**Annex to Crisis Social Housing Green Paper Submission**

**Consultation Workshops for Crisis Clients, October 2018**

**Purpose of this paper**

This paper provides a write up of three consultation workshops about social housing for clients of Crisis services, referred to within the organisation as Crisis Members. The workshops were held to record experiences of and views on social housing from those with lived experience of homelessness. The findings provide important insights on the impact, both positive and negative, that social housing can have on personal wellbeing for people moving on from homelessness. It also highlights the damaging effects of the shortage of housing supply, and the way rationing systems work against many homeless people. The recommendations arising from the workshops inform the Crisis submission to the Westminster Government’s social housing green paper “A new deal for social housing”, highlighting the measures needed to ensure social housing plays an effective role in preventing and alleviating homelessness.

**About the workshops**

Three workshops were held in September and October 2018 at the Newcastle, Birmingham and Oxford Skylights. Geographical coverage in these areas extends beyond the boundaries of the city in which the Skylight is located, so Members’ experiences may reflect contact with councils/housing providers in areas across the wider sub-region in each case. The workshops involved 28 members in total with current or recent experience of homelessness, and included people living in social housing (13 of the 28 participants), people with previous experience of living in social housing and people applying for social housing. Those applying for social housing were currently living in hostels, privately rented housing, staying with friends/family or rough sleeping. Participants were recruited from the Crisis membership by Crisis Skylights.

Each workshop used the same structure, with facilitated discussion groups of between 5 and 8 people, and feedback recorded by Crisis policy and research staff. Each session lasted between 1.5/2 hours, and was structured around the following topics:

* Perceptions of social housing
* Experiences of applying for or living in social housing, both positive and negative
* Barriers to accessing or sustaining social housing
* Solutions to tackle identified barriers.

This report combines feedback from the three workshops, highlighting geographical variation in responses where appropriate. Members’ comments are presented anonymously.

**Summary of key findings and conclusions**

* Crisis held three workshops around the country for people with lived experience of homelessness to explore their experiences of social housing, and how to tackle barriers to applying for and sustaining social housing. The workshops included people who had become social housing tenants and those who were applying for social housing.
* Most of those that had become social tenants reported that moving on from homelessness into social housing was a positive experience. For some, however, the experience of living in social housing had been problematic. At its best, participants highlighted how social housing had provided a foundation for improved personal well-being, and for progression in other areas of life. For others, the problems they experienced with the condition of their home or block, problems with neighbours, the lack of help to furnish or decorate their home, or the lack of support they received to help them settle into their tenancy, undermined their ability to tackle the underlying causes of their homelessness.
* For those who had been unable, so far, to get access to social housing, there was almost universal criticism of the process of applying to councils and housing associations, and some felt they were never going to get access to social housing. Participants’ experiences demonstrate a lack of responsiveness from some councils and housing providers to people’s individual circumstances and needs which is at odds with the Homelessness Reduction Act. This lack of individual consideration can affect people’s ability to register for housing, their ability to take part effectively in the process of bidding for housing, the suitability of the home they are offered and their ability to sustain a tenancy.
* The solutions recommended by workshop participants included
	+ More flexibility from housing providers to look at individuals’ circumstances and keep the door open to social housing
	+ More effective support with the application process, and more transparency about the way homes are allocated, including making housing unconditional for people with unresolved needs.
	+ Ensuring homes are ready to move into, including through furnished lettings, and there is financial support with the costs of moving in
	+ Building more social housing to improve availability, while also making better use of empty homes to provide social housing
	+ Improvements in tenancy, arrears and estate management to improve sustainability for people moving on from homelessness including visits to ensure new tenants are settling in, understand their rent liability and have benefits in place, more responsive repairs services, longer tenancy agreements, and more effective responses to neighbour nuisance
	+ Increased access to effective support services and budgeting advice into help people prepare for and settle into social housing, with support providers held to account to ensure they do what they’re paid to do, and services designed in collaboration with homeless people
	+ Better join up between housing providers and other public services, and better continuation of support when people move.

**Perceptions and experiences of social housing**

The overall reflection of workshop participants was that while social housing has its problems, it is a better option than private renting, or remaining in the hostel system. While some noted it didn’t offer the advantages they had experienced or aspired to with homeownership, a majority of participants reported that moving on from homelessness into social housing was a positive experience.

These participants viewed social housing as secure and affordable, and talked about the impact this had on their wellbeing. This included the feeling of stability that came with their tenancy; a feeling that once a social housing tenant you could put down roots and make your home your own:

*"My Council tenancy has changed my life completely"*

"*I love it, it has proper changed my life".*

***“****Peace of mind stops you fearing that you will become homeless again.”*

Some participants described how their council or housing association home provided a foundation on which they could develop other aspects of their lives. This included improved self-care:

*"In the hostel my personal appearance got worse and I wasn't looking after myself, but now that I've got my own tenancy I'm looking after myself and my appearance"*

It also allowed people to rebuild relationships with family members, build social networks and put down roots in the local community.

*"I hadn't seen my sister for four years, but now that I've moved into the Council tenancy I see her and my nephew all the time"*

Some participants said that it had enabled them to do other things like retraining, developing new skills and getting a job. One commented that becoming a social housing tenant meant you could “*build yourself*”.

Others described less positive experiences of living in social housing, however, with problems sometimes associated with poor property conditions or the impact of anti-social behaviour caused by neighbours or others in the community. For some, far from feeling a sense of security, there were concerns that their tenancy could be ended with ease by their landlord. Negative opinions included that social housing can be hard to get access to, provides little choice of where to live and can be located in “*poor areas*”. The impact social housing can have on an individuals’ wellbeing and associated personal progression should be at the core of reflecting on what role social housing has in preventing homelessness and the importance of this.

**Problems and Solutions**

This section of this paper sets out the key themes that emerged through the workshops as participants identified the barriers they experience applying for or sustaining their social housing tenancy. Alongside each theme are the solutions participants identified to help alleviate these problems.

**Eligibility rules**

A key barrier identified by participants across all workshops was the inability to register for housing because of a range of eligibility rules. The grounds on which participants had been told they were ineligible to apply for social housing included:

* Rent arrears from a previous tenancy or other debts
* Not meeting local connection rules
* Having a criminal record.

Participants commented that having historic rent arrears, including arrears built up as a hostel resident, could end their chances of getting social housing. It was noted that sometimes arrears might have arisen as because of delays or other problems with the payment of Universal Credit or other benefits (such as overpayments), or difficulties understanding benefit entitlements. But sometimes such arrears still presented a barrier to accessing social housing. Providers rules on arrears varied, both on the size of arrears that meant no access to social housing and on the length of repayment arrangements needed to re-qualify.

A number of participants across the three workshops were affected by local connection rules. This meant they were told they couldn’t register, or had low priority for housing.

 *“The council uses local connection as a weapon. They use it to find anyway of not helping you.”*

The precise nature of the rules was sometimes unclear to workshop participants, or seemed not to take account of people’s actual circumstances:

“*They told me I was low priority for housing because I didn’t have a local connection. That was bonkers because my [family] lived here and I worked here before I got ill.”*

Criminal records were highlighted as a particularly problematic barrier for those with prior offending histories. Participants’ experience was that *“blanket assumptions”* are made and consideration is not given to the circumstances around the offence, or changes since the conviction. One participant said they were given multiple reasons for not being eligible:

*“I have appealed against my exclusion three times. They keep coming up with different excuses for me not to be accepted”*

This same participant, who had been unable to register for social housing because of a previous conviction, noted that they could still apply for a private rented tenancy through the allocations system.

The lack of flexibility within eligibility criteria were identified as preventing the council or other social landlords from reacting and responding to individual circumstance and need. As one participant noted that these eligibility exclusions appear to “trump” their vulnerability.

**Suggested solutions:**

* More flexibility from housing providers to look at individuals’ circumstances and keep the door open to social housing
* There should not be a blanket policy excluding people for past behaviour or arrears. Everyone’s circumstances should be assessed based on individual needs.

**Digital by default**

While it was recognised that digital applications are great for those who are “digitally minded”, participants highlighted the challenges presented by applications that ‘digital by default’. In particular, concerns were raised for specific vulnerable groups including those with learning difficulties, those with limited or no access to the internet, those with literacy needs, and those with language barriers.

Even for those with no digital access issues there were issues raised around the self-serve nature of digital applications. Participants described needing to be persistent to work out how to use digital systems, even by those who are digitally competent. Digital forms can be inflexible, and unable to cope with variations in circumstances that the system had not considered. It could then be hard to find out how to resolve problems with the applications process or form, or to obtain advice or support with this. This was the case even for people living in homelessness hostels where providers are funded to provide support.

One group of participants highlighted how individuals with a history of addiction or mental health issues may not have been good at keeping records or documents. This can also be a problem when trying to apply for housing online or claim benefits.

“*They ask for too much documentation from you. Bills, bank statements, ID and birth certificates. I don’t have any of them*”

One participant commented that there is an expectation that the applicant will manage the process themselves, and that it is rare to get support with the application. Instead the applicant may just receive a link to online registration, without guidance on where to get help or advice. The process is not set up well for people who need support.

**Suggested solutions:**

Establish more community hubs / one-stop shops where people can get support with digital applications

* Increase the availability from councils to do supported applications

Councils/housing associations should offer training courses on applying and bidding

**Lack of clarity in the bidding process**

Many participants found the social housing bidding process (typically used as part of choice based lettings schemes)[[1]](#footnote-1) hard to use or understand. Some councils’ requirements about frequency of bidding can be hard to comply with, particularly for more vulnerable people. The weekly bidding requirement used in one council area felt relentless for some – one participant commented that they had to wait 18 months before getting to view a property while bidding weekly.

Participants also commented that it can be hard to understand how the bidding process works:

*“One day you’re number three on the list, the next day you’re 400 and you don’t know why”*

Participants also commented that they didn’t know how bidders are prioritised to receive an offer of housing. This leaves applicants speculating about how decisions are made, and suspecting that particular groups of people might be getting preference:

*“They can pick who they want”*

*“Feels like some people are discriminated against”*

*“I guess they pick people in work”*

While some participants had jumped to conclusions about how people were prioritised, further discussion suggested that the primary problem is a lack of transparency about how decisions are made. Those left continually bidding over months and years had a sense of feeling forgotten.

One participant, however, described a positive experience of bidding – a 12 hour period from bid to offer – and was surprised to have had such a prompt response.

*“I bid for a property and they called me the following day and offered me a viewing. I signed up the day after.”*

This participant’s experience was not typical however. Despite the positive outcome, this participant noted that they didn’t understand why they had been successful, and expressed surprise at the speed of response, reinforcing participants’ sense of a system that lacks transparency.

**Suggested solutions:**

* Provide easy to understand information about the priority banding of the person who gets each home. It needs to be clear which properties are realistic for you.
* Bidding websites need to be clearer and easier to use, with advice and support readily available to people who can’t bid without help. There needs to be training to help with the bidding process.
* More practical support for vulnerable people to help them with bidding.

**Availability of social housing**

Although much of the discussion in all three workshops addressed problems associated with applying for social housing, participants were aware that these problems are often driven by the fact that there simply aren’t enough homes to go around:

*“Not enough homes for single people – very little choice”*

*“There’s such a lack of social housing”*

*“The social housing that is available tends to be far out of the city where there aren’t any jobs. Transport’s very expensive, that makes it hard when you’re far away from the centre”.*

Many of the people taking part in the workshops have relatively low priority for social housing, meaning long waits and very little choice.

*“Feels like zero chance of getting in”*

But in higher demand areas even those with high priority felt their chances of getting social housing were slim:

 “*Even in Band A I’ve never viewed a property”*

Some participants gaining access to social housing were aged over the threshold for older housing (50 or 55 years as it varies by council). These participants felt this gave them a relatively quicker path to social housing – though after many months of fruitless bidding.

All groups identified the shortage of social rented housing as a barrier and viewed building more social housing as a solution.

*“We can’t progress as a country without building more social housing”*

*“There needs to be less competition for properties”*

 “*There needs to be more targets for building social housing. It’s just maths – more people need more social housing.”*

There was also concern about whether councils are doing enough to make use of the existing stock and a view that more could be done to encourage older people to downsize from family homes.

In the North East workshop, one participant noted that they had been allocated a home in an area dominated by “boarded up” properties, and other participants flagged the problem of empty homes in the private sector. The discussion about this identified the need for investment to turn empty homes into social housing, and to improve unpopular housing.

In a discussion about where the money should come from, participants concluded that spending to get people permanently housed was better value than keeping them in expensive hostels. Participants suggested Government should “*think about the costs of not preventing homelessness*” and “*the costs of keeping people stuck in the hostel system*.”

**Suggested solutions:**

* Build more social housing
* Don’t leave it just to private developers - but make sure private developers do their bit
* Re-purpose empty homes into social housing

**Lack of person-centred approach**

Some participants that had received a social housing offer said there had been a lack of consideration of their specific needs at the point of allocation. For example participants had been offered homes in locations that they felt were unsuitable for their specific needs. This included someone moving on from an addiction recovery service being offered accommodation next to known drug users. Another participant – who had been rehoused following domestic abuse – was offered a flat in a block where they’d been told there were no neighbour problems. In reality, they found themselves in a block with boarded up flats, and repeated incidents with neighbours involving drug use, domestic abuse and police visits. This left the person affected feeling vulnerable and at risk, and unable to settle. Participants also highlighted incidents of people with mobility issues being located on second floor flats.

Ultimately there was a strong sense from the workshops that no consideration was given to whether the property they were moving in to would exacerbate existing needs or trauma.

**Suggested solutions:**

Every applicant needs to have an assessment process to make sure provision is responsive to individual need.

* Providers need to take more consideration into support needs and vulnerability of individual when allocating housing.
* Make housing unconditional for people with unresolved needs.

**Unfurnished and undecorated housing**

Some participants talked about the financial challenge of being offered an unfurnished property in the social sector, or a home in a poor state of repair. While obtaining access to a social rented home was a positive experience for some, the costs of decorating, buying white goods and furnishing a home can be a huge challenge for people moving on from homelessness.

One participant talked about their frustration on being offered an unfurnished property, and the lack of support from staff to work out how to get help obtaining furniture. Another commented that they were offered a property in a very poor condition, including a strong smell (the previous tenant had died in the property), with significant repairing requirements. They said the landlord offered no flexibility on the tenancy start date, expecting the applicant to move in pending completion of repair work when the applicant felt the property was not fit for habitation.

There was an awareness from participants that the problems outlined above were in part linked to the shortage of social rented homes and the financial pressures faced by social landlords. They were also aware that the rationing systems that had been put in place to decide who should have priority left many with little priority. Participants’ views on the impact of this shortage are considered elsewhere in this paper.

Some participants were happy with the condition of their homes. Some participants commented that their social landlord provided a more responsive repairs service than their experience of living in the private rented sector. Others felt that their housing association landlords were doing a better job than the local council at looking after the local area.

But others had negative experiences. One participant had had to move home because of the effect of severe damp problems in their social housing tenancy. Another reported being offered a property in very poor condition, without being allowed time to ensure it was made good before the start of the tenancy.

**Suggested solutions:**

* Provide furnished properties, or help people to get access to furniture
* Provide a welcome pack with things like pots and pans.
* Ensure homes are ready to move into, in a decent state of decoration and repair
* Provide financial support for the essential costs of moving in.
* Regulate social landlords to make sure they focus on the right things (ie providing affordable decent homes and effective services for tenants)
* Faster repair response times, particularly when it has security implications

**Security of tenure**

Whilst the pervading opinion from the workshops was that social housing gave more stability than private rented housing, and the benefits it gives from moving on from homelessness should not be ignored, there were mixed experiences relating to the security of their social housing.

For some there was a real sense of ownership with a greater inclination to decorate and to make sure that the property was well kept. However others did reflect on the ease with which you can be evicted, even by a social landlord, meaning that it still doesn’t feel like your own home.

**Suggested solutions:**

* Longer tenancy agreements – reflecting the fact that some participants had been offered only fixed term tenancies rather than the secure tenancies available to others.

**Neighbourhoods and community**

Some participants living in social housing had experienced problems with their neighbourhood. A key concern was the impact of disruptive neighbours and anti-social behaviour in the area around their home. One participant identified how problems with a group of young people causing disruption around their housing block had been batted backwards and forwards between the council and police, with no one taking a lead.

Some workshop participants commented how important it was to them personally to maintain a good relationship with neighbours, recognising how damaging it can be if people fail to consider the impact of their actions on others:

 *“I don’t want to be a bad neighbour”.*

Participants were aware of the impact of anti-social behaviour on the wellbeing of others and the risk that left unresolved it can lead to homelessness for the perpetrator and those affected. For some, the antisocial behaviour of others was having a serious impact on their well-being.

Participants also highlighted the impact of wider neighbourhood factors on their satisfaction – some of those with a positive experience of social housing commented that their home was in a “good area."

While some landlords were praised for effective management, this experience wasn’t universal. Participants wanted to see wider adoption of good practice, and more responsive management, to prevent problems building up.

**Suggested solutions:**

* Council to be more present in the area – take more interest and care in local area.
* More community based staff – including environmental staff.
* Better communication between different departments and services e.g. environmental staff who might observe high levels of anti-social behaviour in a specific area and allocations staff or support workers.

**Effective support to apply for housing and settle in to a new tenancy**

Workshops identified a need for better advice and practical support to help people navigate the applications and bidding process for social housing, and also to help them settle into and sustain their social housing tenancies. There was a concern that services are both hard to access and ineffective – so even when someone has access to a support worker, they won’t necessarily get effective support to progress their search for work or housing. On the other hand, some participants recounted how an effective support worker could have a real impact in helping them overcome barriers to applying for housing.

A number of participants, including those with both positive and negative experiences of living in social housing, commented that that they hadn’t been given enough practical support settling in at the start of the tenancy. This included staff not having enough time to explain practicalities such as utilities meters and bin collection arrangements. It also included failing to hold a “new tenancy meeting” to check how the new tenant was getting on.

*"The person that showed me the property at the viewing didn't know much about the property and didn't explain things like gas meter location and bin collection"*

*"I was supposed to have a new tenancy meeting within 6 weeks but it didn't happen"*

Participants believed there was a lack of funding to ensure support services were available to everyone who needs them and called for more funding. They also acknowledged the pressure that staff are under, and how hard it must be to get the job done properly where staff themselves aren’t properly supported. One group discussed the problem that when people are vulnerable they might find it hard to spot or challenge poor advice. This could exacerbate problems further down the line. Participants in all three workshops highlighted the importance of access to expert advice.

While participants viewed effective specialist support services as part of the solution, they also identified a need for more responsive housing management, particularly at the start of the tenancy:

*“More face to face contact at start of tenancy and to check you are settling in ok”*

Participants also wanted to see a more effective response to anti-social behaviour, combining responsive housing management with access to effective specialist support. If people responsible for anti-social behaviour failed to engage with support there was a view that they should be required to move – but a strong sense that it would be counterproductive to make people homeless in these circumstances. Instead participants called for an approach that placed people into services where they would be effectively supported to address addiction or mental health issues.

**Suggested solutions:**

* Holding support providers to account, monitoring them and ensuring they do what they’re paid to do.
* Ensuring that support workers provide clarity about each individual’s next steps and actions to achieve this:

 *“More focus on the individual and their journey out of the process.”*

* Providing proper training and higher standards for support workers, ensuring that staff are motivated and supported to do their job effectively with
* When designing support services “*listen to the people affected by homelessness – hear their voice.”*

**Benefits and budgeting**

For some participants, a feeling of insecurity also came from the challenge of budgeting to pay the rent in social housing. Such insecurity was expressed both by people in work who were partially reliant on benefits and people unable to work and fully reliant on benefits. Worries about covering the cost of rent utilities and council tax affected the experience of people who were otherwise satisfied with their homes as well as people who weren’t. A number of participants commented that they hadn’t been offered effective support to work out how to budget for rent and utilities, or navigate the benefits system.

*“I was told I couldn’t change my gas or electricity supplier for a month and I’m worried I might get into debt”*

One participant noted that because they were paid monthly in arrears and charged rent in advance, they started out their new tenancy in arrears. While at tenancy sign up they had been told this was ok, the tenant still received arrears warning letters, causing anxiety:

“*They don’t speak to each other. You might make an agreement with one person, but when you speak to someone else they know nothing about it.”*

One participant commented that they hadn’t picked up budgeting skills as part of their ‘life experience’ and would have appreciated an offer of help with this at the time they were offered their tenancy – for example a training course, or ongoing advice.

Participants raised concerns about the assumption under Universal Credit that benefit would be paid to the tenant. They highlighted that processing delays, mistakes or simply a lack of clarity had left some with arrears. For some the assumption that the housing costs part of their benefit would be paid to them was a source of worry. They noted that in the hostel system, with very high rents of as much £1000 a month, arrears could mount quickly. This could lead rapidly to a situation where arrears were too high to qualify for social housing (see Eligibility rules).

For some participants who had become social housing tenants, there was an anxiety about budgeting on a very low income. Some participants commented that they had had to resort to food banks to get by. One commented:

*“What happens if there’s an emergency – say the fridge packs up – there’s no money spare”*

There was a concern that some people are being pushed to the brink (and beyond) by money worries, and by the fear of what will happen when Universal Credit is rolled out.

Participants felt that changes are needed to help people budget more effectively and to prevent arrears building up in the first place. Suggestions related not just to rent, but also to utilities and council tax, which all contributed to anxieties about managing budgets.

**Suggested solutions:**

* Better guidance on budgeting. Access to courses on this.
* Make it easier to pay Universal Credit direct to landlord to prevent arrears building up
* Enable utilities to be paid directly out of benefits.

**Joined up services**

Poor communications and lack of effective collaboration between public services (Job Centre Plus, the Police, Mental Health Services) and housing providers, and also within councils, was a common theme through the workshops. It impacted on people’s experience of managing their rent accounts, their ability to access support, and the responsiveness of housing services and neighbourhood management. The following comment was made about the experience of a tenant unable to pay rent in advance because they had just started a new job, but it reflects a wider concern about staff within and between agencies not communicating effectively:

*“They don’t speak to each other. You might make an agreement with one person, but when you speak to someone else they know nothing about it”.*

As a specific example the relationship between DWP/JobcentrePlus and housing providers was highlighted as one that was of particular importance to ensure that administrative errors and delays, and the bureaucratic requirements to the system do not lead to people becoming homeless:

 *“The Council and DWP need to work better together so that benefits and rents do not lead to rent arrears and evictions”*

One participant gave an example of how they took up a housing association tenancy on completing drug rehabilitation, and didn’t realise they had to claim Universal Credit (instead of Housing Benefit). By the time the omission was spotted, their arrears had mounted, and the housing association’s response was to threaten eviction. Although the housing association had offered a tenancy knowing that the tenant was vulnerable, the tenant’s view was that there seemed to be no liaison with the referral agency’s support worker to ensure benefits were put in place. In this case, intervention from Crisis averted eviction.

Participants also called for better continuity of service where someone moves from the jurisdiction of one service to another.

**Suggested solutions:**

* Better communications between agencies, especially where people move from one landlord to another, or one area to another
* A one stop shop/community hub to make it easier to deal with housing and other issues/needs
* Continuation of care agreements between housing providers and health and social care services

**Conclusions and summary of solutions**

The experiences of workshop participants demonstrate that getting access to social housing can have a positive, transformative effect on people moving on from homelessness. At its best, participants highlighted how social housing can provide a foundation for improved personal well-being, and for progression in other areas of life; rebuilding social and family networks, taking part in training, and finding employment.

Such positive outcomes are not universal however. Some workshop participants had a less positive experience of moving on from homelessness into social housing. Some described how the problems they experienced on moving in undermined their ability to tackle the underlying causes of their homelessness, and risked threatening the sustainability of their tenancies. Whereas some described the positive impact of security of tenure, for others there was a view that social housing was little more secure than a private tenancy. These experiences highlight the importance of ensuring people moving on from homelessness receive effective support to settle in to their tenancy; including ensuring homes are adequately furnished and decorated, that budgeting advice and support is provided, and that there is clarity about rental liabilities, taking account of the availability of Universal Credit/Housing Benefit. A key ask from participants was that it should be easier to have benefits paid directly to landlords, and also to receive more help setting up utilities accounts and advice on budgeting to meet wider housing-related costs.

Some participants had so far been unable to obtain social housing, and felt they might never be successful. They recounted their frustrations with the process of applying to councils and housing associations. There was a general acknowledgement that these difficulties are associated with the chronic shortage of social housing in many parts of the country. But while participants were realistic about the need for rationing social housing at a time of great shortage, they also highlighted the impact of policies that exclude them from joining housing registers, or which gave them no priority, despite being homeless. They noted that rules excluding people from applying for social housing seem to “trump” vulnerability.

Underlying concerns about the process of applying for social housing, or finding a suitable home, is evidence of a lack of responsiveness from some councils and housing providers to people’s individual circumstances and needs. Some participants’ experiences highlight a failure by councils and housing providers to consider their individual history and the reasons for their homelessness in making judgements about eligibility or priority for housing, or in determining the suitability of an offer of housing. This is at odds with the Homelessness Reduction Act and the Homelessness Code of Guidance, and raises serious concerns about whether current approaches to housing allocations are fit for purpose to support the effective implementation of the Act.

These problems were made worse by the absence, in many cases, of effective support or advice to help people navigate access to housing and settle into a tenancy. Many people living in hostels or other types of supported housing expressed frustration at being unable to get effective support to help them address the underlying causes of their homelessness, prepare for becoming a tenant and seek permanent housing. But where effective, individual support workers and/or providers had a transformative effective on people’s ability to move on from homelessness.

The solutions to these problems proposed by workshop participants were as follows:

1. More flexibility from housing providers to look at individuals’ circumstances and keep the door open to social housing
2. There should not be a blanket policy excluding people for past behaviour or arrears. Everyone’s circumstances should be assessed based on individual needs.
3. Establish more community hubs / one-stop shops where people can get support with digital applications
4. Increase the availability of supported applications
5. Councils/housing associations should offer training courses on applying and bidding for social housing
6. Provide easy to understand information about the priority banding of the person who gets each home. It needs to be clear which properties are realistic for you.
7. Bidding websites need to be clearer and easier to use, with advice and support readily available to people who can’t bid without help. There needs to be training to help with the bidding process.
8. More practical support for vulnerable people to help them with bidding.
9. Build more social housing.
10. Don’t leave it just to private developers - but make sure private developers do their bit.
11. Re-purpose empty homes into social housing
12. Every applicant needs to have assessment process to make sure provision is responsive to individual need.
13. Providers need to give more consideration of support needs and vulnerability of individual when allocating housing.
14. Make housing unconditional for people with unresolved needs.
15. Provide furnished properties, or help people to get access to furniture
16. Provide a welcome pack with things like pots and pans.
17. Ensure homes are ready to move into, in a decent state of decoration and repair
18. Provide financial support for the essential costs of moving in.
19. Regulate social landlords to make sure they focus on the right things (ie providing affordable decent homes and effective services for tenants)
20. Faster repair response times, particularly when it has security implications
21. Longer tenancy agreements – reflecting the fact that some participants had been offered only fixed term tenancies rather than the secure tenancies available to others.
22. Council to be more present in the area – take more interest and care in local area.
23. More community based staff – including environmental staff.
24. Better communication between different departments and services e.g. environmental staff who might observe high levels of anti-social behaviour in a specific area and allocations staff or support workers.
25. Holding support providers to account, monitoring them and ensuring they do what they’re paid to do.
26. Ensuring that support workers provide clarity about each individual’s next steps and actions to achieve this.
27. Providing proper training and higher standards for support workers, ensuring that staff are motivated and supported to do their job effectively with
28. When designing support services “*listen to the people affected by homelessness – hear their voice.”*
29. Better guidance on budgeting. Access to courses on this.
30. Make it easier to pay UC direct to landlord to prevent arrears building up
31. Enable utilities to be paid directly out of benefits.
32. Better communications between agencies, especially where people move from one landlord to another, or one area to another
33. A one stop shop/community hub to make it easier to deal with housing and other issues/needs
34. Continuation of care agreements between housing providers and health and social care services
1. Explain choice based lettings? [↑](#footnote-ref-1)