

Kerslake Commission evidence submission

Revolving Doors Agency

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?

We facilitate the National Expert Citizens Group (NECG), who are the lived experience representative group for people using services in the National Lottery Community Fund's Fulfilling Lives programme. The NECG focus on improving services for people who have experienced multiple disadvantages including homelessness, substance/alcohol dependency, mental ill-health and contact with the criminal justice system. Since the lockdown began in March 2020, there has been significant upheaval. However, NECG members started to describe positive changes in the way some services were adapting. We wanted to better understand what these changes were, and whether they could lead to long-term positive adaptations, or systems change. The following evidence is taken from the report of these positive changes and learnings, called Flipped, turned upside down: How COVID-19 improved services for people experiencing multiple disadvantage. Discussing the response to homelessness, members said there had been increased outreach, with services being proactive and creative, "We've found out how rigid they were before – services realising how creative, adaptable they can be, outreach, in reach – variety – we are more creative than we give ourselves credit for" They told us that outreach into hotels, that had been repurposed as temporary accommodation for the homeless, began to offer 'wrap around support'. Housing officers were visiting hotels to support people complete applications and linking them in with other services. Nurses have been visiting hotels to ensure easy access to primary healthcare. Examples were given of substance use services implementing outreach approaches including home deliveries of 'support packs' which included medication and health information: "More outreach from drugs services. Needle exchanges can be dangerous places, people you want to avoid are there." These learnings highlight an increase in outreach, joint-working and flexibility which was consistently cited by the NECG members as a positive responses to the lockdown.

2. In contrast, which measures, policies, practices or joint working

Last year, we co-created an online survey with our lived experience members which aimed to provide a snapshot of the daily realities for people

do you think have not worked well and why?

in the revolving door since the Covid-19 lockdown measures began in March 2020. We found that overwhelmingly, people in the revolving door were struggling to pay for daily necessities. While poverty had been prevalent in many people's lives previously, Covid-19 had worsened the situation. The consequences of the pandemic when combined with such poverty meant that poor physical and mental health were exacerbated as well as the risk of experiencing homelessness. We found that some people were living in precarious housing situations that meant they often had to move frequently and with short notice, exacerbating their risk of homelessness. For some, the lockdown meant they needed to escape domestic violence, for others the lack of a permanent address was commonplace. One participant shared that they were waiting to move into a Housing First flat, but throughout the lockdown period their housing situation was unstable, having moved between staying with a friend and supported accommodation: "I've lost a lot of weight...stress, the anxiety about what's going on and then being in your house all day, drinking became a problem again, I started going back to what I used to... my room in supported accommodation is smaller than a prison cell – I was just looking at four walls, I didn't know what to do." There was a missed opportunity to recognise where people were financially struggling, leading to housing instability and often homelessness. Stronger multi-agency partnerships would help reduce housing instability by recognising when someone is on the cusp of homelessness as well as hidden forms of homelessness, such as sofa surfing. Further investment in support for victims of domestic abuse would also ensure that their housing needs were recognised before they become homeless.

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.

Prison leavers In our research, which provided a snapshot of the daily realities for people in the revolving door since lockdown measures began last year, we spoke to participants whose prison release plans were greatly impacted by the lockdown. One participant told us they did not develop an exit plan until four weeks until they were due to be released which made them extremely anxious about what would happen next: "It caused huge anxieties, I couldn't ask anybody, no one would know, because of the COVID thing I couldn't get in touch with her [my probation officer], I complained, I was told it was nothing to worry about, it was quite common but I did worry because I had no home to go to and no one to fall back on" We know that prior to the lockdown, one in seven people were released from prison

homeless and 25% of all people serving short prison sentences are released homeless. This is a key opportunity to prioritise release plans for prison leavers and those who have recently left prison to ensure they have a genuine opportunity to be safely housed and not return to custody.

Recording homelessness The following includes evidence we submitted to the House of Lords Public Services Committee. Last year, HMI Probation's report raised serious concerns about the system's failure to record someone's housing situation properly. It noted the lack of pre-sentence reports which means we are failing to record what someone's housing situation is. Equally, many Offender Assessment System entries (OASys) are not fully completed or updated when someone comes under the probation service which means another opportunity is missed to recognise someone's housing needs. Another issue is our broad idea of what constitutes 'settled accommodation' in the system. This ranges from sofa-surfing to B&Bs to supported accommodation. This results in having people living in 'hidden homelessness'. We must take this opportunity to better categorise and record settled accommodation – and no longer accept 'hidden homelessness' as a successful outcome.

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?

In the NECG's report, Flipped, turned upside down, members suggest the following recommendations to embed good practice shown during the pandemic:

- Co-production: people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage are involved, locally and nationally, in discussions to fully understand the changes made during lockdown and be partners in the design of future services and strategies.
- Flexibility and choice: services acknowledge that people can and will engage if listened to, their situation is understood, and they are offered a choice in how to engage. This approach should be embedded into service design, culture, and staff training.
- Fast tracking: key stakeholders in the system need to examine how the removal of red tape, simpler referral processes, and better multi-agency collaboration has been possible and ensure it becomes adapted as standard practice.

- Trust & responsibility in treatment: the changes in prescribing services, from daily consumption to longer prescriptions, have been applauded. The impact of this approach needs to be fully evaluated and the learning used to shape future services.

Policing homelessness

In our latest research, which explored lived experience perspectives on policing trauma, poverty and inequalities, we found that the way the police recognise and respond to homelessness could be improved upon. Some participants found that the police officers were 'considerate', 'friendly' and 'helpful' when they responded to them during homelessness. However, this was not always the case, particularly among young women sleeping rough, who said they felt targeted by the police but were not offered appropriate support: "When you are homeless, you have no room to sound [off]. My voice echoes in the town centre, but no one hears. . . I was begging them last year to leave me alone, but when I actually needed them they were not there." We need to train police officers in trauma-informed approaches so they can appropriately deal with people who experience homelessness. This is an opportunity to invest in diversion to help vulnerable rough sleepers into wrap-around support rather than unnecessarily criminalising and traumatising them with further police action.