Meeting the Housing-Related Support Needs of Homeless People in the North East: Summary

Project Overview

In 2011, the Cyrenians, in partnership with Northumbria University, was successful in securing funding to assess the state of homelessness provision in the North East. Supported by the Voluntary Organisations' Network North East (VONNE) Policy and Representation Partnership, the project aimed to:

- Improve awareness in the North East of the national and local picture of homelessness;
- Identify the impacts of public sector funding cuts on the capacity of the North East to meet homeless needs; and,
- Provide an opportunity for local authorities (LAs) and voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations to think collectively about how to continue to meet needs at a time of new challenges and opportunities.

The Changing Picture of Homelessness in the North East

Nationally, increasing levels of homelessness are matched by declines in available resources. Funding cuts are already having a negative impact on the size and capacity of the homelessness sector and this is likely to be compounded by forthcoming legislative changes such as welfare reform. The picture of homelessness need and provision in the North East largely reflects these national trends.

Local Authorities

- There is an ongoing commitment within LAs to maintain homelessness services, but the extent to which this is possible varies significantly across the North East. The impacts of funding cuts are being particularly felt in smaller LAs, where there is limited scope for the scaling back of services.

- Generally, LAs have taken the decision to safeguard frontline services. Emphasis in 2011/12, therefore, has been on the re-negotiation of Supporting People (SP) – the key funding stream for accommodation-based homelessness services – contracts to deliver efficiency savings. However, LAs highlighted that future cuts are significantly more likely to result in the decommissioning of services.

VCS Providers

- Of 20 VCS organisations surveyed, 18 (90%) reported increased demand for services of approx. 10-15% in 2011/12. Service demand increases most commonly related to accommodation (58%); floating support (47%); financial advice and support (47%); and addictions services (42%). Organisations also reported increased waiting list times for service users for specialist appointments (drug and alcohol services).

- Of 20 organisations that were in receipt of SP funding in 2011/12, 16 (63%) saw decreased levels of funding. Homeless Link's Survey of Needs and Provision 2012 highlighted that there are 3 fewer projects and 55 fewer bed spaces (a 3% decrease) in the region now than 12 months ago. The most significant changes in the availability of services are a reduction in the provision of meaningful activities (10%), education, training and employment support (7%) and, resettlement support (7%) (Homeless Link, 2012).

- Looking ahead to 2012/13, 13 of 17 VCS organisations (78%) were expecting further cuts to SP funding and some organisations were due to lose funding altogether. Organisations anticipated taking the following actions in the coming months: services restructuring; reducing level of frontline staff; increasing volunteer support; and, service closures.

- There is concern across the North East about the impact of reduced capacity on service users. Organisations expect they will be able to support a reduced number of service users, provide a reduced range of services, provide less intensive support and will develop stricter eligibility criteria – thereby reducing the accessibility of services to clients. Service closures in some parts of the North East have resulted in the displacement of rough sleepers, placing increasing pressure on services elsewhere. In the longer term, there is concern that funding cuts will result in increased levels of social exclusion, rough sleeping and repeat homelessness, with high associated costs, and the loss of specialism and diversity within the sector.

Key Issues in the North East

Good Practice: The research identified many examples of good practice in the North East, including:

- effective prevention services for young people;
- a good research culture informing service improvements and policy;
- the widespread adoption of a holistic approach to addressing service user needs;
- needs-based, specialist accommodation projects;
- effective move-on schemes; and,
- effective approaches to partnership working between LAs and the VCS.

Prevention: Most of the LAs interviewed had taken the decision to safeguard services primarily for the most vulnerable homeless client groups, such as those with complex needs. The extent to which this is the most effective approach in the long-term, however, is a matter of debate. Some LA and VCS stakeholders fear that where lower-level needs are unmet, they are likely to escalate, resulting in the need for costly interventions for service users in the future. Stakeholders saw the greater stress on prevention in recent years as a highly positive development within the sector, but fear that prevention services are an easy target for further public sector funding cuts due to the difficulty of evidencing the value of this type of services.

Evidencing the Value of Services: The LAs interviewed expressed difficulty deciding which services to prioritise over the coming years due to a lack of evidence regarding which services are most cost-effective and beneficial to service users, limitations to current methods of measuring and collecting outcomes data and the absence of a simple model for analysing the cost-benefits of services. Evidence gathering is made more difficult because many service users require engagement with services for long periods of time before progress is made or may return to services several times before sustaining independence.

Rethinking Hostels: The chaotic and stressful nature of many direct access projects are thought to be impacting upon outcomes for service users, particularly in relation to addictions. Many feel that direct access accommodation does not cater for individuals with low level needs and alternatively, in some cases, some homeless client groups are too vulnerable to be placed in hostel environments.

Move-On Accommodation: The biggest reported gap in service provision in the North East is move-on accommodation (accommodation projects and housing for clients who do not or no longer require intensive support). This is resulting in many service users remaining in expensive supported accommodation for significantly longer periods than necessary and projects being unable to accept new clients. Exclusions are particularly affecting people with an offending history, people considered 'too high' risk, people with addictions and those with a history of previous evictions (Homeless Link, 2012b). In addition, there are mixed feelings regarding the greater use of the private rented sector (PRS) as a supplier of move-on accommodation, due to concerns over rent affordability, property conditions and security of tenure. Many homeless people express grave concern about entering the sector. Whilst various examples of good practice with the PRS are emerging, stakeholders feel that more could be done to support homeless people to access decent and affordable move-on accommodation.

Managing Clients with Complex Needs: Although the eventual financial savings which result from meeting needs effectively are substantial, people with complex needs are very expensive to work with. Faced with a target culture and payment by results, some service providers are reportedly 'cherry picking' clients with less complex needs, turning people with complex needs away or only accepting a small number of such clients at any one time. Concerns were also expressed that not all agencies working with people with complex needs will be appropriately trained and that they may be duplicating each other's services. It was felt that commissioning practices and services should be changed to reflect the difficulties of working with the client group.

Redesigning homelessness services: 'Personalisation' involves affording individuals with long-term support needs personal budgets to purchase personalised care packages. It offers a new approach to meeting homeless needs and will become an increasingly important model for services in the changing commissioning environment. Personalisation has been adopted within the homelessness sector with differing applications and scale and emerging evidence suggests that it offers service-users more choice and independence, and ultimately better long-term outcomes. Being flexible and adapting to new commissioning structures including personalisation may enable valuable services to survive (Homeless Link, 2012c).

Partnership Working: The extent and quality of partnership working between LAs and the VCS varies across the North East. In most instances, LA and the VCS report open, honest and effective partnership working arrangements and to have various mechanisms in place to facilitate this. However, coordinated LA referral routes are not in place within all LA areas; different systems across LAs hinder clients accessing services where there is no local connection; some LAs report difficulties knowing all of the providers in their area; and not all VCS organisations are aware of key points of contact within their respective LAs. VCS organisations also reported the need for better links with other VCS organisations. Good links exist between practitioners but stakeholders suggested that these could be utilised more effectively for strategic purposes, such as the pooling of resources and influencing policy. Equally, services should be better integrated, particularly services for rough sleepers. Key barriers to this are time, a lack of strategic leadership and limited resources resulted in competition within the sector.

Moving Forward

Principles and Practices

1. **Understanding What Works**: Understanding 'what works' is critical to improving outcomes for homeless people and ensuring that resources are being used effectively. All LAs and VCS organisations should ensure that they have a true understanding of the scale and causes of homelessness in their area, have effective systems in place for the monitoring of outcomes (social and financial) and the evaluation of services, and are aware of the points at which people fall out of support or fail to engage with services and how these issues can be overcome. Across the North East, LAs should undertake further work to compare and benchmark services.

2. **Protecting What Works**: Effective services and good practice should be evidenced, promoted and protected. The SP programme acted as a catalyst for the development of a range of effective services for homeless people and driving up standards within the sector. It is important that we do not lose the positive developments made within the sector in recent years, such as a focus on prevention, a holistic approach to meeting needs and balancing stock and services, at a time of limited resources.

3. **Lobbying and Influencing**: Commissioners, procurers, providers and support organisations such as VONNE and Homeless Link must continue to share good practice and work together to communicate with local and national government and beyond.

4. **Diversifying Funding:** The removal of the SP ring-fence and relocation of SP teams (or their equivalents) within new departments following LA restructuring offers an opportunity for

commissioners and VCS organisations to secure additional funding for homelessness services. In trying to do so, organisations must continue to evidence and promote the added value of homelessness services to other sectors.

5. **Adapting to Change and Seizing Opportunities:** Adapting to new commissioning structures including joint-commissioning and personalisation may enable valuable services to survive. It is important that VCS organisations develop infrastructures which enable them to bid for jointly-commissioned contracts and that they know how to lead on good practice around personalised support. Improved infrastructure regarding tendering would also be useful for taking advantage of pilot monies and grants which become available.

6. **Greater Partnership Working across LAs:** LAs across the North East are working together effectively to tackle key issues, such as rough sleeping. It could be, however, that further priorities for action could be more effectively addressed through multi-area agreements and cross-boundary funded services such as problems related to area connection, imbalances and gaps in provision across the North East and the benchmarking of services and monitoring of outcomes.

7. **Greater Partnership Working between VCS Organisations:** Across the sector, VCS organisations should seek to further develop positive working relationships and to utilise these relations for strategic purposes. Organisations should seek to be more pro-active in developing individual and collective strategies for dealing with efficiencies and cuts, such as influencing local policy and the pooling of resources, in order to maintain services.

8. **Greater Communication across the Homelessness Sector:** LAs and VCS organisations should be more pro-active in promoting the services they provide, eligibility criteria for their services and key points of contact within their organisations.

Policy Priorities

1. **Supporting Clients with Complex Needs:** Developing new models for working with this client group should be prioritised. Potential solutions may include: commissioners paying premiums for people with higher needs; seeking to ensure a better match between the needs of the service-user, the service that is commissioned and the service that is provided; adjusting targets for providers working with people with complex needs; a greater use of a Housing First approach with the client group; agencies buying services from each other; and, the greater use of multi-agency case management meetings.

2. **Helping Service Users Access and Sustain Accommodation:** Service providers, including housing providers, should reconsider how they perceive risk so that services look beyond an event or action in a client's history and instead, look at the circumstances, motivations and conditions around that action, the time elapsed since and how these factors relate to the client currently (Homeless Link, 2012b). There is much greater scope in the sector for the sharing of good practice and encouraging shared and common approaches across LA areas regarding engagement with the PRS, particularly in relation to improving management in the sector and driving up physical standards. Broadening the scope and reach of rent deposit schemes should also be prioritised, where possible.

3. **Addressing Financial Exclusion**: Helping service-users to access and sustain employment should also be a key priority for the North East; although the difficulty of this is recognised in light of the limited number of jobs available. The value of education, training and employment schemes in supporting service users to reach and sustain independence should be protected and strengthened, as far as possible and additional research should be invested in exploring the reasons that people remain unemployed and reducing the barriers to employment.

Meeting the Housing-Related Support Needs of Homeless People in the North East

Project Overview

The Policy and Representation Partnership is led by Voluntary Organisations' Network North East (VONNE) and funded by the Big Lottery. The Partnership aims to help the voluntary and community sector (VCS) increase its influence on public policy through quarterly policy forum events, training sessions, researching policy areas and sharing information. In July 2011, the Partnership commissioned the Cyrenians and Northumbria University to undertake a project, entitled 'Meeting the Housing-Related Support Needs of Homeless People in the North East, to help increase the VCS's influence on policy and practice in relation to 'homelessness'. The project aimed to:

- Improve the sector's awareness of the national and local picture of homelessness.
- Identify the impacts of public sector funding cuts on the capacity of local authorities (LAs) and VCS organisations in the North East to meet the needs of homeless people.
- Provide an opportunity for stakeholders to think collectively about how to continue to meet needs at a time of new challenges and opportunities, through critical discussion and the sharing of good practice.

To achieve this, the project team undertook a review of national and local policy documents and research reports; interviews with strategic leads and service commissioners in eight LAs across the North East; developed a survey which was completed by 35 VCS organisations; and ran two regional workshops, attended by approximately 80 individuals from across the North East.

In order to incorporate the views of service users into the project, Northumbria University undertook a related piece of research, which – using the Cyrenians as a case study – aimed to assess the value of housing-related support services and identity 'what works' in supporting service users to achieve independence. The team analysed 238 short-term client outcomes records, completed 19 interviews with staff and service users and calculated the 'social return on investment' of services.

The following report summarises the key findings and policy messages emerging from both pieces of work.

Key Findings

The National Picture of Homelessness

Four key messages emerged from the research regarding the national picture of homelessness.

A Mixed Picture of Funding from Central Government
Nationally, there is a central government commitment to the pro-active management of homelessness. Maintaining homelessness services was given some priority by Ministers and the Treasury within the Comprehensive Spending Review (October 2010), evidenced by the sustained level of Homelessness Grant (£400m over four years) and lower than average cuts to Supporting People (SP); the key funding stream for accommodation-based homelessness services. Despite a reduction of 12% over four years, SP funding stands at £6.5 billion. Furthermore, £42.5 million of capital funding for the Homelessness Change Programme and £20m to support the Homelessness Transition Fund and 'No Second Night Out' (NSNO) initiative indicates the Coalition government's commitment to protecting the most vulnerable within society and recognition of the cost effectiveness of homelessness services (Homeless Link, 2011). Additional resources dedicated to homelessness include: £70m in 2011/12 to tackle single homelessness and repossessions, £10m to support homeless people's access to the Private Rented Sector (PRS), £20m to address single homelessness and £20m for work to prevent repossessions (DCLG, 2012).

The removal of the SP ring-fence and its subsequent inclusion into area-based grants, however, means that LAs no longer have a duty to invest funding in housing-related support services for homeless client

groups. Furthermore, LAs are experiencing significant public sector funding cuts as a whole, including to the SP administration grant. Removal of the ring-fence offers opportunities to commission integrated services and encourage innovation, but carries the risk of funding being removed from those to whom there is no statutory duty to provide a service; most notably, single homeless people (Bee and Woods, 2010).

Funding cuts are Impacting on the Size and Capacity of the Homelessness Sector
Evidence indicates that funding cuts are already impacting on the size and capacity of the sector. Homeless Link's Survey of Needs and Provision (SNAP) 2012 revealed that there are 4.6% fewer projects in 2012 than there were in 2011 (this was mostly in relation to second stage, non-emergency projects) and 3.6% (1544) fewer bed spaces. It is estimated that there are less than 500 spare beds across the sector on any given night; a decrease from 800 in 2011. The number of paid staff in the sector stands at approx. 17,000 (a decrease of 2000 over the past 12 months), while volunteer support has increased by approx. 3000 to 13,000 (it is unknown whether volunteers are filling the posts of paid staff). Not surprisingly, reported staffing problems include: problems recruiting good quality staff, maintaining staffing levels, maintaining morale at a time of increasing workloads and wage freezes and increasing sickness levels due to increased pressure. 58% of projects reported a funding reduction in 2011/12 - averaging at 15% - and 47% of projects reported that cuts were affecting services. In most projects, the services available to clients remain as they were in 2011, but there are significant reductions to the provision of meaningful activities (cut by 9% of projects) and resettlement support (cut by 10% of projects) (Homeless Link,2012a).

Levels of Homelessness are Increasing
The latest rough sleeping count (autumn 2011) suggested a national increase of 23%, from the previous year. In October to December 2011, applicants accepted as owed a main homelessness duty increased by 18%, from the same quarter in the previous year. In December 2011, 2% more households were in temporary accommodation than in December 2010 (with an increase of 37% in the number of households residing in B&Bs). There was a 14% increase in the total cases of homelessness prevention or relief taken place outside the statutory homelessness framework in England between 2009/10 and 2010/11. Positively, mortgage repossessions have been lower in 2011 than in 2010 (DCLG, 2012).

Increasing Strain is likely to be compounded by Challenges Ahead
Despite a difficult 12 months, a number of further challenges face the sector, including: further public sector spending cuts over the next 3 years, the economic recession, limited employment opportunities in the North-East and welfare reform. These changes are likely to result in fewer people being able to access or sustain affordable accommodation, resulting in increased tenancy failure and homelessness. Furthermore, the introduction of 'payment by results' may disincentivise service providers from engagement with those with the most complex needs. These challenges make effective housing-related support services for vulnerable groups increasingly critical.

Homelessness in the North East

Building upon this, the research sought to identify how LAs and VCS organisations in the North East are responding to the cuts; the impact of current and future funding cuts on the size and capacity of the sector; and, the likely impacts of current and future funding cuts on service users.

The Scale and Impact of Funding Cuts (Service Delivery)
All of the LAs interviewed reported a commitment to maintaining homelessness services. The extent to which this is possible, however, varies significantly across the North East. Impact is being particularly felt in smaller LAs, where there is little scope for the scaling back of services. In one LA, for example, officers had commissioned only 3 SP contracts for homelessness projects in2010/11 and so funding cuts would ultimately result in the closure of one of the authority's two accommodation projects or their sole floating support service. In another LA, commissioners were overseeing 27 SP contracts and therefore had scope for the scaling back of provision, without the potential loss of a particular types of service.

In deciding how to manage the cuts, LAs, on the whole, have taken the decision to safeguard frontline services for clients as far as possible. Regarding SP contracts, therefore, the emphasis in 2011/12 was on the re-negotiation of contracts with providers to deliver efficiency savings. Savings had been secured through: staff redundancies, reduced staff wages, the re-grading of staff to reduce wage bills, reducing training budgets and the streamlining of administration processes. Yet, stakeholders highlighted that further funding cuts are significantly more likely to result in service closures and accordingly, the true impacts of the cuts are yet to be felt.

Of 20 organisations surveyed that were in receipt of SP funding in 2011/12, 16 (63%) saw decreased levels of funding. In addition to SP, cuts were experienced from other key funding streams such as Safe Partnerships and organisations reported being less successful in tendering due to the reduced availability of funds.

Funding cuts are impacting upon the size and capacity of the sector. Homeless Link's SNAP 2012 highlighted that there are 3 fewer projects and 55 fewer bed spaces (a 3% decrease) now than 12 months ago. The most significant changes in the availability of services are a reduction in the provision of meaningful activities (10%), education, training and employment support (7%) and, resettlement support (7%) (Homeless Link, 2012). This is concerning in light of several pieces of research which highlight that meaningful activities are more effective than any other aspect of supported housing in helping service users to achieve long-term outcomes (ANEC, 2010).

Looking ahead to 2012/13, 13 of 17 VCS organisations surveyed, (78%), were expecting further cuts to SP funding and some organisations were due to lose funding altogether. Various other funding streams were also expected to be lost in 2012/13. Typical responses from organisations included, *'we have been able to cope so far but we are really worried about what will happen in 2013'.* Organisations anticipated taking the following actions in 2012/13: service restructuring; reducing levels of frontline staff; increasing volunteer support; and, service closures (resulting in the potential loss of specialism and diversity within the sector).

Regarding volunteer support, one organisation said, *'The message is more for less...the only way to achieve that is a long term policy of volunteer support and peer mentor development and that is what we are doing'.* While some organisations see this as a positive development, others expressed concern – highlighting the extensive training and skill-sets required to work with the client group, particularly those with complex needs and the potential unreliability of volunteer support. Organisations fear that an increased reliance on volunteer support will impact negatively upon the quality of support given to service-users.

Despite funding cuts, 18 of 20 VCS organisations (90%) reported increased demand for services of approx. 10-15% in 2011/12. Service demand increases most commonly related to accommodation (58%); floating support (47%); financial advice and support (47%); and addictions services (42%). One LA reported a 40% increase in referrals through their 'gateway' system. Organisations also reported increased waiting list times for service users for specialist appointments, for drug and alcohol services, for example. Positively, 90% of organisations had communicated these changes to LAs, suggesting that effective communication channels are in place.

The Impact of Funding Cuts on Service Users
There is concern across the North East about the impact of funding cuts on the capacity of the sector to meet needs. Organisations predict that they will be able to support a reduced number of service users, provide a reduced range of services, provide less intensive support and will develop stricter eligibility criteria, thereby reducing the accessibility of services for service users. Stakeholders reported that accommodation closures in some areas of the North East have resulted in the displacement of rough sleepers to areas where services are available and in some cases, organisations are actively encouraging people to travel out of their immediate community to access provision. In some cases, discretionary financial support towards this is being provided, but this is not always possible. They suggested the need for the greater use of multi-area responses to problems of insufficient provision,

such as jointly-funded services or referral and reconnection protocols. In the long-term, there is concern that the cuts will result in increased levels of social exclusion, rough sleeping and repeat homelessness, ultimately resulting in the need for more costly interventions for some service users in the future.

Key Issues for the Homelessness Sector in the North East

In considering the scale, impacts and future responses to funding cuts in the North East, the research raised a number of important issues for greater consideration.

Maintaining a Focus on Prevention
Stakeholders saw a greater focus on 'prevention' within the sector, in recent years, as a highly positive development. Organisations expressed the difficulties of maintaining a focus on prevention, however, at a time of limited resources. Indeed, reflecting national government thinking, most of the LAs interviewed had taken the decision to safeguard services for the most vulnerable groups in their area – to this end, services for young people and those with complex needs had largely been protected, with generic floating support services most likely to have been decommissioned – and some LAs had developed a priority grading system for access to support. Yet, it is reasonable to assume that if simple needs are unaddressed, they may develop into complex needs, resulting in the need for costly interventions for service users in the future. As one stakeholder put it, '*a reduction in capacity means that we will work with people with the greatest presenting need. Clients with low level needs may not get supported in the first place; this could lead to a crisis and the individual having higher needs in future'.*

There are examples of best practice in relation to prevention in evidence across the North East – particularly regarding young people, which have resulted in a greater understanding of the causes of youth homelessness and the development of stronger partnership working to prevent youth homelessness. Family mediation services are reported to be very effective in enabling excluded young people to return home.

> *Homelessness prevention with 16-18 year olds is a key strength in Newcastle, with Your Homes Newcastle (YHN) working closely with Newcastle Youth Offending Team, the 16+ team and other housing providers such as Tyneside Foyer, to prevent youth homelessness. YHN's Young People's Service (YPS) has a very high success rate for young people maintaining their tenancy (over 95%). If young people can be sustained in their tenancies, this prevents them from going into temporary accommodation. The 'prevention from eviction' protocol has also helped in this area. YHN are very keen to avoid young people being evicted. Preparation for independent living and staff training are key to the success of the YPS. People who aren't yet ready but need accommodation would normally need to be placed in supported accommodation. However, work with parents can be undertaken to try to ensure that the young person can stay at home for longer, knowing that there will be a transition to independent housing before too long. Much of the 'mediation' work is about dealing with ordinary adolescent problems and being a neutral, independent person who both parties can talk to. Parents often do not want the young person to leave, but want their behaviour to change. 74% are believed to be prevented from becoming homeless as a result of mediation. In 58% of cases, there is reconciliation.*

Evidencing the Value of Homelessness Services
A key issue raised by the LAs interviewed was the difficulties they experienced in deciding which services to prioritise over the coming years. This was due to a lack of evidence regarding which services are most cost-effective and beneficial to service users, linked to the limitations of current approaches to measuring and collecting outcomes data and the absence of a simple model for calculating the social return on investment (SROI) of services. Indeed, we know that homelessness services provide substantial benefits to service users. There is quantification of these benefits at a national level, but trying to demonstrate more specific quantifiable benefits at a local level has proved difficult. Difficulties of data collection are compounded by the nature of the client group. Many service

users will require engagement with services for long periods of time before progress is made or may return to services several times before sustaining independent living.

> *'we have quite good QA systems in place for SP and we do monitor outcomes but we still need to strengthen that quite considerably'*

> *'we have difficulty evidencing the impact of services due to limited case management systems'*

> *'it's difficult to measure the impact of services as many fail before they progress and it can take a long time for sustainable change to occur'*

Nonetheless, LAs reported that the research and lobbying activities undertaken by larger VCS organisations is very useful and urged them to continue with this. Various LA commissioners commented, *'the lobbying we get from some of the bigger groups is really useful'* and *'they need to advertise the services, what they save, provide case studies...continually build the case...highlight it to the council, to local councillors'*.

Stakeholders from small VCS organisations acknowledged the need to improve outcomes monitoring and the sharing of good practice but in many cases, lacked information systems capable of recording more sophisticated outcomes data, sufficient resources to fund research and time to engage in the dissemination of good practice.

Before accessing homelessness services...These quotes from service users demonstrate the negative impacts of housing needs across a range of outcomes.

'The only way I could get to sleep was to get as drunk as possible, so you could pass out....the bench wasn't comfortable!'

'Living on the streets, I drank a hell of a lot more...when you drink, you don't feel the cold...it numbs the feeling'

'[Because I was homeless], my solicitor had a word with the judge and I was given a 5 month sentence in prison'

'I was going into sandwich shops and being sly and just taking stuff. I wasn't happy about it, but I had to survive somehow'

'I just lost all respect for myself'

'I had trips to A&E, I used to self harm a lot...10 times a year'

'I got arrested twelve times in one year....I failed twenty-three out of twenty-four drugs sessions'

After accessing homelessness services...These quotes from service users demonstrate the positive impacts of addressing housing need on a range of outcomes.

'I've done well, I've been off the drink for a canny few weeks'

'Since I come here...I haven't been in trouble'

'I'm living life better than I have done for a long time'

'When I had my problems, it seemed like every door was shut, but once I became involved with Cyrenians – by replacing one massive bad habit with a lot of good habits –one door after the next opened'

'I had stopped speaking to me mam when I went into prison. Since I've come here, I've ended

Understanding 'What works'

'The service user is the constant...needs are the same now as they were in 1960s. What changes are policies,
legislation, funding and services'

Reflecting a significant body of research evidence, stakeholders emphasised the importance of a holistic approach to supporting service users. The Cyrenians recently commissioned Northumbria University to help them understand 'what works' in supporting their service users to independence. Of 236 cases studied, 67% (158) of service users made a planned move away from services and in 68% (161) of cases, leaving services resulted in the service user becoming more independent. The research highlighted the significant impacts of meeting primary needs on the likelihood of making a planned move-on (see table below) and the importance of supporting service users at all stages of their journey to independent living. In addition to facilitating access to good quality accommodation, good practice included: the holistic assessment of service user needs and the development of holistic support plans, dedicated key workers and assertive outreach support, supporting service users to develop positive social networks and engage in meaningful activities (particularly, peer-led activities), support to access move-on accommodation and floating support. Stakeholders emphasised the scale of development within the sector in the last decade, largely as a result of the SP programme which encouraged a focus on 'enabling' service users to move-on, rather than 'looking after' service users and the adoption a holistic approach to understanding and addressing needs. They emphasised the importance of not losing good practice at a time of limited resources. In particular, stakeholders stressed the need to 'balance stock with support' and not retreat to providing accommodation-based services only.

This table suggests that few homeless people would be successfully resettled if there was not an attempt to meet needs beyond housing.

Need	Likelihood of Move-On if need met (%)	Likelihood of move-on if need unmet (%)
Physical health	82	37
Mental Health	89	48
Substance Misuse	88	40
Compliance with Statutory Order	68	8
Self Harm	82	38
Risk of causing harm to others	77	22
Risk of harm from others	82	33

Rethinking Hostels

A key issue highlighted by stakeholders and service users was the chaotic and stressful nature of direct access accommodation and the impact of this on outcomes for service users, particularly in relation to addictions. Many felt that direct accommodation does not cater for individuals with low level needs and alternatively, in some cases, individuals are 'too' vulnerable to be placed in hostel environments. As one stakeholder commented, '*we shouldn't be funding places which put people in danger'*. Stakeholders also spoke of the difficulty of maintaining order within some direct access hostels due to their size, the limited control that they have over acceptances and the limited value of evictions (repeating the cycle of rough sleeping). One stakeholder described evictions as effectively '*punishing clients for the very reasons that they require support'.* Stakeholders recommended that the sector

move towards the development of smaller, needs-based accommodation projects and a greater use of the 'Housing First' Model.

> *'These places create their own problems. Trying to keep yourself in recovery in here is the ultimate task for anyone'*

> *'Compared to other hostels, it's just a ton cleaner. It's just as unsafe, it's just as stressful'*

> *'I've been here for about a couple of months and it's affecting us all ways...I don't cope with the stress of the environment'*

> *'It's bringing people back into addiction and it's putting lives in danger, without a doubt'*

> *'I have used a good few times since I've been here. That's the first time in two years I've used gear...Just my way of coping in this place'*

Barriers to Accommodation (Supported Accommodation, Social Housing and Private Tenancies)

The biggest reported gap in service provision in the North East is move-on accommodation (accommodation projects and housing for clients who do not or no longer require intensive support). This is resulting in many service users remaining in expensive supported accommodation for significantly longer periods than necessary and organisations being unable to accept new clients. Housing supply was reported to be a major issue. Social housing stock is under pressure (emphasising the need for a culture shift towards prevention and support for long-term outcomes for service users) and the allocation policies of some housing providers are thought to be reducing the already limited supply of housing available to service users. Barriers are particularly affecting people with an offending history, people considered 'too high' risk, people with drug and alcohol issues and those with a history of previous eviction (Homeless Link, 2012b). One stakeholder reported, *'move-on is becoming a real battle ground. Housing providers can cherry pick who they want, has trickle-down effect for the client group'*.

Stakeholders fear that current problems linked to supporting people with rent arrears are likely to be exacerbated by welfare reform changes, when a higher proportion of vulnerable individuals are required to take responsibility for the management of their finances. This could potentially impact upon the financial viability of supported accommodation, decrease the number of landlords willing to let to housing benefit claimants and result in increased evictions and homelessness.

There was a mixed response from stakeholders regarding a greater role for the private rented sector (PRS) in the provision of move-on accommodation due to concerns over rent affordability, property conditions and security of tenure. Many homeless people express grave concern about entering the sector.

> *'I privately rented a flat above a bar in Byker...I couldn't bear being there...my landlord was pestering us, demanding money all the time. There was nothing there, no cooker, no washer'*

> *'I was late with my rent so my landlord threw me out...I became homeless for the second time, this time it lasted for three months'*

> *'The last place I was staying....it's all alcoholics and drug users'*

> *'There's a few damages in the flat what she won't repair...we still haven't even had a tenancy agreement'*

Across the sector, there are various examples of good and innovative practices in operation to help service users access and sustain decent and affordable accommodation in the PRS. These include:

- organisations developing trustful relationships with a small number of PRS landlords;
- agreeing to manage tenancies on behalf of landlords;

- guaranteeing minimum levels of ongoing support to service users;
- providing service users with establishment packages (such as furniture);
- landlord accreditation schemes; and,
- rent deposit and rent guarantee schemes.

Yet, it was felt that more could be done to support homeless people to access private tenancies, particularly in relation to broadening the scope and reach of rent deposit schemes and partnership working with landlords. There is also much greater scope for the sharing of good practice across authorities and encouraging shared and common approaches to improving management in the sector and driving up physical standards.

Financial Exclusion
A key obstacle to move-on is financial exclusion. Service users report difficulties finding employment due to the lack of a fixed abode; ongoing needs; offending histories; a lack of ID, references and not having a bank account; historical issues of rent arrears; and, the limited employment opportunities available to them in the North East. High levels of unemployment amongst homeless service users render much accommodation unaffordable. Service users also reported being unable to work because they are unable to afford rent charges while living in supported accommodation.

'I've been offered jobs... [but] it's just like having somewhere to live. When you put NFA down, they look at you and it's like 'ah right'

'I've knocked a few jobs back since I've been here because the rent's too high, you know, it's not possible to work'

'I would go to work tomorrow if I could, but living in a place like this, it's not affordable'

'it's sort of catch-22 with a place like this: you find a job, you lose your place here, because you can't afford the rent'

Helping service users to access and sustain employment should be a key priority for the North East; although the difficulty of this is recognised in light of the wider economic picture. Good practice tends to focus on training programmes for homeless people, some of which are accredited. There are also some interesting examples of people acquiring building and related skills through self-build or refurbishment projects (ANEC, 2010). Tyneside Foyer and Northumberland Foyer Home Achievement Programme deliver modular Level 1 and 2 qualifications to vulnerable young people. Tyneside Foyer also runs an apprenticeship scheme which give ex-clients the chance to work with the organisation for a year and qualify for future work in the social care sector. However, most projects and programmes are fairly small scale. Overall, this is an area which is under-developed.

Joint Commissioning / Diversification of Funding for Homelessness Service
Whilst the removal of the SP ring-fence has resulted in the reduction of resources for homeless people, it has allowed greater freedom for the joint-commissioning of services within LAs. Stakeholders commented, *'joint commissioning has been talked about for a long time but in terms of pooling budgets and resources, people have been less resistant...the fact that there is less money in the system has given an opportunity to prompt people to do it better...we have to, it's the only way we can deliver services going forward', 'this is the area we are going to have to draw on to see if we can achieve the same service with reduced resources'* and *'more and more people are coming around the table with that in mind'.* Some SP teams within LAs are already integrated into the wider commissioning activity in relation to statutory duties and will be building on these new relationships in the coming years. The housing team in one LA is linking up with the adult community learning department which provides courses on independent living skills, resulting in savings to the SP budget (Homeless Link, 2012c).

It is important that VCS organisations develop infrastructures which enable them to bid for jointly-commissioned contracts. One stakeholder commented, *'they need to work with other providers to make savings or develop a wider level of expertise and knowledge...they need to work out their strengths and weaknesses and how they can complement each other'.*

Homeless Link's SNAP 2012 revealed that 71% of organisations continue to rely primarily on SP, followed by 12% on benefit payments and 6% on charitable donations. Despite the cost-benefits of homelessness services, only 20% of projects receive funding from social services and only 4-5% receive funding from health, employment and education, substance misuse and criminal justice (Homeless Link, 2012). Homeless Link has also been mapping where SP funds have been placed since the decision to remove the ring-fence in 2009. SP has in many areas moved, or is moving, into Adult Social Care or was already part of it. In other LAs, SP teams have moved into Health, Health & Social Care or Housing & Social Services departments. One LA has split SP between Housing & Social Care and Children & Families. This represents a significant opportunity for VCS organisations to diversify sources of funding for homelessness services and in this context, it is vital that VCS organisations continue to evidence the added value of homelessness service to other sector.

Supporting Clients with Complex Needs
The transition to independence for clients with complex needs was identified as an issue within the sector. Although the eventual financial savings which result from meeting needs effectively are substantial, people with complex needs are difficult and very expensive to work with. Faced with a target culture and payment by results, some service providers are reportedly 'cherry-picking' clients with less complex needs, turning people with complex needs away or only accepting a small number of such clients at any one time to avoid disruption to others. There is also a difficulty in defining support, which can be as simple as having a cup of tea with a service user. Concerns were also expressed that not all agencies working with people with complex needs will be appropriately trained and may be duplicating each other's services. In these respects, it was felt that commissioning practices and services do not reflect the difficulties of working with the client group and that alternative models should be developed.

Redesigning Homelessness Services
A common theme across the project was acknowledgement of the need to consider a more radical approach to meeting the needs of homeless people in the future, with stakeholders agreeing that mitigating the impact of funding cuts through efficiency savings and increased volunteer support are not sustainable, long-term solutions. 'Personalisation' offers a new approach to meeting homeless needs by affording individuals with long-term support needs personal budgets to purchase personalised care packages. As a strategy for delivering more (cost)-effective services, personalisation has been adopted to varying degrees and ends within the homelessness sector. Emerging evidence suggests it offers service-users more choice and independence and ultimately better long-term outcomes. It is likely to become an increasingly important model for services in the changing commissioning environment. Being flexible and adapting to new commissioning structures, including personalisation, may enable valuable services to survive. It is imperative that services know how to lead on good practice around personalised support and evidence the outcomes they achieve with the client group (Homeless Link 2012c).

Partnership Working between Local Authorities and VCS Organisations
The extent and quality of partnership working between LAs and VCS organisations varies significantly across the North East. In most instances, LA and the VCS reported open, honest and effective collaborative arrangements. LAs acknowledged the critical role played by the VCS in helping them to meet key strategic outcomes and deliver services. Key mechanisms for engagement include: quarterly core strategy groups; provider forums; contract monitoring; and, open door policies. Several LAs have also developed 'Gateways' or 'Pathways' systems to improve the co-ordination of LA-commissioned and VCS-led services and the case management of homeless service users – with Newcastle City Council's Gateway System and Darlington Borough Council's Key Point of Access (KPA) systems being hailed as best practice examples. These systems control access to supported housing, providing a rounded view

of client needs and facilitate a shared understanding of how services can best work together to meet those needs.

> *Darlington's Housing Options Team and FirstStop Darlington have developed a 'Key Point of Access' (KPA) system; everyone who presents as homeless is assessed and the system is used to refer them onto the most relevant service. The service enables people to access supported housing as well as advice and assistance in preventing homelessness. Based in a voluntary sector agency, this offers an alternative to those who might be put off going to the Council. Providers and KPA staff can enter notes which enable constructive pictures of the clients to be built up. Through KPA, the LA can monitor where everyone is, their outcomes and can contact providers if any problems are seen to be emerging. One stakeholder commented, 'KPA has massively increased the success of our partnership working...we all have access to the same information and I think it enhances that element of trust'. Another stakeholder commented, 'the Key Point of Access in Darlington is a successful way of enabling better use of scarce resources and improving multi-agency service delivery'.*

Multi-agency panels provide a different model, with agencies meeting together to identify the best way to resolve the housing and support needs of individuals at various stages along the pathway from chaos to independence. Other examples of innovative partnership approaches between LAs and the VCS include the development of 'Young People's Hubs' to facilitate more effective partnership working in relation to youth homelessness.

Yet, mechanisms to facilitate effective dialogue between commissioners and providers, such as provider forum and gateway-type systems are not in place in all LAs areas and where they are, they were not always reported to be working effectively, with reports, for example, that many gateway-type systems do not allow clients to access accommodation in areas where they do not have a local connection. This is preventing some clients from securing accommodation and is leaving some much-needed SP bed spaces empty. Some stakeholders suggested that struggling LAs should learn from successful models elsewhere. Other suggested, more radically, that there should be a single gateway system for the North East, supported by jointly-funded services and multi-area referral and reconnection agreements, to enable service users to access support in other parts of the North East. Indeed, some service users are known to seek a fresh start elsewhere to escape pressure from peers regarding drugs and alcohol, for example, or to be nearer to friends and family. Where service users would like to relocate to different areas of the North East, stakeholders suggested that LAs could purchase bed spaces and support from other LAs on an individual basis.

In some LA areas, stakeholders reported that engagement with organisations beyond core SP providers, needs strengthening. One stakeholder commented, '*The VCS is a variable sector...it's difficult for us to know who the providers are and who does what across the sector'.* LA officers called for VCS organisations to be more forthcoming in terms of who they are, what services they provide and constructive solutions to meeting needs at a time of challenge. Equally, some LAs acknowledge they could improve their external communication regarding key points of contact. One stakeholder commented, '*It's them knowing who to contact....people don't often know how to negotiate the council'.*

Another area in which LAs suggested partnership working could be improved is in relation to strategic bidding for funding. They suggested that collectively, LAs and the VCS should be much more strategic in terms of what they bid for. LAs could pump-prime core services, then support other organisations to seek external funding for additional services '*we could effectively double the funding and ensure that we have all the core services needed for vulnerable people in the area'.*

Partnership Working between VCS Organisations
VCS organisations agreed that there is significant scope for increased partnership working within the sector. There was a strong desire amongst organisations for partnership working, with comments including '*We will continue to look for partnerships and new opportunities to grow'* and '*our organisation is always keen to develop new ways of working in collaboration with others to provide*

services'. A key barrier to this, however, is competition for limited funding. Stakeholders commented, '*the exception to the rule can be when money is involved*' and '*it's a struggle sometimes for homeless organisations to work together, particularly through Supporting People, which causes competition*'. Other suggested barriers are: time to develop partnerships, commercial sensitivity and organisations being reluctant to move away from traditional modes of operating. It was generally felt that practitioners have positive working relationship with one another, but that these relationships could be utilised more effectively for strategic purposes, in relation to the pooling of resources, better service integration and influencing policy.

'I think we need to consider economies of scale and ways we can pool our resources better'

'we need a collective voice when engaging with LAs...I think that would be more effective than trying to lobby alone'

Scope for increased service integration is perhaps most apparent in the case of services for rough sleepers (providing food, shelter, clothing and washing facilities, for example) with accommodation-based and advice services. The People's Kitchen's in Newcastle is currently trying to be proactive in linking clients to other services. They have engaged a team of 'listeners' to encourage more active referrals and workers from the Joseph Cowan Health Centre go into the People's Kitchen every two weeks to provide advice and support to single homeless people.

Moving Forward

A number of key messages and recommendations have emerged from the research, as outlined below. It is hope that they provide a useful steer for local and national policy makers, as well as local commissioners and service providers, regarding the key issues facing the homelessness sector in the North East and possible responses.

Principles and Practices

1. **Understanding What Works**: Understanding 'what works' is critical to improving outcomes for homeless people and ensuring that resources are being used effectively. All LAs and VCS organisations should ensure that they have a true understanding of the scale and causes of homelessness in their area, have effective systems in place for the monitoring of outcomes (social and financial) and the evaluation of services, and are aware of the points at which people fall out of support or fail to engage with services and how these issues can be overcome. Across the North East, LAs should undertake further work to compare and benchmark services.

2. **Protecting What Works**: Effective services and good practice should be evidenced, promoted and protected. The SP programme acted as a catalyst for the development of a range of effective services for homeless people and driving up standards within the sector. It is important that we do not lose the positive developments made within the sector in recent years, such as a focus on prevention, a holistic approach to meeting needs and balancing stock and services, at a time of limited resources.

3. **Lobbying and Influencing**: Commissioners, procurers, providers and support organisations such as VONNE and Homeless Link must continue to share good practice and work together to communicate with local and national government and beyond.

4. **Diversifying Funding:** The removal of the SP ring-fence and relocation of SP teams (or their equivalents) within new departments following LA restructuring offers an exciting opportunity for commissioners and VCS organisations to secure additional funding for homelessness services. In trying to do so, organisations must continue to evidence and promote the added value of homelessness services to other sectors.

5. **Adapting to Change and Seizing Opportunities:** Adapting to new commissioning structures including joint-commissioning and personalisation may enable valuable services to survive. It is important that VCS organisations develop infrastructures which enable them to bid for jointly-commissioned contracts and that they know how to lead on good practice around personalised support. Improved infrastructure regarding tendering would also be useful for taking advantage of pilot monies and grants which become available.

6. **Greater Partnership Working across LAs:** LA s across the North East are working together effectively to tackle key issues, such as rough sleeping. It could be, however, that further priorities for action could be more effectively addressed through multi-area agreements and cross-boundary funded services such as problems related to area connection, imbalances and gaps in provision across the North East and the benchmarking of services and monitoring of outcomes.

7. **Greater Partnership Working between VCS Organisations:** Across the sector, VCS organisations should seek to further develop positive working relationships and to utilise these relations for strategic purposes. Organisations should seek to be more pro-active in developing individual and collective strategies for dealing with efficiencies and cuts, such as influencing local policy and the pooling of resources, in order to maintain services.

8. **Greater Communication across the Homelessness Sector:** LAs and VCS organisations should be more pro-active in promoting the services they provide, eligibility criteria for their services and key points of contact within their organisations.

Policy Priorities

9. **Supporting Clients with Complex Needs:** Developing new models for working with this client group should be prioritised. Potential solutions may include: commissioners paying premiums for people with higher needs; seeking to ensure a better match between the needs of the service-user, the service that is commissioned and the service that is provided; adjusting targets for providers working with people with complex needs; a greater use of a Housing First approach with the client group; agencies buying services from each other; and, the greater use of multi-agency case management meetings.

10. **Helping Service Users Access and Sustain Accommodation:** Service providers, including housing providers, should reconsider how they perceive risk so that services look beyond an event or action in a client's history and instead, look at the circumstances, motivations and conditions around that action, the time elapsed since and how these factors relate to the client currently (Homeless Link, 2012b). There is much greater scope in the sector for the sharing of good practice and encouraging shared and common approaches across LA areas regarding engagement with the PRS, particularly in relation to improving management in the sector and driving up physical standards. Broadening the scope and reach of rent deposit schemes should also be prioritised, where possible.

11. **Addressing Financial Exclusion**: Helping service-users to access and sustain employment should also be a key priority for the North East; although the difficulty of this is recognised in light of the limited number of jobs available in the North East. The value of education, training and employment schemes in supporting service users to reach and sustain independence should be protected and strengthened, as far as possible and additional research should be invested in exploring the reasons that people remain unemployed and reducing the barriers to employment.

Lead Author, Adele Irving
Research Associate, Centre for Public Policy, Northumbria University. Adele2.irving:nnorthumbria.ac.uk
Adele Irving, Research Associate, Centre for Public Policy, Northumbria University: Adele's primary
area of research interest and experience is multiple social exclusion. Adele has undertaken a number of
applied research and evaluation projects exploring the impact of various forms of disadvantages on the
life courses of vulnerable groups – including homeless people, sex workers and offenders – in order to

inform policy and practice developments. She has undertaken projects for a range of clients including: the Department for Work and Pensions, Newcastle City Council, Newcastle Youth Offending Team, the Cyrenians, Northern Rock Foundation, Millfield House and VONNE. Recent projects have looked at: the nature of the sex industry and the service needs of sex workers in the North East; the cost-benefits of housing-related support services for homeless people; the impact of public sector funding cuts on the capacity of local authorities and third sector organisations in the North East to meet the needs of homeless people; and, the causes of poverty and chronic exclusion among homeless people accessing emergency accommodation. Adele is currently exploring the relationship between housing and exclusion through doctoral study.

References

Association of North East Councils (2010), 'Filling in the picture: Homelessness in the North East and learning what can be done about it', www.strategyintegrationne.co.uk/displaypagedoc.asp?id=1330

Bee, K. and Woods, H. (2010), 'North East Region, Cost Benefit Analysis and Lessons Learnt From Supporting People', http://www.northeastiep.gov.uk/adult/supportingpeople.htm

Crisis (2011), 'Changes to the Shared Accommodation Rate in Housing Benefit', Policy Briefing, http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/srr.html

Department for Communities and Local Government (2010) 'Business Plan 2011-2015', http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/corporate/pdf/1762476.pdf

Department for Communities and Local Government (2010), 'Decentralisation and the Localism Bill: An Essential Guide', http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/1793908.pdf

Department for Communities and Local Government (2010), 'Open Public Services White Paper', http://files.openpublicservices.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/OpenPublicServices-WhitePaper.pdf

Department for Communities and Local Government (2012), Homelessness Statistics, http://www.communities.gov.uk/housing/housingresearch/housingstatistics/housingstatisticsby/homelessnessstatistics/

Department for Work and Pensions (2011), 'Welfare Reform Bill 2011', http://www.dwp.gov.uk/policy/welfare-reform/legislation-and-key-documents/welfare-reform-bill-2011/

Homeless Link, (2011), 'Our Response to the Spending Review', http://www.homeless.org.uk/spending-review-response

Homeless Link, (2012a), SNAAP 2012, http://homeless.org.uk/snap2012

Homeless Link (2012b), 'Removing Barriers: Reducing Exclusions from Homelessness Services', http://homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/Effective_Action_Removing%20barriers_reducing%20exclusions%20from%20homelessness%20services_0.pdf

Homeless Link (2012c), 'An Update on Personalisation in the Homelessness Sector', http://homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/Personalisation%20update%20document%20Final.pdf

House of Commons (2008), 'The Supporting People Programme', Communities and Local Government Committee, http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmcomloc/649/649i.pdf

SITRA (2011), 'Supporting People', http://www.sitra.org/supporting_people/