive or where the rental market is saturated.

A key reason why it has been possible to accommodate almost everyone who is experiencing homelessness in the North East during the pandemic is because registered social landlords have eased their eligibility criteria and streamlined their applications process to identify individuals within our services who would be able to sustain a tenancy. The Taskforce has an opportunity to consider how

the strategic contribution and responsibilities of social landlords¹ can increase the number of properties available for people who are experiencing homelessness.

Recommendation 3: Specialist support is vital and must start now

Investment in housing is vital, but we know that it will take more than a roof over a person's head to help them build on their strengths and address the wider challenges in their lives that may have contributed to their homelessness in the first place. A disproportionately high number of people who are rough sleeping have experiences of local authority care or contact with the criminal justice system, and frequently experience poor mental health and addiction.² We know, from the work of our Rough Sleeper Social Impact Bond project and our other rough sleeper services, that when you work with people in a person-led and strengths-based way people are more likely to a tenancy and make progress in other areas of their lives. It is therefore particularly encouraging that the Government has announced an uplift of 37% in funding for specialist support.

We believe it is vital that this funding for the introduction of additional support services must start now, and should not wait until people find longer-term housing – although neither should support needs prevent people from accessing housing. As many different funding streams are made available, whether for homelessness, addictions or other 'needs', there must be a recognition that many people face interlinked challenges. Rather than trying to address these in silos, commissioners should be actively trying to integrate services. We believe that this is the time to start focussing on the person, not the service.

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About Changing Lives

Changing Lives is a national charity supporting people who are experiencing multiple disadvantage, helping people through their most challenging of circumstances, including homelessness, life-threatening addictions, domestic abuse, sexual exploitation, long-term employment and more.

We deliver housing and homelessness services across the north of England the Midlands, including accommodation and community-based services. This includes whole service pathways in Durham, Halton, Newcastle, Northumberland and York.

Our accommodation services include: emergency access accommodation; dispersed community projects; specialist services for veterans; specialist services for people experiencing domestic abuse; and Housing First initiatives.

Our community-based services include: tenancy sustainment; rough sleeper and complex needs outreach services; modern Slavery services; domestic abuse and veterans' community outreach services

¹ This applies in particular to those Large Scale Voluntary Transfer (LSVT) and Arms-Length Management Organisations (ALMO) landlords who now control much council stock.

² <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/chain-reports>