

'A TRAUMATISED SYSTEM': Research into the commissioning of homelessness services in the last 10 years

This research was conducted to understand trends in commissioning of homelessness services and facilitate the honest conversation about how to improve them in the future. Why? Because doing so will mean better support for people who are homeless – or even prevent them getting there in the first place.

The findings and reflections all come from people actively involved in commissioning, delivering or accessing homelessness services. The aim isn't to place blame but acknowledge the reality of where we are. In doing so, there is a clear resilience in the sector, but also a huge variation in what is happening depending on where you are in the country. Maybe the only thing that is

consistent is that everyone is to some degree 'traumatised' by the last decade. This doesn't mean there aren't good things happening, and the report outlines how we as a sector can change the environment and allow these positives to thrive in the future.

We hope this research can encourage these promising practices and help shift the conversation onto what is needed to expand and sustain them. With an increasingly common understanding we can more quickly proceed to a situation where no one is homeless and everyone gets the support they need.

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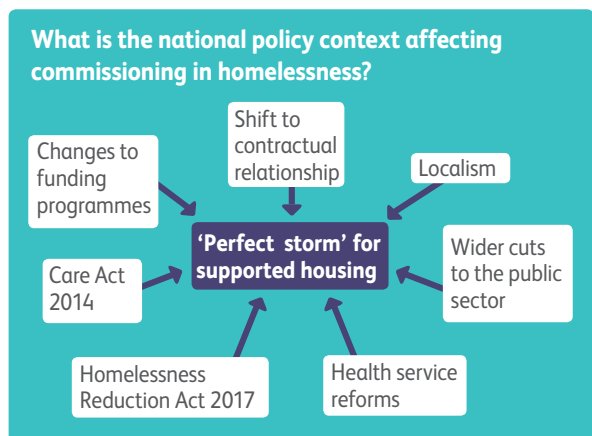
Commissioner stories

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Phases of 'story selection'

18

Providers, commissioners & people with lived experience involved in highlighting the 'most significant change'



What do we mean by a 'traumatised system'?

The concept of a 'traumatised system' was introduced at one of the research panels, and resonated with other attendees.

We're now familiar with the effects of trauma amongst people we work with. In the sector's case, our 'trauma' comes from the 'perfect storm' policy context: the **£1bn** less spent on single homelessness; the **141%** increase in official rough sleeper count; the rising complexity of people's lives.

The research is packed with examples of how this has affected decision making, behaviour and interactions. Good intentions and delivery are waylaid by other pressures, leading to investment being wasted. Attempts at efficiency create inefficiencies; necessity results in services being recommissioned that no one really wants. To thrive as a sector and achieve our aims, these are the challenges the research recommendations seek to overcome.

Doing 'more with less'

In the background of every story is the impact of funding cuts. This is no surprise, and the impact of austerity is well documented. Certain trends came through across the research, and not all negative:

	Changes to HOW services are commissioned	Changes in WHAT is commissioned	Changes to non-commissioned services
-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced commissioning teams Contracts extended or 'rolled up' Increased 'performance management' of contracts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced value and length of contracts Higher targets for higher needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fall back to reliance on enhanced housing benefit Lack of quality control on 'supported placements'
+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joint commissioning across areas Local authorities giving away power to providers and even people who've experienced homelessness! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater expectations for recovery, independence, and move-on Switch to dispersed models 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Freedom and flexibility to trial new approaches Space for new providers and models to innovate

"You can't solve this problem with lots of different bits of initiative"

Case Study: 'Bitty-short term' funding

The story which was felt to be 'most significant' by panel members was one about 'bitty, short-term funding', a theme highlighted by around half of commissioner responses. The story outlined one area's experience with the current central government funding strategy. While the ability to put more resource into rough sleeping responses was welcomed, there was an underlying feeling that the timing, emphasis and structuring of this wasn't helping them do what needed to be done, only what was possible with what was to hand.

From the perspectives of people using services, the short term nature undermined the ability to build relationships with workers. Instead, pulling the plug once a relationship has been established caused more trauma for those with histories of loss and rejection, and a further erosion of their trust in services.

On top of this, there was a general feeling that if the government is serious about ending rough sleeping, we need to intervene earlier in people's housing pathways and look at the root causes of their homelessness and support needs. No one felt that year on year funding could do this in the way that was required.

Other stories related to innovation and good practice – of which there is a lot!

Across each, certain factors are driving and sustaining innovation. To de-traumatise the system and create an environment in which innovative, impactful services can thrive, these are the conditions we can learn from and recreate:

Conditions which help drive innovation...	Conditions which sustain innovation...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — There is 'urgency on the ground' that things need to be done differently — There is a realisation that whole system approach is required — There is political will as well as practitioner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — There is flexible, longer-term funding — There is a willingness to listen and act on evidence — There is a recognition that responses need to maximise individuals' choice and control — There is an emphasis on culture changes to underpin practical ones

Conclusions and recommendations

Report recommendation	Why does this matter?
Homelessness services need sufficient reassurance that there will be continuity of funding at decent levels , without constant re-tendering and fire-fighting.	Stable funding is the foundation for providers to deliver better support, and for people accessing services to feel safe, secure and supported. Without this, all other efforts at 'de-traumatising' the system will struggle.
A common quality framework should be developed for supported housing that aligns with the Housing First principles.	Housing First is not the right option for everyone who is homeless, but the principles have validity across supported housing (which is why people are attracted to them). Developing a quality framework using the Housing First principles could reduce some of the 'postcode lottery' in service quality, as well as protect the integrity of high fidelity models.
Local homelessness strategies should be encouraged to incorporate a full pathway of housing types and needs , alongside effective co-ordination focused on the needs of the person not the system.	Strategic provision of housing at each step of someone's journey into and out of homelessness is the best way to prevent the inefficiencies and traumatising failures resulting from customers being passed 'upstream' or 'downstream' when only certain needs or housing types are provided for.
Homelessness commissioning should involve the whole system which affects those with MCN, including health, welfare, criminal justice and drug & alcohol services.	Homelessness is a social problem with a housing dimension, not a housing problem with a social dimension. If support addressing other needs is aligned to the provision of stable, supported housing, then the likelihood of someone's homelessness ending long term is greatly increased (and value for money delivered).
We have to avoid designing out innovation by creating the conditions under which innovation and collaboration can thrive .	As is now recognised within most homelessness provision, we need to create strength-based, supportive environments if we expect people to flourish. The same principle stands for how services are commissioned, monitored and delivered.

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