

Kerslake Commission evidence submission

Nacro

1. Thinking about the response to rough sleeping during the pandemic, which measures, policies, practices or joint working do you think worked well and why?

Everyone In was a massive achievement, implemented at pace, and drove action across local authorities and other partners. The Ministry of Justice Homeless Prevention Team funding for accommodation for prison leavers ('HPT funding') has meant that many prison leavers were provided with accommodation who would have otherwise been released into homelessness. Our staff tell us that some people were provided with accommodation who would usually have been released homeless, and this has meant they have been less likely to return to prison. Collaborative working across agencies during the pandemic has often been solutions-focused and has worked well. The HPT funding has demonstrated the key importance of accommodation for a successful transition into the community for many people, and also demonstrates that there is accommodation available and a willingness on the part of many landlords to accommodate prison leavers.

2. In contrast, which measures, policies, practices or joint working do you think have not worked well and why?

At the start of the pandemic there was a clear drive and message that everyone at risk of rough sleeping/homelessness should be housed and brought in off the streets, due to the risk to themselves and to others. This was very welcome and we saw a marked improvement in the ability to secure housing for people leaving prison at risk of homelessness. However, by May 2020 things began to change, as some local authorities told us that there was a change in policy and that they were returning to a 'business as usual' approach and only housing people where they can prove they are particularly vulnerable and therefore have 'priority need'. This change left more people homeless putting not only their health at risk but also the health of wider communities. We found that services would not pick prison leavers up as part of the Everyone In campaign unless they were released and were then rough sleeping. The HPT funding was therefore a welcome innovation, highlighting and taking action in respect of the huge challenges faced by prison leavers, although as a consequence of this funding being available we found that some local authorities were more likely to reject people who were likely to be eligible for HPT funding. The funding was available to pay for

accommodation but not support, which many prison leavers require, particularly if they have substance misuse and/or mental health issues. In our experience there was mixed provision of support in hotel accommodation, and in some there was little or no support. People with higher need, who were not suitable for hotel accommodation, have in some cases slipped through the net, and it is arguably these people who are at most risk of falling into homelessness. HPT funding rightly focused on the urgent situation that faced prison leavers in the pandemic, but the pathways into move on accommodation were under-developed. Staff have told us about people being evicted from hotel accommodation when the HPT funding ran out if move on accommodation had not been secured at that point. It is clear that longer term solutions are required, both for the first few nights after release and to ensure that there are clear pathways into secure move on accommodation.

3. Please describe the specific challenges, and opportunities, in the next phase of the Everyone In programme and helping people to move on from hotel accommodation.

The Everyone In programme demonstrates that collaborative multi agency working can make a huge difference in tackling homelessness. It is clear that as we build from the success of the Everyone In programme and HPT funding, we need a range of longer term housing solutions. Living alone and independently may not be the most suitable option for some people. We know that prison leavers are at risk of homelessness (53% of rough sleepers have been in prison or had some form of contact with the criminal justice system), and we need to find a way to break the cycle of homelessness and imprisonment. A range of accommodation options are required, including short term 'landing pad' accommodation with intensive support for the first few nights, and longer term supported housing where people have their basic needs met, but also have the opportunity for social interaction and support. An environment with specialist support and companionship of other residents can mean people who might otherwise drift back to the streets remain in accommodation. Pathways into a range of options for varying levels of need are required with specialist support.

4. And finally, what do you think needs to be put in place to embed the good work that developed during the pandemic, or improve upon it?

The pandemic underlined the importance of accommodation for all prison leavers, and the difference that having suitable accommodation with the right support can make in terms of reoffending. It demonstrates the need for access to a range of suitable accommodation options, with support and the pathways to move on to long term secure accommodation. It has also

demonstrated that there are housing providers who are willing to provide accommodation to prison leavers, and that it is possible for agencies to be mobilised to make this happen.