

Homelessness Prevention in England: What can central government do to help councils prevent homelessness?

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Acronyms

AIN	Active Inclusion Newcastle
ALMO	Arms Length Management Organisation
H-CLIC	Homelessness Case Level Information Classification
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
DHP	Discretionary Housing Payment
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
FHSG	Flexible Homelessness Support Grant
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GP	General Practitioners
HAST	Homelessness Advice and Support Team
HB	Housing Benefit
HRA	Homelessness Reduction Act
IH	Intentional Homelessness
IT	Information Technology
JRF	Joseph Rowntree Foundation
LA	Local Authority
LGA	Local Government Association
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender
LHA	Local Housing Allowance
MHCLG	Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government
NAO	National Audit Office
NCC	Newcastle City Council
NHF	National Housing Federation
NHS	National Health Service
NM&Co	Neil Morland & Co Housing Consultants
PRS	Private Rented Sector
RSI	Rough Sleeping Initiative
RTB	Right to Buy
SIB	Social Impact Bond
I-SPHERE	Institute for Social Policy, Housing and Equalities Research
TA	Temporary Accommodation
UC	Universal Credit
YHN	Your Homes Newcastle

1. Introduction

Background to the study

The Local Government Association (LGA) would like to set out a positive, well-evidenced case for central government funding and policy reform that will enable councils to end homelessness by preventing it happening in the first place. As such, they wish to understand what central government can do to help councils effectively prevent homelessness. In service to this overarching aim, this study sought to answer the following three research questions:

1. What homelessness prevention activities are being carried out by local authorities and how effective are they?
2. What are the consequence of the UK Government's policies and funding decisions on local authorities' ability to undertake effective homelessness prevention activities?
3. What changes should be made to national policy and funding mechanisms that would improve the ability of local authorities to prevent homelessness?

This study was commissioned and carried out prior to the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, which has radically and rapidly shifted responses to homelessness across the country, prompting a focus on getting those sleeping rough inside and those in shelters in which they cannot self-isolate into alternative accommodation. Local authorities have substantially altered their focus and working practices to achieve these ends, to continue to meet their legal duties, and to provide services to those in need in ways consistent with social distancing requirements. The medium- to long-term impacts of the pandemic on local authority homelessness responses and on homelessness prevention activity in particular are not yet clear. It is possible that the public health emergency will underline the importance of preventing homelessness in the first place and bolster a future focus on prevention. There is a risk, however, that the emergency will precipitate a step backwards rather than forward on prevention. It is our hope that this report provides some impetus for central government, local authorities and other stakeholders to decide to avoid this latter path and redouble homelessness prevention efforts in the ways we outline.

Conceptualising homelessness prevention

Various typologies of homelessness prevention have been developed to help understand the ways in which national and local government, and other organisations working in this area, can effectively intervene. Homelessness prevention is often understood in the academic literature (see Mackie, 2015) in relation to a three way typology that distinguishes between:

- **primary prevention**, which seeks to prevent new individuals or households becoming homeless, often through, for example, poverty reduction or affordable housing provision;
- **secondary prevention**; which seeks to identify and end an occurrence of homelessness as swiftly as possible through, for example, landlord mediation or help with rental payments; and
- **tertiary prevention**, which focuses on addressing the needs of those already experiencing homelessness in a more enduring way and thus seeks to prevent longer term housing and homelessness issues.

There have been other slightly differing conceptualisations of this three way typology, with some defining secondary prevention as targeting those *at risk* of homelessness for some specific reason (e.g. leaving prison) rather than those already homeless and tertiary prevention applying more

generally to interventions targeting the ‘already homeless’, whether recently or longer-term (see Busch-Geertsema and Fitzpatrick, 2008; Jacob, 2018).

It has also been suggested that primary prevention can be disaggregated into three sub-categories: *universal* prevention interventions which span entire populations; *selected* interventions that target at risk *groups*, and *indicated* interventions which target people at risk based on some *individual* rather than group-level characteristic or set of characteristics (Shinn et al, 2001).

Pawson (2007) developed a slightly different three-way categorisation of prevention work in his evaluation of homelessness prevention in England, distinguishing ‘early intervention’ targeting those at risk with support, ‘pre-crisis interventions’ like mediation or advice services, and work ‘preventing recurring homelessness’, like tenancy sustainment.

More recently, a five-way typology of homelessness prevention has increasingly been used in policy and practice circles. This approach has its origins in the Positive Pathways model of youth homelessness prevention developed by St Basils (St Basils, 2015), which subsequently influenced the Birmingham City Council Homelessness Prevention Strategy (Birmingham City Council, 2017) and the West Midlands Designing Out Homelessness Pathway Approach (Business in the Community, 2019). This work in Birmingham and the West Midlands informed the thinking of the Prevention Task and Finish Group in England (chaired by the Local Government Association and involving a range of third sector, local authority and central government representatives). It is in the final report of this group (Prevention Task and Finish Group, 2018) that the five-way typology took the form detailed below¹. This version has subsequently been used by in a UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence (CaCHE) analysis of homelessness prevention practice in the UK (Fitzpatrick et al, 2019a). The five kinds of prevention this typology distinguishes are as follows:

- **universal** prevention which is population-wide and seeks to reduce overall levels of risk (e.g. ensuring a sufficient supply of affordable housing and access to that housing; a robust welfare-safety net etc.);
- **targeted** prevention, focusing on at risk groups and transition points (e.g. those leaving institutions);
- **crisis** prevention, which focuses on preventing homelessness when risk is imminent (defined as within 56 days in line with the Homelessness Reduction Act);
- **emergency** prevention, working with those at immediate risk of homelessness (i.e. that night or similar); and
- **recovery** prevention, focusing on minimising repeat homelessness among those experiencing/who have experienced it (e.g. housing-related support for those rehoused following a period of homelessness).

In this study we have deployed this five way typology to understand current homelessness prevention activity among local authorities in England, as it provides the most fine-grained framework for exploring the full spectrum and diversity of prevention-type interventions and approaches. In distinguishing between five distinct kinds of prevention it also maps clearly onto different kinds of intervention and services and thus offers maximum utility to policy makers in considering how to enhance, enable and prioritise these different kinds of prevention work. We are also aware, however, that this typology has only recently been developed and is thus unlikely to be in mainstream usage

¹ A slightly different version of the five-way typology was used by the Department for Communities and Local Government in setting the context for the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazers programme in 2016. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/homelessness-prevention-programme>.

among local authorities in England. The study thus gives an opportunity to consider the resonance and applicability of the typology to local authority practice and consider whether and how it is best utilised in the future.

The levers required to influence the scale and effectiveness of these five different kinds of prevention lie at a combination of national and local government level, and also among partner agencies (the health, education and justice sectors, voluntary sector organisations, housing associations etc.). *Universal* prevention options as described above lie to a considerable degree (though not exclusively) in the hands of central government, with control over the shape of the social security safety net key here, so too regulation of the private and social rented housing sectors. Local authorities have some – but limited – access to levers enabling them to reduce population level risk in their area (universal prevention), for instance via local efforts to minimise or reduce poverty, and maximise housing supply (Fitzpatrick et al, 2019a; Watts et al, 2019; Fitzpatrick et al, 2019b)². National homelessness legislation also has a profound influence on the nature and scope of prevention work locally, with the recently introduced Homelessness Reduction Act requiring local authorities to engage in ‘crisis prevention’ work (see below). National government also have important influence on prevention activity through non-legislative means including by introducing funding streams and providing guidance and support to local authorities to focus on particular aspects of the homelessness problem e.g. the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer (which incentivised ‘targeted’ prevention work in local authorities receiving that funding (Watts et al, 2019)) and the Rough Sleeper’s Initiative (which promoted emergency prevention activity).

Local authorities arguably have more control over the levers available to influence *targeted*, *crisis*, *emergency* and *recovery* prevention than universal prevention, and are able to design and commission services locally that prioritise these according to local need or other factors (political priorities, public opinion etc.). The involvement of other local partners is likely to be especially crucial for *targeted* prevention i.e. identifying those at risk of homelessness e.g. via social/private landlords, health professionals, prison/probation services etc. Local capacity across all forms of prevention is, of course, shaped and constrained by a number of factors which are explored further in this report. The finances available, however, are likely to be highly relevant and are once again defined largely by decisions at national level on local authority budgets.

Policy context

In setting the context for this study, three key contextual and policy factors are of particular relevance.

First, local authority efforts to prevent homelessness are taking place in the context of radical central government cuts to local authority budgets which have substantially reduced the funding available to provide services (Smith et al, 2016; Hastings et al, 2015). Consequently, large reductions in local authority spending on homelessness have been seen (Thunder and Rose, 2019). These cuts have put particular pressure on non-statutory services, which local authorities have more latitude to cut than statutory services (National Audit Office [NAO], 2018). Until April 2018, all homelessness prevention activity was non-statutory provision. These trends have led to particularly acute cuts (of 78% since

² A slightly different conception of *universal prevention* is deployed in the Birmingham Social Housing Partnership’s work on the voluntary commitment to collaborate to prevent and relieve homelessness in Birmingham. Here *universal prevention* is used to refer to actions housing associations/registered providers can take to reduce the risk of homelessness among their tenants (e.g. by ensuring that all tenants have access to clear and accessible information about their tenancy) and prospective tenants (e.g. by ensuring that rent in advance requirements and affordability assessments are not a barrier to accessing social housing) (see Birmingham Social Housing Partnership, 2018).

2010) in spending on Supporting People interventions that provide housing related support to those at risk (Fitzpatrick et al, 2019a).

Second, post-2010 welfare reforms have reduced the income of already poorer households across the UK (Beatty and Forthergill, 2016). The impacts of these cuts to welfare entitlements have been unevenly spread across local authorities and impacted already low income households in receipt of welfare benefits. Bearing in mind these inequalities, the overall impact of the reforms from 2010-2018 has been estimated to have reduced *average* household incomes by around £300 per head per year across England, with these reductions far greater and highly significant for those on low incomes and unevenly distributed across the country (Watts et al, 2019). These pressures on the income of already poorer households can be expected to increase population level risk of experiencing homelessness, given the causal link between poverty and homelessness (Bramley and Fitzpatrick, 2018).

Third, at the same time as these reforms have been pursued, central government has sought to strengthen responses to homelessness in various ways. Of most relevance here, the 2016 Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme launched by the (then) Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) sought to promote and support innovative practice in homelessness, and allocated £20m to a total of 30 local authorities to achieve those aims. In 2018, the Homelessness Reduction Act came into force, which strengthened the duties owed by local authorities to those at risk of or experiencing homelessness. Its main provisions included the introduction of a duty to prevent homelessness among all those threatened with it (regardless of priority need status), to take reasonable steps to relieve homelessness (regardless of priority need status); an extension of the definition of 'threatened' with homelessness from those likely to lose their home within 28 to those likely to within 56 days; a duty to agree, and keep under review, a Personalised Housing Plan with all eligible applicants; and placed a new Duty to Refer on (some) public authorities to make referrals to the local housing authority if they come into contact with someone they think may be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The implementation of the Act was supported by the introduction of a new data recording system (H-CLIC) and short-term New Burdens funding (see Fitzpatrick et al, 2019b). Finally, in summer 2018, the government published the Rough Sleeping Strategy, which focused on scaling up and funding initiatives including Housing First, local service 'navigators', and rapid assessment hubs (MHCLG, 2018).

In relation to the five way typology outlined above, these developments can collectively be understood to have significantly strengthened *crisis* prevention, through the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act. While the Trailblazer funding marked a commitment to and investment in more 'upstream' forms of prevention (universal and targeted) this was a short term funding programme and the 'mainstreaming' of approaches developed under the programme has not taken place. Similarly, the Rough Sleeping Strategy marks the commitment of central government at the time of its publication to emergency prevention, but does not commit to the mainstreaming of well-evidenced initiatives like Housing First or funding to support more proactive outreach work. The cuts to Supporting People seen above clearly indicate that recovery prevention has been victim to local authority budget cuts. Fitzpatrick et al (2019a) conclude in a recent review of homelessness prevention across the UK that while there has been significant progress in relation to crisis prevention:

“... Much work remains to be done on universal and targeted forms of prevention, and on improving the emergency housing and recovery support available to single homeless people and to those sleeping rough in particular.”

It is in this context that the present study seeks to identify practical steps that could be taken by central government to strengthen all these forms of prevention locally.

Research process

Four primary research methods have been pursued to meet the study's aims.

First, a desktop review of relevant literature and policy documents was undertaken to inform the latter stages of the project.

Second, a workshop with members of the LGA's Homelessness Policy Officers Network was undertaken in March 2019. Around 30 officers with in-depth experience of housing and homelessness issues across English local authorities took part in the workshop. The aim of the event was to generate indicative findings pertaining to the study's research questions, and test and refine the study's focus before scaling up council involvement in later stages of the research. The workshop comprised of context setting presentations to the group and discussions on the following themes:

- What works well, could work better, and should be a priority for the future for local approaches to preventing homelessness?
- What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of policy and funding decision made by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG), for local approaches to preventing homelessness?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of policy and funding decisions made by other UK Government departments, for local approaches to preventing homelessness?

Workshop attendees identified a series of ways in which government policy is undermining local prevention work. Particularly strong themes to emerge from the day included officers' significant concerns about fixed-term funding, which involves bidding on short timescales. An almost as prevalent issue was the adverse impact of welfare reforms. A more detailed account of workshop discussions can be found in a supplementary report (LGA, 2019b). These discussions informed subsequent stages of the study and the design of the research instruments deployed in stages three and four detailed below.

The third stage of the research constituted a bespoke online survey of local authorities, which sought to map (1) the nature and scale of prevention efforts according to the five way prevention typology outlined above; (2) local authority perspectives on the strengths and weaknesses of current prevention activity; (3) their analysis of local and national barriers and enablers to homelessness prevention; and (4) their identification of national government changes to policy and funding frameworks that could enhance homelessness prevention locally. The survey included 20 questions, 7 of which were closed multiple choice questions. The remaining questions required survey respondents to insert data from their records or open text responses detailing their qualitative views on particular issues. The full set of survey questions can be viewed in the appendix.

The survey was piloted with a small number of local authorities with amendments made following their feedback. Email invitations were sent to all 317 local authority housing authorities in July 2019, followed by weekly reminders to those that hadn't submitted a response. The survey was closed to responses in early September 2019 with 67 responses received, representing a response rate of 21%. These responses in fact covered 70 local authorities, as three joint responses were submitted. These are counted as one response for the purpose of the statistics shown below. This is a somewhat lower response rate than achieved in two recent surveys of local authority on homelessness-related topics (e.g. Fitzpatrick et al, 2019; LGA, 2019a), though similar to that achieved in others (LGA, 2017). Relevant explanatory factors may include: the time of year the survey was conducted; research fatigue on the part of local authorities; time constraints/work pressures on relevant staff; and the challenge of applying the five-way typology deployed in the survey to local authority practice. Given this

response rate, the findings presented in this report should be taken as indicative rather than representative.

We received a relatively even response rate (ranging from 20-25%) from different kinds of local authorities (London boroughs, metropolitan districts, shire districts and unitary authorities), with our highest response rate from London Boroughs and our lowest from shire districts. In terms of regional coverage, we received the highest response rates from authorities in the North East (33%) and East (28%) and the lowest from those in the South East (13%), with response rates from the North East, East of England, Greater London, the North West and the South West exceeding 20%. In terms of political control, we received the highest response rate from Labour controlled authorities (27%) and the lowest from those controlled by independents (14%) and with no overall control (16%). We achieved a 19% response rate from Conservative controlled councils and a 21% response rate from Liberal Democrat controlled authorities.

It should also be noted that survey responses were not invited from the ten Combined Authorities³, and this report does not therefore capture prevention work being pursued at this level (on this theme, see for example West Midlands Combined Authority Homelessness Task Force, 2019; Greater Manchester Combined Authority, 2018).

The results of the survey are presented in chapter 3 of this report. For multiple choice questions, charts have been included to show responses rates. Quotes from respondents have been included to illustrate key themes emerging from open text questions. These have been anonymised, including the rounding of quoted figures (where this is the case, figures are shown in square brackets).

Fourth and finally, case studies of homeless prevention activity were undertaken in six local authorities. In two areas, the case study covered prevention activity across more than one local authority given merged homelessness teams – as in Wychavon and Malvern Hills – and the participation of the local authority in cross-authority prevention work – as in Fenland District Council who are part of a cross-authority Homelessness Trailblazer Project involving 5 other authorities in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

Participating authorities were purposively sampled in order to reflect a diversity of contexts relevant to understanding homelessness prevention activity, reflecting both political leadership, local authority structure, urban/rural/mixed contexts and local housing market contexts. Local authorities who we had reason to believe have particularly pro-active approaches to homelessness prevention, based on available evidence (e.g. Watts et al, 2019), survey results (see chapter 2) and our knowledge of existing practice, were prioritised, though it should be noted there is no definitive account of which areas are engaged in the most effective homelessness prevention activity, and more generally there is a lack of evidence on what interventions constitute effective homelessness prevention (Centre for Homelessness Impact, 2018). The final case studies selected are detailed along with their key characteristics in table 1.

Table 1: Case study areas

Case study area	LA Type	Region	Political control
Brent	London Borough	London	Labour

³ See <https://www.local.gov.uk/topics/devolution/combined-authorities>

Fenland and the wider Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Homelessness Trailblazer	District (Fenland)	East of England	Conservative (Fenland)
Newcastle	Metropolitan District	North East	Labour
Reading	Unitary Authority	South East	Labour
South Norfolk	District	East of England	Conservative
Wychavon/Malvern Hills	District(s)	West Midlands	Conservative (both LAs)

Each case study involved a phone interview with one (and in one case, two) senior key informants from within the local authority housing and homelessness service. Interviews lasted up to one hour and covered: views on the components of maximally effective homelessness prevention; the extent to which current prevention in their area met that standard; barriers to and enablers of effective homelessness prevention at the local and national level; and their views on the actions central government could take to enable more effective prevention locally. Interviews were conducted on a confidential basis and no individual interviewees are identified in this report. All participants agreed for their local authority area to be identified. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription company. The data captured was analysed for key themes related to the research questions of the study detailed above.

Report structure

The next chapter (chapter 2) details the analysis of the findings of the bespoke local authority survey. Chapter 3 deepens the analysis by looking in detail at prevention practice in the six case study authorities. Chapter 5 draws out the conclusions of the study.

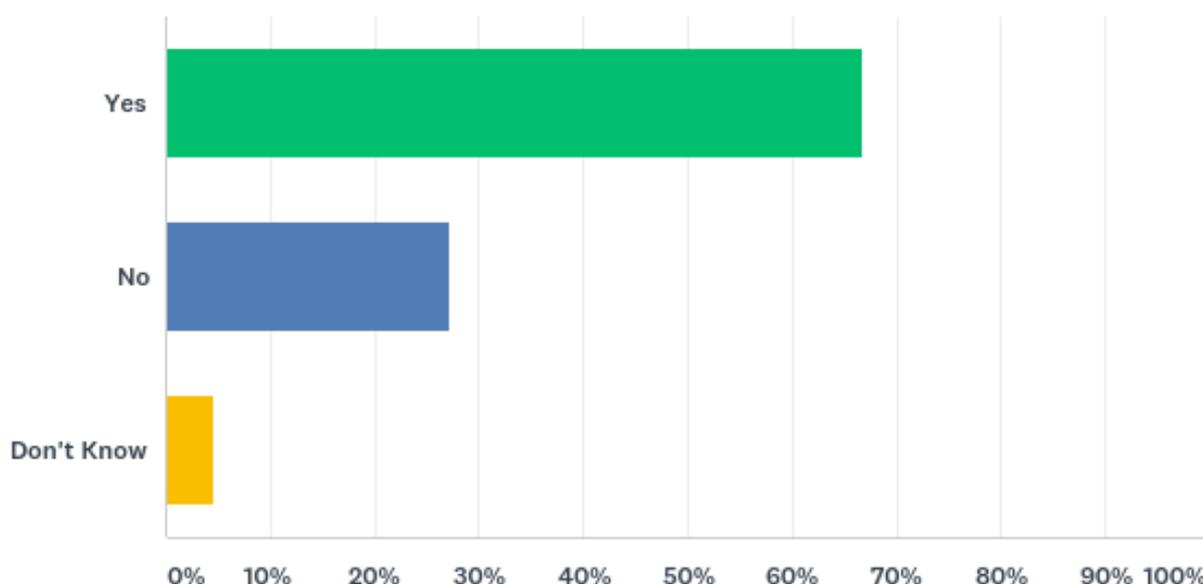
2. Local authority survey findings

This chapter details the findings of the bespoke online survey, drawing on the five way typology of five kinds of prevention work (universal, targeted, crisis, emergency and recovery) detailed in the introduction. The analysis proceeds in five stages, covering the following themes: the nature and scope of homelessness prevention activity; co-operation and partnerships; homelessness prevention funding; local level enablers and barriers; national level enablers and barriers; and a final section which discusses respondent perspectives on what actions the UK government could take to enable or incentivise homelessness prevention activity in the future.

The nature and scope of homelessness prevention activity

Two-thirds (67%) of respondents said their homelessness prevention activities are organised into a prevention framework or pathway (see figure 1), and just over one-quarter (27%) said no such framework existed. A further 3 respondents didn't know if their local authority had a prevention framework. One respondent didn't answer the question.

Figure 1: Are homelessness prevention activities in your local authority area organised into a prevention framework of pathway?

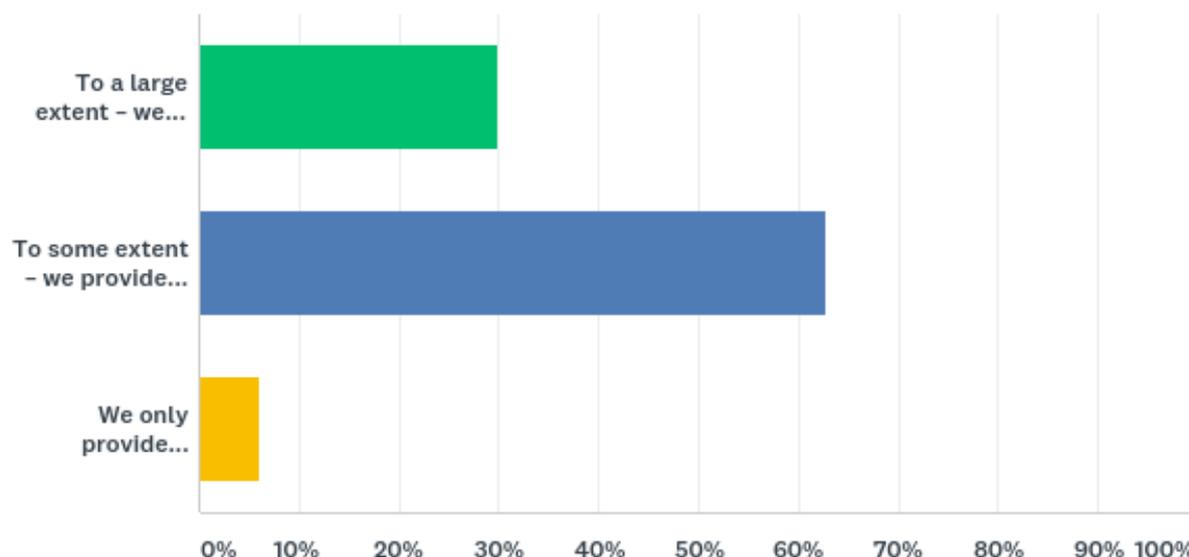


Notes: 66 respondents answered this question.

In answer to this question respondents tended to describe operational arrangements, rather than use of typologies or models of homelessness prevention such as those described in the introduction to this report (e.g. primary, secondary, tertiary prevention, or the five-way typology used in the survey). Key operational arrangements described included joint working protocols with some public bodies (e.g. child social services), alongside centralised teams whereby casework is carried out to prevent (and relieve) homelessness. Some local authorities reported having a specific range of provision for single persons (especially those sleeping rough), commissioned and operating separately to that for families with dependent children. A number of respondents mentioned having arrangement for receiving referrals and triaging cases upon the initial stage of someone seeking assistance, prior to cases being handed over to another team for full assessment. Typically, respondents described Personalised Housing Plans as a key part of their approach to preventing homelessness, coupled with information, advice and assistance available from a local authority homelessness service (encompassing both in-person and online).

Almost all respondents report that their local authority provides or funds prevention activities extending beyond their legal obligations (see figure 2), whether to some extent (63%) or to a large extent (30%). Only a handful of local authorities (6%) said they only provided homelessness prevention services that they are legally required to.

Figure 2: To what extent, if at all, does your local authority provide or fund homelessness prevention services extending beyond its statutory duties under homelessness legislation e.g. targeting people at early (pre-56 days) risk of homelessness or preventing repeat prevention?



Notes: 67 respondents answered this question, none skipped it.

Examples of homelessness prevention services provided, that are not legally required, included:

- deploying Discretionary Housing Payments to prevent homelessness
- assistance with housing benefit claims
- other financial assistance
- landlord exclusion negotiation
- parental exclusion mediation
- Sanctuary Schemes for those experiencing/threatened with domestic abuse
- tenancy training

Some examples of responses are shown below.

Metropolitan authority, North West

[The] Council and the Clinical Commissioning Group fund a range of community-based activities including food banks, cookery schemes, Credit Union and Citizens Advice. [The] Council funds a discretionary support scheme which provides financial support to residents including food vouchers and furniture... [and] an internal Welfare Rights and Debt Advice Service. [The area] has an Anti-Poverty Strategy and delivery plan to reduce the impact of poverty.

District authority, East of England

We have two homeless link workers (funded by [the] County Council and MHCLG New Burdens funding) who work once a homeless applicant has been housed to prevent repeat homelessness, for example, by ensuring that properties are affordable, that there are mechanisms in place for payment of bills etc.

Drilling down further, we asked respondents to give details of the prevention activities carried out in their area (provided internally, commissioned, and non-commissioned) in relation to the five-way typology described in the introduction. In relation to **universal prevention**, we asked about activities that seek to reduce the risk of homelessness amongst the general population, including affordable housing supply, poverty reduction initiatives, universally available information/advice/guidance on welfare rights, debt etc. 64 respondents answered this question, 3 skipped it.

Early prevention activities named by respondents which were especially common included:

- floating support
- welfare rights advice
- affordable housing development and delivery
- Joint working with Jobcentre Plus
- debt advice
- tackling child poverty strategy
- online and bespoke tailored advice
- domestic abuse services

Less commonly reported activities were:

- social prescribing (i.e. GPs, nurses and primary care professionals referring people to local, non-clinical services⁴)
- co-location of local authority homelessness service with voluntary organisations and Jobcentre Plus
- a Home Improvement Agency
- An empty homes team

Many respondents also cited examples of rough sleeping initiatives and tenancy sustainment support, which could be considered more aligned to emergency prevention and recovery prevention respectively. Some of the above bulleted activities could be considered targeted prevention activities (welfare rights advice, domestic abuse services, debt advice). This indicates that local authority understanding of universal provision is uneven and underdeveloped. This makes sense in a context where local government has limited access to the levers that would enable a reduction of homelessness risk across the population e.g. social security policy (see chapter 1), though it is worth noting that some authorities do have anti-poverty strategies of some kind and an emphasis on affordable housing provision was fairly common.

The examples below further illustrate the mix of universal and targeted interventions highlighted by authorities in response to this question. It is clear that some local authorities are much further progressed in seeking to reduce population wide homelessness risk than others.

District authority, East of England

⁴ See <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/social-prescribing>

There is an enabling function within the council to ensure delivery of affordable housing via S106 developments, work with Registered Providers and acquisitions through spending RTB receipts. The council has its own development company... which is also delivering new build homes and which will in the future own PRS properties. We lead seven partner organisations to deliver... [an] initiative which aims to increase community and economic resilience... [including provision of] Multi-Disciplinary advice and guidance... money and debt advice and... the provision of general advice and guidance on debt, benefits and other welfare support. This funding ensures that there is locally available and accessible debt and money advice... [Specialist] advice and support for migrant communities [is also provided in the area].

Metropolitan authority, North East

It is difficult to prevent homelessness without affordable housing and... [our] council houses are obviously a key universal service, we build on this through our... partnership approach, to make it everyone's business to prevent homelessness. We seek to make the best use of our limited face to face specialist advice services by helping non-specialist services to identify the risks of homelessness and enable quicker and more preventative responses. This means moving from signposting to proportionate partnership responses. To help us with this we have developed "spectrums of advice" for housing and homelessness and financial inclusion. These describe three broad tiers (general information, general advice and specialist advice) and acts as a guide to help us to better understand where partners fit into our provision... and what support they need to do this. In 2018-19 we provided our universal advice and information to 3,550 subscribers and saw 76,937 hits to access the information on our web pages dedicated to homelessness prevention and financial inclusion. We now need to build on this work and try to gain a better understanding of how the information we provide is used by partners and the impact it is having as part of the wider... advice and support system in preventing homelessness, 134 agencies partake in our partnership working arrangements, this helps to develop 'universal' responses. To complement our spectrum of advice we provide quarterly 'Introduction to Housing and Homelessness...' training sessions for those working in tier 1 and 2, supplemented by online training. These sessions offer an overview of homelessness legislation, an explanation of the different kinds of housing tenure and the rules that govern them, how to apply for social housing, and how to query and challenge housing and homelessness decisions. We also cover practical information about the role of the council and the policies and procedures that we and partners... follow to prevent homelessness. In addition to the specific housing elements we also offer online and face to face training in benefits, debt and budgeting and preventing sanctions. In 2018-19 we provided training to 503 volunteers and professionals from our network of partners.

London Borough

There is a large number of commissioned and third sector organisations in [the area] who have homelessness prevention as a sole or partial responsibility. We have [an investment programme] that will result in 100's of affordable homes being built. We have an intermediate rent subsidiary company of the council housing people who cannot afford market rents.

In relation to **targeted prevention**, we asked what, if any, activities are carried out in the area (provided internally, commissioned, and non-commissioned) that focus on people at a high potential risk of homelessness because of their characteristics e.g. people leaving prison, hospital, care, or the armed forces; victims of domestic abuse; other vulnerable adults; people in rent or council tax arrears or other forms of debt, etc. 66 respondents answered this question, 1 skipped it.

Examples of targeted prevention activities cited by respondents include:

- domestic abuse hub/domestic abuse Independent Domestic Abuse Advisors
- hospital discharge housing options advisor
- floating support for veterans
- prison release protocol
- co-location with children services
- tenant arrears advice
- protocols with adult and children services
- Duty to Refer arrangements
- rough sleeper outreach services
- housing allocation scheme prioritisation

Joint working protocols with key public bodies were the most commonly mentioned types of early prevention activity, along with floating support services and Duty to Refer arrangements. Less common were pre-eviction protocols with social or private landlords and specific measures for forces veterans.

Many respondents cited examples of Housing First projects, which could be considered a form of recovery prevention, rather than targeted prevention. Some of the above bulleted activities could be considered emergency prevention activities (e.g. rough sleeper outreach). That being said, respondents understanding of targeted prevention appears to be stronger than their understanding of universal prevention initiatives.

Some examples of detailed responses are shown below, which reinforce the quite wide range of targeted prevention underway in many local authorities.

Metropolitan authority, North West

Fixed term funding to end of December 2019 for Hospital Discharge Housing Options Advisor. Floating Support for veterans; Internal Welfare Rights and Debt Advice Service;... Independent Domestic Abuse Support Service; established pathway with... leaving care service; joint protocol with Children's Services for homeless 16/17 year olds; pilot pre-eviction protocol with registered providers for tenants at risk of eviction; agreed proposal for... [cross-local authority] Housing Options Advisor to be based in prison.

Metropolitan authority, Yorkshire and Humber

We have specific targeted interventions and services delivered to the following groups: Sex Workers; Members of the LGBT+ Community; Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants; Armed Forces Leavers; Vulnerable Private Rented Tenants in Priority Neighborhoods; Victims of Domestic Violence; People Suffering with Mental Ill Health; Prison Leavers; People with a Learning Disability; Gypsies and Travellers; and Older People.

District authority, East of England

Various projects are being led... that look at pathways for the most vulnerable groups. The first one was Offender Pathways that has produced a protocol. We are looking at those experiencing Mental Health and Drug and Alcohol challenges and accessing Housing. We are also going to address the difficulties faced around Hospital Discharge and Homelessness and also those displaying Hoarding Behaviours in the region.

District authority, East Midlands

We work with other... Districts to offer... a service for landlords to solve issues before service of eviction notices and... [a] Law Centre to provide support for both landlords and tenants with the aim of optimising prevention within the PRS.

In relation to **crisis prevention**, we asked what activities are carried out during the 56-day period during which someone is legally considered to be threatened with homelessness, including help to remain in existing accommodation and assistance to obtain alternative accommodation. 66 respondents answered this question, 1 skipped it.

Examples of crisis prevention activities cited by respondents include:

- mediation with landlord and families
- tenancy sustainment
- financial assistance
- pre-eviction protocol with registered providers
- housing allocation scheme additional preference
- Discretionary Housing Payments
- welfare rights and debt advice
- environmental health housing enforcement
- tenancy support
- financial assistance to secure PRS accommodation
- court possession advice scheme
- disabled facilities grant

A handful of local authorities said that the Personal Housing Plan was their key crisis prevention activity. Some respondents cited examples of rough sleeping initiatives and hostel provision, which could be considered more aligned to emergency prevention. Some examples of responses are shown below. These illustrate the wide variety of crisis prevention activities underway in local authorities, but also the conflation of crisis and emergency prevention

Metropolitan authority, Yorkshire and Humber

We adopt a relatively flexible interpretation of when we open the prevention duty e.g. we accept an approach when a landlord states their intention to bring a tenancy to an end, even if the S21 is invalid. [We] spent [around £2m] last year on crisis prevention activity

London Borough

The Council... operates a... Rent Deposit Scheme to help prevent and relieve homelessness. The service also supports tenants living in Emergency Temporary Accommodation provided by the Council to move into the private rented sector (Discharge of Duty). Financial Assessment services that support households to claim housing benefit / maximise income – co location of DWP staff enhances outcomes. Housing Related Support funded floating Support service - 35K hours over 3 years. Joint working with Community Safety, [voluntary sector homelessness organisation] and neighbouring boroughs to address unlawful encampments / provide support with housing options / move on. Council Housing Services have dedicated neighbourhood Officers / commission Income Recovery officers to provide tenancy sustainment services (they also undertake tenancy sustainment work outside of 56 days) Registered Providers are encouraged to work closely with the Council to prevent homelessness.

Metropolitan authority, Yorkshire and Humber

We work alongside the voluntary sector who have established good links with asylum seekers. They are working with us to notify us and to support people with positive decisions, so we can work with people before it gets to the point of crisis. We support people to access DHP and to get bonds where appropriate and we will offer bonds/rent in advance as well. We have a crash pad for young people, if there is a chance of reconciling a family breakdown and timeout and mediation could prevent homelessness we will use this option. Referrals to support agencies to help tenancies to be sustained. We have various supported housing schemes... with floating support options

We asked respondents to detail the **emergency prevention** activities carried out the area (provided internally, commissioned, and non-commissioned) for people who are at immediate risk of homelessness, including rough sleeping e.g. assistance to obtain accommodation. 65 respondents answered this question, 2 skipped it.

Examples of emergency prevention activities cited by respondents include:

- Rough sleeping initiatives (e.g. hubs, outreach)
- financial incentives to secure PRS accommodation e.g. Rent Deposit Guarantee Schemes
- supported housing and hostels
- temporary accommodation
- tenancy support
- court possession advice scheme
- Discretionary Housing Payments
- food banks
- severe weather emergency provision, night shelters and 'crash pads'
- reconnection assistance
- migrant specific advice and assistance
- domestic abuse specific advice and assistance
- Housing First projects

Street outreach, hostel accommodation and assessment hubs were the most commonly reported types of emergency prevention activities. Assistance with mental ill health and being allocated social rented housing were less commonly reported activities.

A handful of local authorities said that the Personal Housing Plan was their key emergency prevention activity.

Responses to this question were more detailed than those pertaining to universal, targeted or crisis prevention. This might be due to this type of homelessness prevention activity being more established and better understood than other types of homelessness prevention activity. Many local authorities referenced funding received from the MHCLG, as part of its Rough Sleeping Strategy, which might also have influenced the availability of such a comprehensive array of emergency prevention activity. It is worth noting, however, that local authorities are not required to provide the majority of this kind of emergency provision. It may therefore be subject to increases and decreases in relation to funding streams and the political priority attached to it locally and nationally (see below).

Some examples of responses are shown below. They reinforce the role of central government funding pots (e.g. the Rough Sleepers Initiative) in driving and enhancing locally designed and delivered services in this area.

Metropolitan authority, North West

Rough Sleeper Initiative funding; [initiative focused on preventing street homelessness] for non-priority households at risk of rough sleeping...; Rapid Rehousing Pathway funding; Private Sector Access funding; commissioning of supported accommodation for young people and single people; dispersed temporary accommodation portfolio for statutory homeless placements; referrals into non-commissioned temporary accommodation; joint home visits with Children's Services to prevent young people being excluded from family home;

District authority, South West

Countywide services include SIB [Social Impact Bond] project (Housing First), emergency accommodation and assessment centres, street homeless outreach service.

District authority, East of England

We successfully obtain funding from MHCLG to facilitate 2 rough sleeper co-ordinators. Our expectation is that this will have a huge impact for helping those who are rough sleeping and will mean that we have emergency accommodation for non-priority homeless customers for the first time. The support from partners for this project has been excellent. For those with priority need we have our own temporary accommodation and... Financial, Inclusion, Resilience, Skills and Training officers... who work closely with all residents to provide with the skills and welfare resources (or support into employment) to make sure [they are] ready to take on sustainable accommodation

District authority, East of England

Rough Sleeper navigator service, night shelter, emergency provision... [via third sector provider], emergency rooms in council's own temporary accommodation; crash pad service for young people; [county-] wide protocol to provide emergency provision for care leavers/young people - 16/17 years; [Domestic Violence organisation] refuge and outreach; additional refuge house; specialist refuge Housing Options Service

London Borough

There is an enormous amount of rough sleeping work impossible to sum up here. There is an entire Strategy for this... and a large number of directly employed and commissioned staff specialising in helping rough sleepers. Since the advent of the Rough Sleeping Initiative fund and the Rapid Rehousing Pathway from which we were allocated a large amount of money we have been doing even more, for example a small team of assertive reconnection advisers... and an expanded Housing First service.

Finally, in relation to **recovery prevention**, we asked respondents to describe the activities carried out in the area to prevent repeat or chronic homelessness e.g. assistance from adult social care, children services and other public bodies and/or support from housing associations and voluntary organisations, including floating support and Housing First. 64 respondents answered this question, 3 skipped it.

Examples of recovery prevention activities cited by respondents include:

- tenancy sustainment/floating support/resettlement support
- Housing First projects
- rough sleeping initiatives
- domestic abuse specific support
- mental health specific support
- Housing association tenant specific initiatives

This question had less detailed responses than any of those preceding it. A handful of respondents had no specific recovery prevention initiatives. Some of the activities listed above could also be considered emergency prevention activities. All of this suggests, in line with the findings of Fitzpatrick et al (2019a) that recovery prevention (along with universal and possibly targeted prevention) is a key area of weakness in current responses to homelessness. The impact of local authority budget cuts on Supporting People-type services is an important part of the picture here.

Some examples of responses are shown below, some of which strongly reinforce this message about the de-prioritisation of recovery prevention interventions in recent years.

District authority, East of England

[County]-wide floating support was decommissioned in December 2017. The Housing Related Support funding was divided up between districts and [this area] used the funding for a homeless link worker (employed by the Council) and a Pathway worker (employed by a local housing association). A Pathway worker supports rough sleepers/those at risk of rough sleeping from the streets into accommodation. Accommodation solutions are matched to clients' individual needs and they are linked in with the [drug and alcohol] Service delivered by [a local charity]. [Local housing association] has a community detox service attached to its

hostel. This was set up with funding from drug and alcohol commissioners some years ago. The Council has provided funding to [this organisation] to increase their provision and in particular those who could not be safely accommodated in the hostel or whose behaviour has resulted them in being banned from the hostel. [The area] has a monthly multi-agency task and targeting group... for rough sleepers led by a Pathway worker. Partners include: Housing Options, Police, NHS Health (GP etc), NHS Mental Health, Voluntary and Community Sector organisations, supported housing providers, DWP, faith sector which looks at holistic support to enable homeless households to access and maintain accommodation. [The council] attends the Police-hosted [street homelessness and street culture-focused] meeting.

Metropolitan authority, Yorkshire and Humber

[The local authority] defines recovery as being primarily relating to tenancy sustainment... [and] has invested heavily in tenancy management resources relating to council housing with housing officers having an average management patch of 300 homes. This is significantly lower than many other social landlords and enables [us] to adopt a more proactive approach to tenancy management. [The authority] has a private sector housing team that regulates and enforces standards under the Hosing Act 2004 and is able to inspect 2,500 properties per year in the private rented sector. [We] intend to introduce Selective Licencing in two areas... covering approx. 8,000 private rented properties. [We] commission a range of housing related support services with the principle commissioned service offering housing related support to 1,500 households. There is close working relationships between Housing Options and Housing Management relating to finding timely and sustainable council housing lets for rough sleepers with a lettings manager being seconded into the housing options service to ensure that these outcomes are achieved.

District Council, South West

We are offering Housing First as part of the funding granted to us under the Rough Sleeper initiative. we fund a tenant accreditation training scheme to assist in the reduction of the repeat cycle of homelessness giving clients the skills to manage tenancies in the future either where they have not held a tenancy before or have had a tenancy failure in the past. Whilst we can refer and do refer cases to [adult and children's social care], often thresholds are very high (for [adults]) and resources limited (eg for drugs / alcohol rehab, MHealth support) so intervention is limited or not forthcoming. We have been working to try to inform and upskill [adult and children's social care] tier 1 colleagues to help them to understand each other's roles. We however do work collaboratively with [children's services] to commission a... youth homelessness service for 16 to 25 year olds which is very successful.

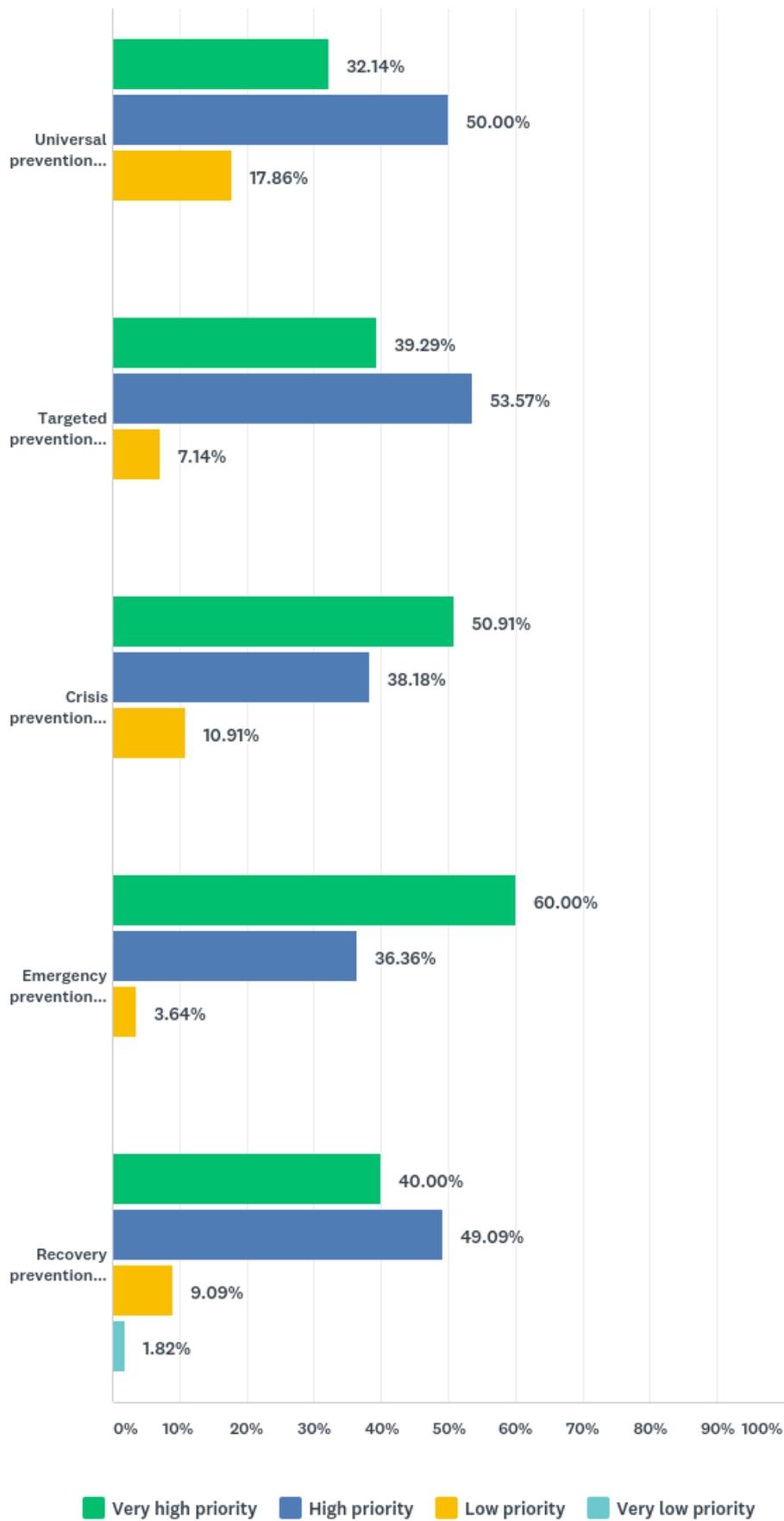
District authority, South East

The local Homelessness Charity provides a range of services. [An addiction charity] also exists in this District. There are two other charitable services in [the area] - one of which receives Council funding - with a focus on providing pastoral support to rough sleepers and those using the night time economy and may be in need of help. There is a general lack of non-Council-

funded floating support for general residents in this area and not all Housing Associations seem to be focussed on the social side of their business and some seem to prioritise revenue first. There is a scheme with the County Council to assist intentionally homeless families and 16/17 year olds at risk of becoming homeless.

We asked respondents to provide information regarding the number of households prevented from becoming homelessness due to universal, targeted, crisis, emergency and recovery prevention activities during the year 2018/19. This received a lower response than other questions and the vast majority of respondents stated that they didn't capture data specific to the five strands of prevention activities. This reflects that current required data recording under H-CLIC covers only the period during which households at risk of homelessness within 56 days (defined here as crisis prevention). As some case study authorities commented (see chapter three), the P1E recording system had allowed them to capture a broader range of prevention activities occurring before households were at such imminent risk.

Figure 3: What level of priority is given to providing each form of prevention activity of in your local authority area

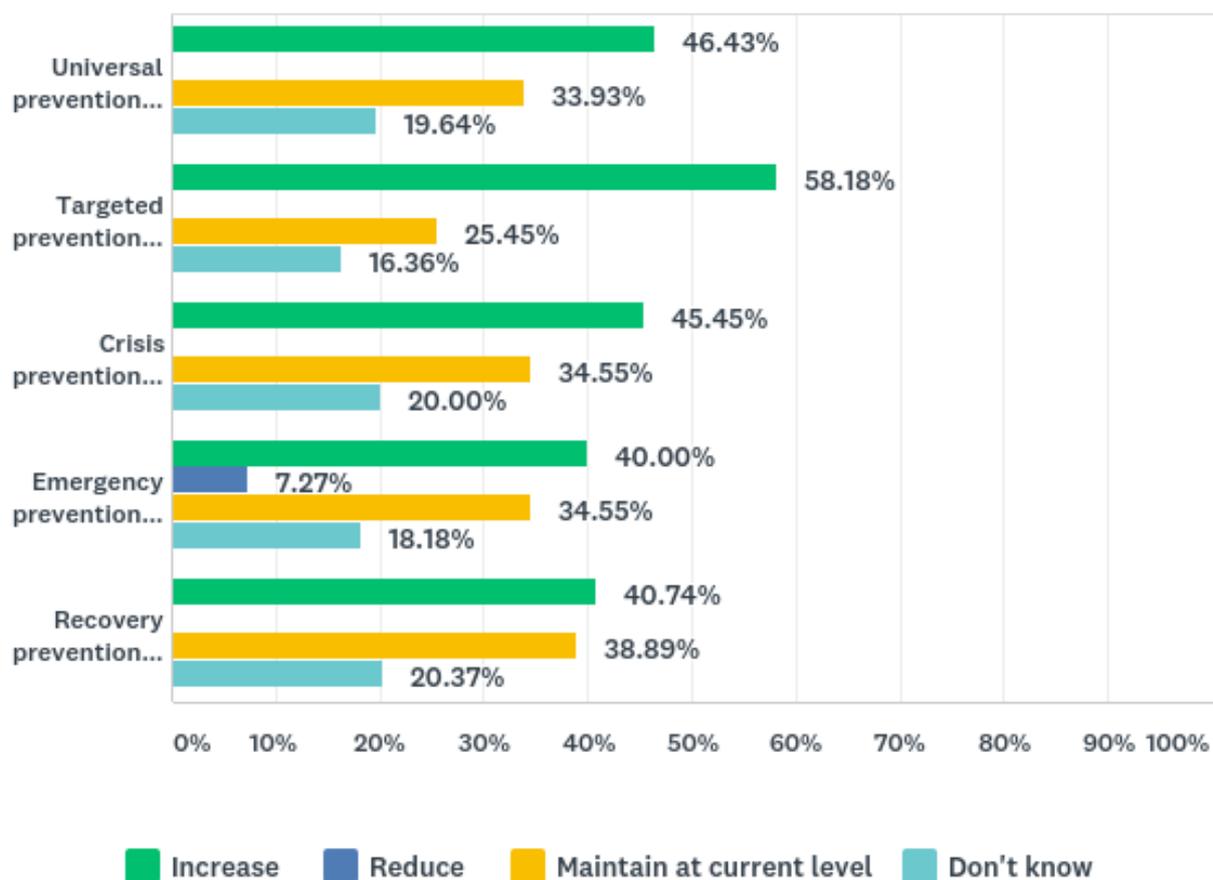


Notes: 56 respondents answered this question, 11 skipped it.

Respondents were asked to rate the level of priority given to each form of prevention activity in their local authority area. As can be seen from figure 3, there was a clear tendency for local authorities to rate all or most forms of prevention activity as a high or very high priority. That being said, figure 3 does indicate, in line with the analysis above, that universal prevention activity is accorded lower priority in local authorities than other forms of prevention, with 18% of respondents acknowledging that this was a low priority. Recovery prevention and crisis prevention also appears to be accorded lower priority than other forms, with one in ten authorities recognising that these kinds of prevention were a low priority locally. Emergency, targeted and emergency accommodation were the highest priority.

These findings are perhaps surprising, as they do not neatly accord with local authorities prioritising areas in which they have statutory responsibilities i.e. crisis prevention. Two explanations may be relevant here. First, the strong priority given to emergency responses fits with the increased levels of rough sleeping seen in many parts of England in the last decade or so (Fitzpatrick et al, 2019b) and the related high priority recently given to this area by central government, including via the Rough Sleepers Strategy and Initiative and associated funding. Second, a year and half after the coming into force of the Homelessness Reduction Act it may be that the anticipated high priority to be given to crisis interventions has not yet been fully realised. Alternatively, it may be that local authorities are counting work undertaken in relation to their prevention duties under the HRA as ‘targeted’ rather than ‘crisis’ prevention. All of these findings must be interpreted in the light of the limited resonance and understanding of the five-way typology evident in the analysis above.

Figure 4: Does your local authority have plans to increase/reduce the following kinds of prevention activity over the next 1-3 years?



Notes: 56 respondents answered this question, 11 skipped it.

Respondents were asked whether they intended to increase or reduce homelessness prevention activity over the next few years. There are intentions to increase targeted prevention activity (58%, 32 local authorities) more than any other type of prevention activity. There are fewer intentions to increase emergency prevention activity and recovery prevention activity (40%, 22, each). The only type of prevention activity where there are intentions to reduce it, is emergency prevention activity (7%, 4), potentially indicating a recalibration towards further 'upstream' prevention driven by the Homelessness Reduction Act.

Respondents who were unsure about whether prevention activity would be increased said this was due to uncertainty regarding future decisions about funding and potential further legislative reform. Equally, those respondents who were certain there would be future increases in prevention activity cited recent additional funding and new legislation to prevent and relieve homelessness as the driving factors here.

Some examples of responses are shown below. These highlight the dependence of plans regarding homelessness prevention activity on available resources and partnership arrangements. They also illustrate some of the factors driving changes in the balance of prevention activity, linked to the pressures on local authorities in high demand areas and the increase in demand associated with the Homelessness Reduction Act.

District authority, East of England

We are trying to maintain services by either lobbying or working in partnership to prove the value or trying to hold on to funds internally. If the current homeless prevention grant is cut or removed, we will have a massive reduction in projects. We are building new and modern temporary accommodation and this includes increasing capacity in our current schemes. We would love to be increasing schemes across each of these categories, but that is not realistic with current budget pressures

London Borough

On the back of our recently approved new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy we have an action plan to maximise the effectiveness of the resources available to the council internally and within partners and stakeholder organisations. Internally for example we are going to dedicate a number of floating support workers to helping more families move out of TA. We also have a programme to redevelop our hostel stock, which will result in an increase in bed spaces for single homeless people as well as improving the quality of our family hostel supply. We are going to buy around 60 RTB [Right to Buy] properties to use as in-borough TA for families so that it is easier to work with them towards moving them on to more settled accommodation. We are going to tender for a contract with Registered Providers, through which we hope to secure up to 100 AST's that are managed by the RP's but not as TA or on leases but as settled housing options. We are building more new council rent housing than [other areas].

District authority, South West

We are very happy with our process and systems - our TA numbers remain low, however, they have increased (doubled) since the introduction of HRA, predominantly because of the

increased length of time we have to accommodate some cohorts of people (eg a client who is Intentionally homeless would have been accommodated for far less time in the days before HRA, however, now they must be accommodated for 56 days and then for a reasonable period once the IH decision is made post 56 days). we are seeing more complex people leaving their position until crisis point so from that perspective the HRA has worked against us as we cannot effectively manage their expectations because they end up staying for several months in TA, whereas before we could effectively manage their expectations pre the point at which they were physically homeless because they knew that the length of time they would get to stay in TA was a matter of days or weeks in some instances. It therefore encouraged them to work with us proactively pre-physical homelessness and during their short stay in TA.

London Borough

What sets [this area] apart from other London boroughs is a high number of poorer households living in the private rented sector. This combination of households with low levels of financial resilience living in a relatively fluid private sector housing market has led to a [more than 200%] increase in homelessness acceptances... over a seven-year period. The sheer volume of requests for assistance have overloaded our homelessness services to the extent that we now have over [3000] households in temporary accommodation... equat[ing] to [over 11,000] individuals... Without action, this figure is projected to rise to over [4,500] households (or [15,000 plus] individuals) by 2025. Although the accommodation is designated as temporary, the reality for most people is that they will remain there for several years. To put this in context, each year roughly [250] social rented homes are let to homeless households in the borough.

Co-operation and partnerships

Respondents were asked to rank how much co-operation there was between their local authority and other public bodies, housing associations and voluntary organisations to prevent homelessness. The plurality (46%, or 30 respondents) said there was not enough, with a further 7% (5) saying there was nowhere near enough. Just over a third (35% or 23 respondents) felt there was enough, with a small number (7% or 5 respondents) reported that there is more than enough.

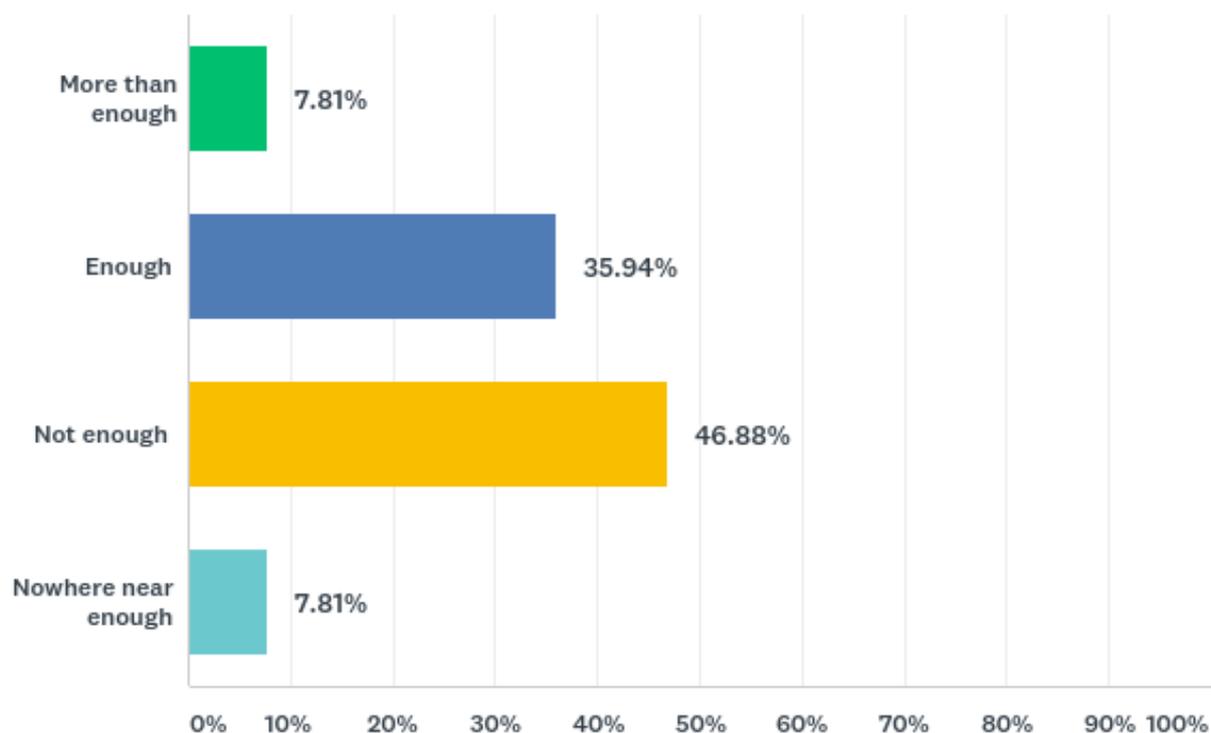
Respondents cited examples of co-operative working such as:

- joint working protocols e.g. with hospitals, housing benefit administrators, child social care, housing associations
- common housing allocation schemes e.g. sub-regional choice-based lettings
- joint commissioning of services e.g. Sanctuary Scheme, day services, hostels
- multi-agency hubs e.g. for young people
- pathways e.g. for single people, or people leaving hospital
- co-location e.g. with Jobcentre Plus
- joint assessments e.g. with mental health services
- forums e.g. focusing on specific cohorts of people at risk of homelessness such as rough sleepers, with specific types of stakeholders such as private landlords, or regular meetings focusing on homelessness strategy delivery

Joint working protocols, especially with children's services and prisons were commonly reported partnerships, whereas co-operation with mental health services and NHS services generally were less commonly reported.

Some respondents said they had no formal arrangements for co-operative working. Many reported that more co-operative working could be done with housing associations, although as many local authorities were positive about existing co-operation with housing associations suggesting that housing association ‘buy in’ to the homelessness agenda is uneven and highly variable. A lack of co-operation from adult social care services, especially in respect of mental illness was commonly reported, with budget cuts being perceived as a contributing factor here. Information sharing protocols were also an area where co-operation could be improved. Co-operation with criminal justice agencies, especially in regards to approved premises and prison leavers, was cited as an area that needed improving. Challenges of co-operation across large geographical areas, rural areas and between county councils and district council were all reported as being problematic. Some respondents said they intended to review co-operative arrangements as part of a homelessness review and realign this when a new homelessness strategy was launched. Intentions to carry out joint commissioning of homelessness prevention activities were mentioned by only one respondent. Budgetary constraints of local government were cited by a few respondents as a factor inhibiting co-operative working in general. Some respondents referenced the Duty to Refer as enabling co-operative working, though tended to see the duty as not going far enough, as too many agencies simply make a referral rather than taking this contact as an opportunity to co-operate more pro-actively.

Figure 5: In your local authority area, how much co-operation is there between the Council and other public bodies, housing associations, and voluntary organisations, to prevent homelessness (e.g. common policies, pooled budgets, joint commissioning, shared service delivery, joint working protocols, single pathways)?



Notes: 64 respondents answered this question, 3 skipped it.

Some examples of responses are shown below. These clearly illustrate the advanced partnership arrangements in place in some local authorities, but also the unevenness of these and the struggles faced engaging some partners as much as local authorities would like.

District authority, East of England

We achieve this [co-operative working] largely through our Early Help model that has a large majority of services within [it], last recorded number was 26 organisations. In addition to this we then have the prison release protocol, district direct within hospitals, developing mental health discharge protocols and now have data sharing protocols with our main landlords. Legally sharing info at the earliest opportunity in order to assist those who are vulnerable or at risk of becoming homeless is an essential preventative tool.

District authority, North West

There are some good examples of joint working protocols i.e. with Children's Services and the DWP, however there is more to be done with other statutory agencies such as the prisons, health, RPs [Registered Providers] etc. The Council intends to develop these relationships following the recent Homelessness Review and the introduction of the new Homelessness Strategy. A multi-agency working group will be established to monitor the delivery of the action plan, and this should encourage more inter-agency working.

District authority, East of England

We have some areas of good practice and joint protocols, but even in these areas there are tensions due to the budgetary pressures and competing priorities. We want to ensure that there is sufficient help with services such as Housing Related Support - but this sits with [the] county council and they have the pressures of adult social care. Housing associations do not cooperate fully and we have better engagement from some than from others. The voluntary and charitable sectors are great, but they need more funding. We have got some shared commissioning models, such as domestic abuse/refuge support; young people support. Most housing associations don't let us know about evictions until the day.

London Borough

The Duty to Refer has resulted in increased referrals, however cooperation post this point is not as forthcoming as it should. Homelessness is everybody's problem.

District authority, East Midlands

Despite stock being transferred and a difficult relationship that has involved bringing service back in house within the last 16 months we have developed positive and constructive relationships with local social housing providers and have been able to navigate their increasingly commercial approach to letting and managing properties. We actively manage the housing register and look at seeking to better use adapted properties and otherwise support the landlord to optimise the use of their stock. We continue to be an active delivery partner supporting their development programme. BUT social housing is rapidly becoming far more focused on tenants that will be able to pay the rent and is leaving some behind. We work very closely internally with homelessness sitting alongside officers delivering disabled facility grants and private sector enforcement... We have excellent relationships with Community

Safety that enables effective work with the Police and wider issues to produce a coordinated response. We have a healthy relationship with those representing older adults and families meaning that in many instances we can solve housing problems collectively... There is a very strong working group that has attracted funding into the county and that continues to provide an effective forum to coordinate responses to homelessness... There is some resource sharing and a complete absence of inter-authority rivalry... housing and homelessness [is] very well established within NHS commissioning locally. We have been able to have mature conversations about greater investment into treatment and support services for those with drug and alcohol dependency issues. Equally we have been able to provide solutions for some residents that have been placing high and unrealistic demands on NHS services.

District authority, East Midlands

There is strong joint working through the Complex Case Panel... as well as the agencies working together in [our] Hub. There are close working relationships at a strategic level with all other... districts, [the] City Council and... particularly the Public Health department... There is close working with other organisation, faith and voluntary groups through the sub-regional inter-agency forum who lead on the strategic action plan. There are a range of other strategic groups at county level, that feed into Health and Wellbeing Board, [the Community Safety] Board, Integrated Care Partnership groups, etc ensuring that homelessness is high on everyone's agenda. This is resulting in joint commissioning and pooling of funding. The Care Leaver Offer and pathway is working well across [the county]. Through the MHCLG rough sleeper funding, we are working to improve pathways on release from hospital and prisons. There is room for improvement in joint working with those subject to the Duty to Refer, social care, social landlords, approved premises, faith groups, etc, who largely place the onus on Housing Options Teams to resolve someone's homelessness – in our view homelessness is everyone's responsibility.

Metropolitan authority, North West

There are some good examples of collaboration but this is not system-wide necessarily. The Duty to Refer has on balance been helpful and there is a good arrangement with housing providers taking this up voluntarily. However, some public bodies have not entered into the spirit of the D2R in respect of its intention to promote prevention. We are working on a city-wide Prevention Compact.

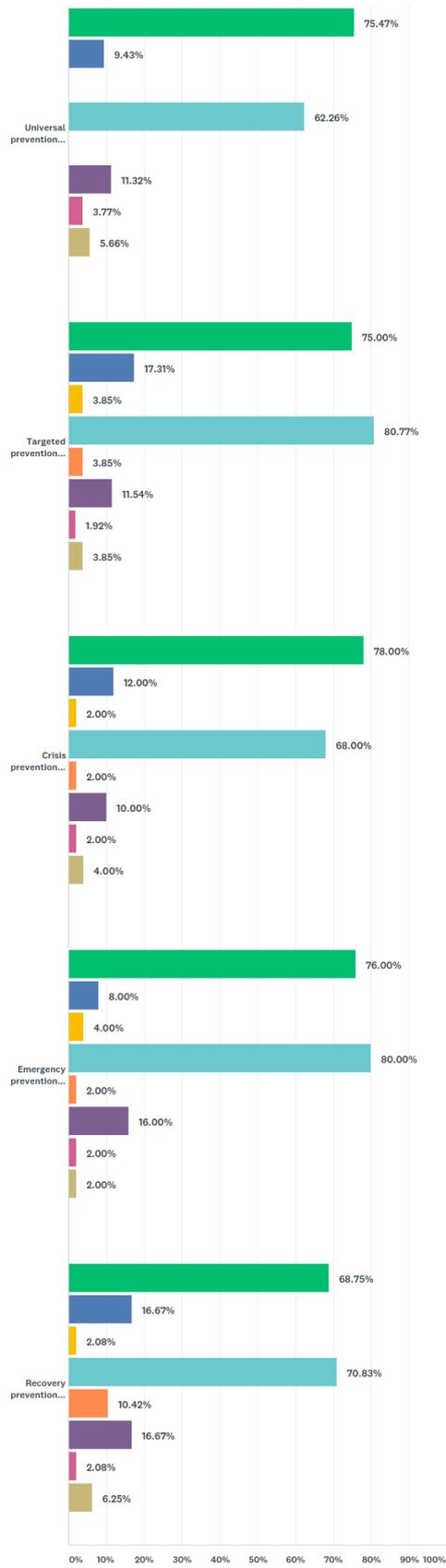
Homelessness prevention funding

The survey included several questions about the level and source of funding across the five types of homelessness prevention activity framing this report. The question regarding levels of funding across the five prevention types received a low response rate with only 41 respondents providing an answer. The overwhelming majority of authorities who did respond explained that they do not have detailed spending figures broken down according to these prevention types. As one district council in the East of England put it: "It is difficult to separate out costs into the different prevention areas." The small numbers of estimates provided are thus likely to tell us little about spending on these various forms of prevention across local authorities. It is perhaps worth noting, however, that the highest estimates

were given for targeted and crisis prevention activities, with spending estimates for universal, emergency and recovery prevention far lower.

We also asked about the sources of funding for prevention activities spanning the five-way typology during 2018/19. 53 respondents answered this question, 14 skipped it. For all forms of prevention activity, overwhelmingly respondents said that funding came from local government, with the MHCLG being the second most common funding source, public bodies the third and philanthropic/voluntary sector organisations the fourth. Very little funding came from combined authorities or the Greater London Authority, nor from other national government ministries, agencies and bodies.

Figure 6: From April 2018 – March 2019, where did funding for the following kinds of prevention activity undertaken in your local authority area come from?



Of all forms of prevention activity, local government is more likely to fund crisis prevention activity (78%, 39), other local public bodies are more likely to fund targeted prevention activities (17%, 9), combined authorities or the Greater London Authority are more likely to fund emergency prevention activities (4%, 2), MHCLG is more likely to fund targeted and emergency prevention activities (80%, 41 each), other national government ministries, agencies and bodies are more likely to fund recovery prevention activities (10% 5), philanthropic/voluntary sector is more likely to fund recovery prevention activities (16% 8), and others are more likely to fund universal prevention activities (3%, 2). It is notable that targeted prevention activity, which almost 60% of respondents report they intend to increase (see above), is more likely to be funded by MHCLG than from other sources.

A fairly typical response is shown below.

Metropolitan authority, North East

It is difficult to confirm the exact amount spent on each activity in the city but we have tried to capture the main sources. The majority of our universal and targeted activities are funded by [the council's] General Fund or Housing Revenue Account or through Housing Benefit rent payments, the remainder is funded through national government funding... Our crisis and emergency activities are funded to a larger extent by national government homelessness funding including the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant and New Burdens. We have less developed recovery prevention activities but where they do exist, they are funded both through homelessness grant funding and by the council.

Respondents were also asked about the stability of funding for homelessness prevention activities. 53 respondents answered this question, 14 skipped it.

The picture that emerges is of homelessness funding across the five prevention types being unstable. Across all five categories of prevention, a very small proportion of respondents (less than 10%) reported funding being stable i.e. secure in the longer term of five years plus, and around 30-40% of respondents reported that funding for these five kinds of prevention activity was 'not very stable' i.e. secure for less than a year.

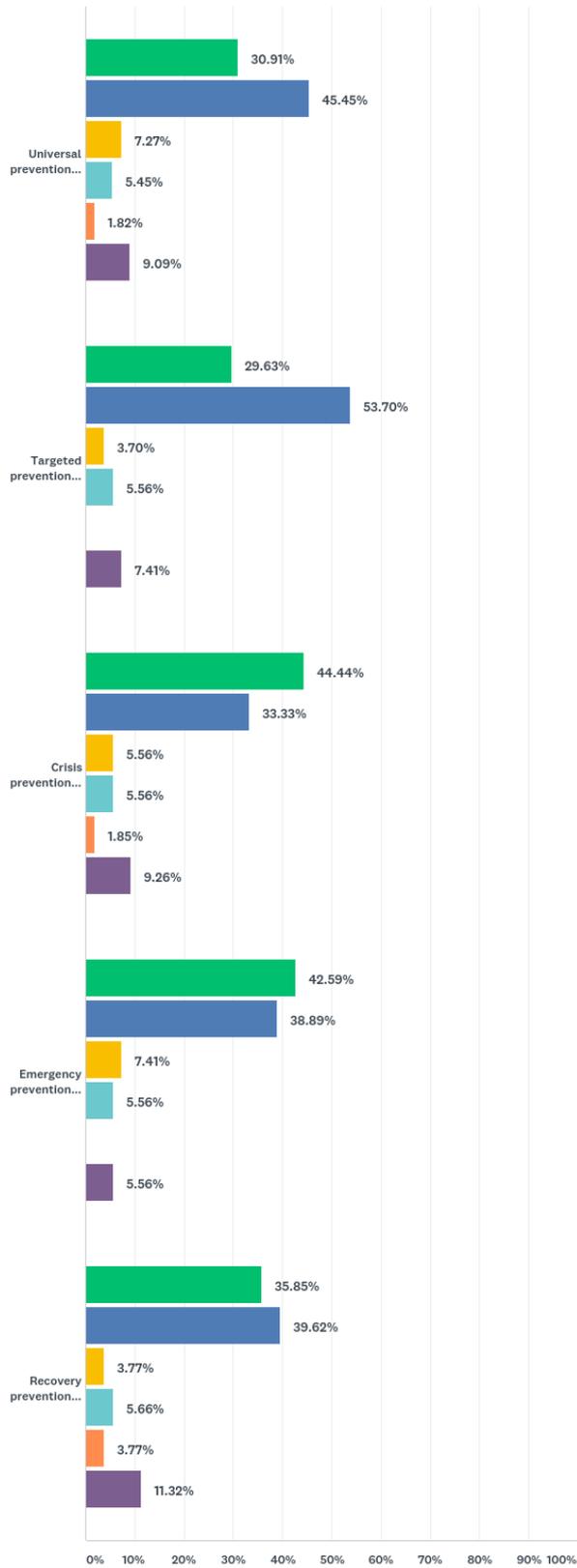
Universal and targeted prevention activities were reported as the most likely to be seen as 'moderately' stably funded i.e. with funding secure for 2-3 years: 45% of respondents described universal prevention as this secure, and 54% targeted prevention as this secure. 40-45% of local authorities reported crisis and emergency prevention activity to be 'not very stably' funded with only a third reporting that crisis prevention was 'moderately' stably funded and 39% in the case of emergency prevention. It is interesting, and perhaps surprising, that crisis prevention activity is seen to be the least stably funded given that local authorities now have an obligation to provide this under the Homelessness Reduction Act, and that universal and targeted prevention is seen as relatively more stably funded given the comparative lack of specific and long-term funding streams for this kind of prevention. Concerns about the instability of crisis prevention may reflect that the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant allocations from April 2020 onwards had not yet been announced at the time of survey. The results pertaining to universal and targeted prevention may reflect a relative lack of understanding of what constitutes these kinds of prevention activity (see above) or potentially that more proactive authorities in these areas are over-represented in our sample. Funding for recovery prevention was seen as 'not very stable' in 35% of responding authorities and moderately stable in 40%. The category of prevention activity was the most likely to be reported as not existing at all in local authorities, and it was also more common here for respondents not to know how secure the funding was (with over 10% responding 'don't know' to this element of the question).

Consistent throughout all response was the uncertainty of local government funding generally, but also MHCLG homelessness grant funding specifically, which respondents made very apparent their open text responses, examples of which are included below.

District authority, North West

The Council is about to embark upon a procurement exercise for the homelessness and housing advice contract. Whilst funding has been earmarked for the delivery of the service (for up to 10 years), specific prevention activities may be dependent upon funding from the MHCLG, and if this is uncertain, then activities may need to reduce to the statutory minimum.

Figure 7: In your local authority area, how stable is the funding for homelessness prevention activities...?



- Not very stable - secure in the short-term (e.g less than 1 year)
- Moderately stable - secure in the medium-term (e.g 2-5 years)
- Stable - secure in the long-term (e.g more than 5 years)
- Other
- Not applicable (we do now have this kind of prevention activity in the area)
- Don't know

Metropolitan authority, Yorkshire and Humber

Grants constitute 50% of our income source relating to prevention. If the funding was to decrease, our activity would have to decrease to reflect this.

District authority, East of England

We are facing budget cuts internally and therefore any budget is currently at risk. We do not know about future funding from Ministry of Housing. We are not sure what will happen with housing related support funding from [the] County council as this is currently under review. All of our charitable partnerships rely on this funding.

Unitary authority, South West

Funding in this area is generally short term with the exception of the flexible homelessness support grant - still don't know if we are getting any new burdens funding after next April in relation the HRAAct, and most funding bids are for 1 or 2 years so difficult to plan longer term, retain staff etc.

Local level enablers and barriers

Respondents were asked a series of open text questions related to the local level barriers and enablers of homelessness prevention activity. 62 respondents provided an answer to the question, and 5 skipped it. A number of key themes emerged in respondents' answers.

The nature of the local housing market was identified as a barrier by some respondents. Specific issues here included a lack of affordable and suitable housing in the private and social rented sectors; illogical and unlawful practices when allocating social rented housing; and out-of-borough placements using up available and affordable housing supply in some areas. The unaffordability of accommodation linked to cuts to people's social security entitlements was a key factor here, as illustrated in the responses below. This is discussed further in the next section.

District authority, East of England

Universal Credit is making it harder for private landlords and some social landlords to accept due to the clients not being able to afford the rent of the property being offered, the shortfalls are too large. Under 35's struggle to find affordable accommodation due to the lack of shared accommodation.

London Borough

[The area] has a very small supply of affordable private rented accommodation as market rents are in the top 5 most expensive in the country. This is a huge barrier for single people and families who would prefer to be able to find their own housing, or would accept a PRS option if it was available [here]. This both causes homelessness to be higher than it should be and stops the council and partners from being able to resolve it quickly or in some cases at all. Similar logic applies to the overall lack of affordable housing of all types. Home ownership is beyond the grasp of all but the extremely wealthy... Although we have a relatively good

supply of social housing... the lack of any affordable housing of other types means demand massively outstrips supply. These are the more local barriers... then there are the national barriers of welfare reformed benefits and austerity that both cause homelessness and make it far harder to prevent or relieve it.

Gaps or weaknesses in local service provision were identified as another barrier. Specific examples here included adult and/or child social care services being in special measures; a lack of support being available for those with mental health and/or substance dependency issues; and a lack of occupational therapists to provide assistance with aids and adaptations to help people remain at home.

Local spending decisions emerged as a further barrier. Reductions in spending on housing support services, including floating support were specifically mentioned, so too reduced spending on adult social care. These challenges must be understood in the context of national funding decisions (see below).

The circumstances of those at risk or experiencing homelessness in the area was identified as a barrier by some respondents. Specific issues related to the insecure and irregular income of some households, something that could reflect challenges with the adequacy and security of social security benefits and/or factors relating to the local labour market and employment opportunities. One district council for example cited "low wages across the district due to the majority industries of farming, retail and tourism" as a barrier to prevention work. Some respondents cited unrealistic expectation of people seeking assistance due to homelessness or a threat of homelessness as a barrier to prevention work.

Other barriers identified included: difficulties recruiting and retaining staff that are experienced, knowledgeable and skilled into the housing/homelessness team; high caseloads; a lack of strategic planning/short-term planning locally; ineffective information sharing and collaboration between key partner organisations; a lack of communication and competing priorities between relevant organisations locally; and the generosity of local residents supporting people sleeping rough in urban centres.

Examples of responses illustrating these themes are shown below.

District authority, South East

The very high cost and very low availability of all types and security of accommodation. The low wages across the district due to the majority industries of farming, retail and tourism. Private sector landlords rarely have a need to consider more vulnerable tenants because of 'safer' alternatives. The City Centre is a very desirable area for rough sleepers (from inside and outside the District) because it is well lit, has CCTV and local residents are often wealthy and generous in supporting rough sleepers. However, this often is displayed as naïve compassion and forms a barrier to people seeking the proper help they really need. [Name of town is where] many county services [are] based... meaning we tend to import a number of people to this area to access services for the vulnerable who would otherwise not come... Drug use (and County Lines activity) seems to be growing which can be a barrier to many of securing accommodation. [The] District also has a very large number of caravans and holiday sites which seems to inflate the number of homeless applicants we would otherwise naturally have and these are often used as a sub-prime and insecure form of cheaper accommodation for people.

District authority, South East

The greatest challenge to prevention within the PRS is the difference between Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and market rent. On average, a property can be [around £200] a month over LHA. This makes the PRS a difficult market to access and we're often having to offset this by providing [Rent in Advance and Deposits] up front for longer-periods of time. Other strategic challenges include: - cuts to support services (i.e. mental health, substance misuse) meaning increased households losing their tenancy or being found intentionally homeless. - Budgeting on UC - Settled communities meaning we have little available council housing - Overall increases in demand for housing services meaning officers are managing high caseloads.

District authority, East Midlands

Homeless prevention is hindered locally by a lack of funding specifically for homelessness services (including advice, supported housing, floating support, etc), for council and public services generally, a lack of affordable housing (hindered by poor viability margins), the welfare system, lack of specialist support and preventative initiatives to address mental health, substance misuse, unhealthy relationships, etc. at their earliest point. The administrative burden of the HRA reduces officer time to work with residents and does not necessarily improve the service for the resident. The poor joint working with organisations such as social care, housing associations, private landlords, hospitals, prisons, probation, etc creates barriers. There also appears to be low take up of advice services generally by residents, a high rate of parental exclusion and approaches at crisis point with an expectation of a council house being available.

Metropolitan authority, North West

Our greatest barrier is the buoyant housing market, particularly in respect of the private rented sector. Coupled with insecurity of tenure and the inadequacy of LHA, this makes prevention extremely difficult when landlords are minded to evict. It also hinders the acquisition of property to enable prevention, as landlords have choice in the market. Capacity and knowledge-sharing make early intervention prevention difficult, particularly in regards to public bodies who are overstretched and for whom homelessness prevention is not a core business and for voluntary sector agencies who are attuned to a rights-based approach or who see prevention as gatekeeping.

Respondents were asked to identify what local level enablers, if any, help facilitate homelessness prevention activity in their area. 52 respondents answered this question, 15 skipped it. A number of key themes emerged here. By far and away the strongest theme related the buy in and co-operation of local partners. Specific points made included:

- the presence of a common approach to tackling homelessness
- joint working with neighbouring local authorities
- multi-agency forums
- co-location of service providers
- engagement with voluntary organisations
- commitment to partnership working

- joint commissioning (e.g. between local government and other local public bodies such as the Police and Crime Commissioner)
- joint working with private landlords
- referral pathways between public bodies (e.g. Duty to Refer arrangements)

Also receiving mention was the importance of local political buy-in and leadership, including elected member interest and involvement in homelessness and homelessness prevention and having a corporate priority to tackle homelessness. A final enabler mentioned was the existence of tenancy support services in the area.

Interestingly, no respondents reported their local homelessness strategy as being a key enabler facilitating the prevention of homelessness⁵. Example responses covering a number of themes above is shown below:

London Borough

Strong political commitment since around 2004 when there were [high numbers of] households in TA... This... is matched by corporate support. Excellent strategies both in terms of those directly related to homelessness and within other corporate strategies such as children's strategies. [The area] is blessed with a huge number of third sector and voluntary organisations, as mentioned earlier and also a very strong commitment from our community to the plight of those in need or who are vulnerable.

District authority, South East

Strong partnership networks and co-location is allowing us to build on our prevention work. We are also seeing an active voluntary sector which is keen to engage with LA to improve the prevention agenda. The Flexible Homelessness Support Grant can allow us to prop up these voluntary agencies and put in place agreements with them to deliver pre-prevention based services.

District authority, East of England

Our close working relationship with the community connectors and social prescribing. We also work closely with our neighbouring districts... and complete a [county-wide] Homelessness forum whereby all local stakeholders can attend to share best practice and champion support availability.

National level enablers and barriers

The next set of survey questions probed respondents' views on national level enablers of and barriers to homelessness prevention activity locally. First, respondents were asked to identify what the UK Government does to enable homelessness prevention activity. 55 respondents answered this question, 12 skipped it. The key themes to emerge here related to funding, advice and support, and legislative change.

⁵ The Local Government Association have recently published guidance on how to 'make homelessness strategies happen' (LGA, 2019c).

First, local authorities recognised the various forms of funding provided by central government as a key enabler, including the flexible homelessness support grant and the new burdens funding, plus one-off grant allocations such as Rough Sleeper Initiative monies, social impact bonds for rough sleeping, and the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme. Frustration regarding these opportunities being multiple, short-term and non-recurring was frequently voiced (see below).

Second, in terms of expertise, MHCLG's Homelessness Advice & Support Team and Rough Sleeper Initiative Support Team were highlighted as especially helpful, so too the National Homelessness Advice Service.

Third and finally, the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act and the Duty to Refer was identified as an enabler of better homelessness prevention.

Example responses covering these themes are shown below.

District authority, South East

MHCLG has released a number of funding opportunities which we have used for Recovery based prevention activities (i.e. our Rough Sleeper Initiative project). However these funding opportunities are often short-term and there are challenges in establishing and delivering projects within the set time periods.

Metropolitan authority, North East

Examples of UK Government support that has improved local understanding and approaches to homelessness prevention include:

- 1) ... the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme and... funding to test new approaches to responding to homelessness at an earlier stage through a service transformation programme
- 2) ... an Entrenched Rough Sleeper Social Impact Bond (SIB) to test new ways to help long-term rough sleepers with the most complex needs

However, each of these funding opportunities are short term, limiting their potential in enabling more meaningful and sustainable approaches to prevention to be developed and retained by authorities.

The introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) also strengthened the statutory rights for residents to receive a personalised assessment and plan of their housing needs. This provided an opportunity to shift the focus of our frontline statutory homelessness service from determining statutory duties to a more supportive approach, while still recognising the significant administrative and legislative requirements that the act retains. However, the preventative focus of the legislation had a less significant impact [here], where prevention activities before the 56 day target are already well established.

Respondents were asked to identify what the UK Government does that is a barrier to homelessness prevention activity. 61 respondents answered this question, 6 skipped it. A key theme here concerned the nature of funding streams and opportunities available to local authorities to fund prevention activity. Central frustrations here concerned:

- the narrow and prescribed focus of some grant funding streams
- the short-term nature of funding and uncertainty of what future funding will be available
- a lack of ring-fenced funding for homelessness prevention activities
- the removal of the Supporting People ring-fence and the subsequent reduction in funding spent on housing support services

Some respondents were also frustrated that they needed to bid competitively for funding for homelessness prevention work, given its importance. The wider funding context of radical cuts to local authority budgets was also highlighted as detrimental to homelessness prevention work. Several respondents made the point that this wider funding environment forces a focus on acute needs and responding to crisis and inhibits the ability to focus on more upstream forms of prevention.

Welfare policy in general and welfare reform measures specifically were frequently commented upon as a major barrier to homelessness prevention, with the specific following issues highlighted:

- The introduction of Universal Credit, including the 5 week wait for income and no automatic right for payments to go direct to landlords
- The overall benefit cap
- Local Housing Allowance rates (n.b. since the research was conducted, and in response to the coronavirus pandemic, the government announced Local Housing Allowance rates would be increased to match ‘the 30th percentile’ of rents in the area)
- The extension of Shared Accommodation Rate from 24 up to 34 years of age.
- The working age benefit freeze (not set to be lifted in 2020 but with no plans to make up the ground lost).

In-work poverty was also identified as a barrier to homelessness prevention work, something that could relate to local labour market conditions, but also the nature of nationally designed in-work benefits.

Some aspects of housing policy were identified as a barrier to homelessness prevention. Mentioned here were the limited regulation of the Private Rented Sector; the continuation of right to buy policy and focus of national housing policy on homeownership; and issues in the social rented sector, in particular that housing associations are increasingly selective about who they allocate housing to (excluding for instance those on the lowest incomes via financial capability assessments).

Cutting across these themes in relation to housing and welfare policy, was a perception that there was a lack of joined-up thinking between UK Government departments in ensuring that all policy areas are aligned to support and enable – or at the very least do not hinder – homelessness prevention activity locally.

Aspects of the Homelessness Reduction Act were also identified as barriers to homelessness prevention. Receiving mention here was the introduction of H-CLIC, which was seen to be administratively burdensome. The HRA overall was seen to be administratively burdensome, requiring more notifications of decisions required and additional notification stages. These burdens were seen to directly reduce the amount of time available to improve practice and work with households to prevent homelessness. The limited level and short-term nature of the New Burdens funding also received mention.

Examples of responses given are shown below.

District authority, East of England
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RSI funding is very short term which makes long term planning challenging. To deliver a Somewhere Safe to Stay project an exit strategy for the scheme is needed – and staffing can be difficult. UC is a barrier to prevention at local level. [The] County Council has had to make major savings following reductions in Government funding since 2010. Further reductions are planned. This has led to reduction in Supporting People (Housing Related Support) funding from £20 million to £6 million during this period. This funding was of key importance in preventing homelessness and preventing people from ‘reaching the statutory door’. Uncertainty re revenue funding makes it difficult to look at developing supported housing schemes.

London Borough

Welfare benefits do not prevent homelessness in [this area] and they do cause it. Less than 1% of PRS tenancies... are affordable to people who need help from the welfare benefit system. This means households who have lived all their lives in [the area] but become homeless through no fault of their own cannot usually be provided with temporary or long term accommodation in or near [the area]. This is harming communities. Government do not seem to do impact assessments on legislative change or policies to consider whether they will cause or prevent homelessness. The additional burdens funding for the HRA is too little and too short term, so that the vast increase in responsibility and bureaucracy caused by the Homelessness Reduction Act is undermining the good intentions of the Act. If there is no more additional funding from 2020 there could be a sharp increase in statutory homelessness. Austerity and the economic downturns have increased homelessness as statutory and non-statutory services that can prevent and relieve homelessness have shrunk back and not been replaced by alternatives. Too much time is being spent by statutory homelessness services trying to provide data to MHCLG via the HCLIC system. Time that should be spent improving practices, procedures and strategies and working with homeless people, solving their problems and helping them

London Borough

Under funding for Homelessness Prevention Services despite significant increases in demand... New funding from Government does not close the gap left by other cuts, leading to new cost pressures that councils must manage. Local authorities are left with no choice but to direct limited resources to acute and crisis services, curtailing our ability to deliver the full extent of preventative interventions that we want to deliver. We believe that funding models are too fragmented, too short-term and too uncertain – such as the Flexible Homelessness Grant. Councils cannot plan stable services for the long term but in addition, this fragmentation can have a negative impact for individuals who need stable, consistent and responsive services. The Fair Funding Review provides Government with an opportunity to prevent and end homelessness through sustainable funding. A key barrier to homelessness prevention would be the inclusion of homelessness in the foundation formula, rather than having its own separate formula. There is a mismatch between the distribution of the general population and the homeless population. London has 68% of England’s total households in temporary accommodation but only has 16% of the total population... A separate formula would allow

each local authority to secure adequate funding to combat homelessness, in line with local demand

Whilst Government has made some positive steps to address homelessness, welfare reforms, such as the introduction of Universal Credit, the benefit cap and changes to Local Housing Allowance (LHA), are contributing to increasing homelessness and undermining efforts nationally to prevent homelessness. The increasing gap between LHA rates and private sector rents is a systematic driver of homelessness. Since 2015, most LHA rates across the country have been frozen. Prior to this, rates reduced from the 50th percentile to the 30th percentile – meaning that recipients can only afford the lowest rents in the market. This freezing of LHA, along with changes to how it is calculated, including extending the shared accommodation rate for single people from 25 years of age to 35, poses serious challenges to any renter who is reliant on Housing Benefit for all or part of their rent. This is particularly relevant in cases where offenders are to be rehabilitated into the community and may result in larger numbers of individuals co-housed in challenging conditions, increasing the risk of re-offending. In [this area], even lower quartile private sector rents are higher than the LHA rate, from a room in a shared flat to a four-bed house. We know that the biggest cause of homelessness is eviction from the private rented sector. Between April and December 2018, [we] paid [around £1m] in Discretionary Housing Payments as a top up to Housing Benefit to prevent homelessness. As an indirect consequence, landlords are increasingly refusing to accept tenants who receive benefits. Such policies leave our most vulnerable residents with no choice but to turn to the Council for their housing needs. This is costly to the Council and has devastating impacts on these residents.

Whilst the Homeless Reduction Act offers to change the culture of organisations to prevent homelessness, the additional administrative burdens have had an impact on our ability to effectively deliver services. This includes the requirements for written Notices and Decision letters alongside keeping the personal housing plan under review. Staff time is being taken away from prevention activities. There is a huge amount of data that is recorded via H-Clic and this provides potential opportunities to truly understand local need and direct policy through a robust evidence base. However, the system is complicated, resulting in errors and inaccuracies and it is not compatible with other data sharing systems. H-Clic does not capture outcomes from partner organisations who are funded by the local authority so outcomes are under recorded... There is an arbitrary and inflexible (legal) trigger for homelessness prevention activity of 56 days. This means there is no statutory requirement to capture early interventions / root causes of homelessness eg invalid S,21 notices, early missed rent payments.

Unitary authority, North West

Homelessness Reduction Act needs reform as it is creating instability and displacement. We need to have some level of adequate on street neighbourhood Policing. Universal Credit needs reform, we need a fund for local authorities to commission fully packaged support whilst we engage people with chaotic lives to make claims and register with DWP. Funding needs to be made available for activity based support such as intermediate labour, training and wrap round volunteer support. We need to revisit supported housing regulation and in doing so ensure that HMOs are regulated in their management as registered premises (they are creating vulnerability and costing the Government huge sums). Private landlords have no

accountability and money for vulnerable people is making them rich. Government needs to revisit need for housing strategies - since they were abolished we have not got the same strategic oversight. Overall resources for 'universal services and prevention' has suffered during austerity. This means that people are getting into crisis and using crisis services as a safety net.

What could central government do to enable homelessness prevention activity?

A core aim of this study is to identify specific actions that central government could take to enable and incentivise more effective homelessness prevention locally. We asked respondents to make such recommendations explicitly in the online survey. 62 respondents answered this question, 5 skipped it. Respondents' views can be grouped into a number of key themes reflecting many of the findings already discussed in this chapter.

First, there was a strong emphasis on how the **funding regime for homelessness prevention services** could be designed and delivered in a manner more conducive to effective practice. Specific recommendations included:

- increasing homelessness grant funding, possibly linked to performance, with fairer allocation formula, with money being allocated for 4-5-year period, especially in regards to Flexible Homelessness Support Grant
- ring-fencing funding for homelessness prevention
- introducing a requirement for housing support services to be funded locally, including the Housing First approach
- directing all homelessness funding to district councils (e.g. local housing authorities, rather than authorities which have no housing duties, such as county councils or combined authorities)

Second, local authorities proposed **reviews, reversals and/or reforms to some aspects of the welfare reform programme**, including a review of the benefit cap and bedroom tax, the direct payment of housing costs to landlords under Universal Credit and other reforms to minimise the homelessness risks associated with UC (e.g. the 5 week wait), an increase in Local Housing Allowance rates, and a reversal of the extension of the Shared Accommodation rate to under 35s.

Third, a range of national government actions in relation to **housing policy, regulation and the housing market** were cited as having the potential to enhance homelessness prevention activity locally. Investment in affordable and social housing, extending the Duty to Refer to housing associations, improving social rented housing allocation systems, and ending the right to buy were among the actions identified as likely to make a difference. Reforms to the private rented sector were also identified as important, including the ending of no fault evictions and rent controls.

Fourth, a series of responses called for national government action to **improve responses for those with support needs and at risk of homelessness**. Some respondents called for improved housing options for vulnerable adults generally, including Housing First provision, and improved regulation of supported accommodation. Related to this, local authorities called for more support being made available to people with mental health issues and substance dependencies. National government action to ensure greater involvement from health services and the NHS in homelessness prevention activity locally was also identified as an important potential enabler.

Fifth, in relation to the **Homelessness Reduction Act** local authorities called for central government to reduce the administrative burden of the act, including by simplifying the H-CLIC recording system.

It was also seen to be important by some respondents for prevention activity occurring before the formal prevention duty kicks in to be monitored by central government, to incentivise and monitor prevention work further 'upstream'. Though local authorities are *able* to engage in pre-56 day prevention work, the lack of any requirement to, combined with the absence of any system measuring such work, appears to be a key issue here. Respondents also recommended that the Duty to Refer be strengthened to a Duty to Cooperate and extended to a wider range of public bodies (e.g. housing associations).

A sixth theme to emerge concerned strengthening **strategic attention to and oversight** of homelessness prevention work locally, by for example introducing "homeless reduction boards" (District authority, North West, see also MHCLG, 2019) bringing together key partners locally with a "clear remit" pertaining to their role in tackling homelessness; taking action to increase the focus on homelessness and homelessness prevention in local areas; and regulating or providing greater oversight of homelessness strategies. Finally, some respondents called for the availability of free training on homelessness prevention, especially outside of London.

Some example responses are shown below.

Metropolitan authority, Yorkshire and Humber

Have funding streams that are ring-fenced for homelessness prevention investment. Place TA costs into the overall council funding settlement so it must compete against other funding pressures creating an incentive for LAs to reduce TA numbers. Link prevention investment to prevention outcomes achieved. Give longer term (min of three years) funding commitments for prevention. Restore the 30th percentile of market rents for LHA. Remove the shared room rate for homeless households. Update the guidance on DHP so that it includes an emphasis on spending DHP on prevention and tenancy sustainment. Ask LAs and stock transfer housing associations to undertake homeless impact assessments when formulating relevant policies such as allocation schemes. Consider options for better regulating stock transfer housing associations in respect of their service offer to homeless households and specifically practice relating to advance rent. Abolish S[ection]21. Create a link between S8 possession actions on post-S21 private rented tenancies so that serious breaches of obligation by LLs [Landlords] result in possession action only being able to be undertaken on discretionary grounds. Consider funding options for tackling rouge LLs.

London Borough

Somehow the admin burdens brought in by the HRA have to be reversed or revised so staff can focus on preventing homelessness. Longer term funding for rough sleeping should be assured. Longer lasting additional burdens funding for the HRA or an alternative should be assured. Clarity about what the Ministerial Task Force on homelessness has achieved, is doing and will do would be helpful. Review (or learn from research and reviews that already exist) the impacts of welfare reform and austerity on homelessness and seek to make further reforms that reduce homelessness and increase the ability of LA's and other agencies to prevent and relieve homelessness. Have greater ambitions, met by realistic targets that are achieved, to create a new wave of affordable housing of excellent quality. Learn from European countries where the standard of living looks and feels far higher despite the nations

not appearing to be as "wealthy" as ours. Consider why we need "pocket living" and shipping containers to house families in the UK in 2019.

District authority, East Midlands

Has to move away from in year bidding [for funding] that encourages knee jerk responses and poor value for money. Need longer term consistent funding that enables the Council and partners to plan appropriately. Simplify HCLIC. Ensure that there is housing related support for those at risk of homelessness. Demand full and active involvement of the NHS at all levels to take an active part. Understand that Councils need help - homelessness is just a symptom of other issues, often poor upbringing, lack of skills within individuals for managing budgets, drugs and alcohol, increasing numbers of children in care that become the homeless and rough sleepers of the future. Invest in the support and services that increase aspiration, skills and attainment.

Unitary authority, North West

1) Regulate supported housing - millions of pounds of tax payers money is being wasted on unregulated "supported housing" who are basically scamming the HB system - the savings from this could fund provision we actually need. 2) Regulation on the PRS to include removing section 21 notices and linking property conditions to rent liability (as per Scotland). Although affordability isn't a major pressure in [this area], quality of accommodation is and the lack of quality adds to the churn/revolving door of repeat homelessness 3) although UC has some merits (i.e. combining several benefits in one) it has a major flaw which is including housing costs in the calculation. The basic provisions of keeping a roof over someone's head should be treated more seriously and as rent relationship is 3 way (landlord, tenant, DWP) it would be better administered at a local level where the housing market is understood and relationships are developed

District authority, North West

Grant allocations based upon a formula for all LA's. Grant allocations for a min 4-5 years to aid planning. Statutory responsibility for upper tier LA's to fund support for homeless households, or give the support funding to lower tier LA's. Introduce the homeless reduction boards with a clear remit for partners.

Metropolitan authority, North West

Implement Duty to Co-operate. Regulate Homelessness Strategies and make prevention a requirement. Long-term funding settlement - needs to be at least 3 years. Abolish s.21. Abolish Right to Buy.

Conclusion

While the majority of local authorities reported that homelessness prevention frameworks or pathways are in place, a significant minority do not organise prevention work into a framework or

pathway and there is a great deal of variety in how homelessness prevention work is organised. Most respondents described these pathways and frameworks in relation to operational structures e.g. singles and family teams, or triage and case work teams, rather than strategic frameworks covering prevention activity occurring further up and downstream. The five-tier typology used to frame this study – and a number of other pieces of work on homelessness prevention – is not used by local authorities, or indeed fully understood by them. Some areas do distinguish ‘early help’ from the more crisis focused prevention work undertaken in discharging duties under the HRA, and a small number adopt a simpler three way distinction between primary, secondary and crisis prevention.

Local authorities struggle to quantify the level of activity occurring in relation to the five way typology, and the amount of money spent on these various forms of prevention activity, though we are very grateful for those local authorities who sought to do so. This small number of estimates suggest very highly variable levels of different kinds of prevention activity and spend across England, though do indicate higher levels of spend on targeted and crisis work compared to universal, emergency and recovery prevention. H-CLIC does not give a clear and full insight into the wide range of prevention work underway in local authorities, given that it is only likely to capture crisis and potentially some targeted prevention work.

Our analysis suggests an uneven focus on and priority given to the five forms of prevention focused on in this report. The least activity appears to be undertaken in relation to universal and recovery prevention. This makes sense in the context of local authorities not facing duties to provide this kind of prevention work and, as commented by some respondents, having to focus on ‘the sharp end of homelessness’ via crisis and emergency prevention. It should also be noted that recent government priority and funding has been directing at these crisis and emergency aspects of the homelessness response, and acknowledged (see chapter 1) that local authorities only have access to limited levers of ‘universal prevention’, with many of these levers lying squarely in the hands of central government (e.g. welfare policy). Some local areas are nevertheless seeking to reduce population risk by reducing poverty in the city and seeking to ensure the supply of affordable housing. Some of this ‘upstream’ prevention work was supported and catalysed by the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme, which has now ended. Positively, quite some targeted prevention work is undertaken in local authorities, possibly reflecting that the Homelessness Reduction Act has incentivised prevention work extending beyond the legally required 56 day period. Significantly, the vast majority of authorities who participated in this study reported undertaking prevention work beyond what they are required to do by law.

The majority of the barriers to homelessness prevention activity identified by local authorities are beyond their control, primarily being due to national policy (especially housing and welfare matters) and funding decisions (overall local government funding and short-term homelessness related grant awards). Locally, barriers often reflect the nature of the housing market (combined with welfare reforms and local allocations policy) and the variable commitment and buy-in from key partners (health, justice, housing associations, etc.). Key local enablers identified were buy-in and co-operation from key local partners (in some areas Jobcentre Plus, for example, adult social care, the police or voluntary sector organisations), and political buy-in and leadership from local politicians and local authority staff. What is clear from this picture of the struggles and successes locally, is that much more can be done to prevent homelessness at the local level, especially in a more enabling context shaped by central government action.

In this regard, funding is a central concern for local authorities and these survey results give a very clear picture of how the funding environment facing councils and largely shaped by central government could be radically more supportive of homelessness prevention activity locally. The large

reductions in overall funding going to local authorities is the key variable here and has put non-ring fenced funding in danger, with particularly damaging impacts on non-statutory provision including floating support typically funded by 'Supporting People' budget lines (perhaps the key form of recovery prevention). This funding context reportedly also makes it difficult for authorities to shift prevention work 'upstream' thus requiring a continued focus on crisis and emergency interventions. The funding environment is also seen to be unhelpful in relation to the uncertainty, fragmentation, competitiveness and short-term nature of many homelessness specific funding opportunities, which constrains local authority's ability to plan strategically for the future, absorbs staff time in applying for those funding streams and does not recognise the importance of this work (which after all seeks to prevent people from experiencing amongst the most severe forms of social disadvantage) in local authorities not successful in bidding rounds.

Other areas in which national government could make a significant difference to homelessness prevention locally related to the following themes: reviewing and reversing aspects of the welfare reform programme most pernicious to homelessness prevention; housing policy changes to strengthen security of tenure in the PRS, ensure access to social housing for those who need it, and ensure an adequate overall supply of genuinely affordably accommodation; improve responses for those with support needs and at risk of homelessness; reduce the administrative burden associated with the HRA and replace the Duty to Refer with a more muscular Duty to Cooperate; and finally, by strengthening strategic attention to and oversight of homelessness prevention work, including by measuring and monitoring early prevention activity not currently captured by H-CLIC.

3. Case study findings

This chapter details findings from our six case study areas, exploring key informants' views on what effective homelessness prevention looks like 'in principle'; the extent to which local prevention activity lives up to this in principle vision of effective prevention; and the barriers to and enablers of effective homelessness prevention, both at the local and national level. In each case study area we identify the priority areas for central government policy and funding reform to enable better prevention locally. Local authorities participating in this element of the research were purposively sampled in order to reflect a diversity of contexts relevant to understanding homelessness prevention activity, reflecting both political leadership, local authority structure, urban/rural/mixed contexts and local housing market contexts. Local authorities who we had reason to believe are especially proactive in relation to homelessness prevention activities were selected, based on available evidence, survey results and our knowledge of existing practice. For an overview of the case study authorities, see chapter 1.

Case study 1: London Borough of Brent

Introduction

Brent is an outer London Borough in the north west of the city, under Labour control. Homelessness prevention services are organised into two teams focusing on families, and single person households. A key part of the authority's services targeting singles is the Single Homeless Prevention Service, a collaboration between the charity Crisis and Brent Council, supported by funding gained under the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme and targeting people with lower support needs to prevent or relieve their homelessness quickly⁶. Brent have also opened a community hub in Harlesden to promote partnership working on homelessness prevention and a range of other needs faced by residents and get services closer to those who need them, with additional hubs planned across the borough (Brent, 2019).

Effective homelessness prevention in principle

According to our key informant, effective homelessness prevention is "about getting... households [at risk] to engage at the earliest stage possible", rather than when they're already or imminently homeless. This requires a focus on early or upstream prevention. More specifically, it requires tackling the key drivers of homelessness: poverty, lack of affordable housing and welfare reform (universal prevention) and targeting support at vulnerable groups who we know are more likely to be homeless. Key to achieving this is involving the spectrum of relevant partners across the voluntary sector, adult social care, mental health services, and probation. This requires action beyond that required under the Homelessness Reduction Act, focused on winning over partners to spot signs of homelessness at the first signs of risk and take action alongside statutory services. The key partners with a role to play vary for different household types. For families at risk, private landlords, the DWP and Children's Services play a central role. Preventing homelessness for single people with complex needs requires engagement from mental health teams, probation, drug and alcohol services, and voluntary sector services as well as DWP/Jobcentre staff.

Homelessness prevention in practice

Homeless prevention targeting *families* is seen to be "fairly successful":

⁶ See <https://www.shpsbrent.co.uk/>

“it's a group that we've been working with for a long time and are used to coming to a local authority when they're first threatened with homelessness and we are able to intervene and negotiate with landlords... [or] if that fails, find alternative affordable accommodation”

The biggest barrier to effective prevention for this group is the increasing unaffordability of private rented sector accommodation, which both drives homelessness and reduces rehousing options.

Preventing homelessness among single people is seen to be more challenging, not least because this work is “fairly new” to the local authority following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act, and because single person households at risk or experiencing homelessness “tend to have issues beyond the fact that they're homeless”, including vulnerabilities around mental health, and drug and alcohol misuse. The biggest barrier here is identifying households at risk before they hit crisis:

“We're still seeing far too many people who are coming to us at crisis point. Quite often parental or family exclusions who have been sofa-surfing for months, or even longer and then they come to us when that sofa-surfing arrangement falls down”.

Effective prevention for this group is especially inhibited in Brent by difficulties accessing statutory mental health services. Our key informant felt that such services have a “huge role to play around single homelessness” but one that is not currently realised for a key group of individuals at risk who are “quite vulnerable but not vulnerable enough to trigger those statutory services”. A key challenge in preventing rough sleeping in Brent is that around half of those on the street have no recourse to public funds, for whom “there's still very little you can actually do”. Work to prevent homelessness among prison leavers was also seen to be a gap locally, albeit something that the council are aware of and working with charity St Mungo's to improve through surgeries within the local prison Wormwood Scrubs.

Efforts are underway to address these challenges around single homelessness. A Single Homelessness Forum has recently been established, hosted by the council and chaired by Crisis. A number of Task and Finish Groups have also been set up to address particularly important issues, including homelessness among those with the most complex needs (e.g. dual diagnoses) and among migrants (including those with no recourse to public funds).

Aspects of Brent's approach seen to be particularly important are being co-located and having a good relationship with the Housing Benefit team to spot rent arrears early (though this has been diluted by the centralisation of Universal Credit administration); the use of Discretionary Housing Payments to negotiate with landlords; the establishment of a community hub in Harlesden (with more planned); and having a presence in Jobcentre Plus offices in the borough – a recent development building on work developed in other London Boroughs that it is hoped will be valuable in homelessness prevention terms. Brent also now have a dedicated team that deal with homelessness and homelessness risk among those experiencing domestic abuse, which is “proving to be very successful”. Our key informant was also positive about the decision to have dedicated teams working with families and single person households, on the basis that:

“for a frontline officer it's quite difficult to be interviewing a homeless family when you're on duty. Then the next person you see is a vulnerable person with all sorts of mental health [and] other issues and I think it's a different skillset that's required... we went down the route of having dedicated teams, so that you could develop those skillsets and provide a more tailored service”

People in different kinds of circumstances of homelessness risk were seen as more or less easy to help in Brent. Those facing eviction from social housing for example are seen as easier to help given that Brent is a stock owning authority and has good relationships with local housing associations. Younger people facing homelessness risk linked to parental exclusion are also seen as a somewhat easier group to help, by shifting the focus from a sudden move to a planned move, in negotiation with 'mum and dad'. Harder cases involve shortfalls in people's income and entitlements relative to private sector rents, especially in the context of the London housing market and levels of Local Housing Allowance. On this theme our key informant commented: "it's a pretty difficult one, not to say that it's impossible and we have had some success in negotiating, but I think it's by far the most difficult".

In terms of future service development in Brent, the core priority was improving the prevention offer to single person households and seeking to engage them with services when at an earlier stage of risk. Some components of this are in train and have been noted above. Following developments in some other local authorities, the team are also hoping to make use of predictive analytics – using available data to identify households at risk – to target support at those at early risk and prevent crisis (see Watts et al, 2019).

Local enablers of and barriers to effective homelessness prevention

Key enablers of effective prevention at the local level were seen to be partnership working, with teams within the local authority (Housing Benefit, DHP etc.) as well as with the voluntary sector, private sector landlords and others. The key barriers at the local level were identified as a lack of affordable housing, across both the social and private rented sector.

National enablers of and barriers to effective homelessness prevention

The Homelessness Reduction Act has played a key role in Brent in galvanising work to better prevent homelessness for single person households, albeit with a local commitment to better serve this group pre-HRA also identified as relevant. While described as not yet fully implemented or embedded, the positive impact of the Act on the development of services for single households is clear. Our key informant explained that while early welfare reforms (e.g. the Benefit Cap) had prompted concerted universal prevention (i.e. a public awareness campaign) and targeted prevention (e.g. joint working with the Housing Benefit team) efforts directed at effected families in the early 2010s, such work is "not established on the singles side... because we weren't statutorily obliged to do it, historically... We're [now] doing it... in reaction to the Homelessness Reduction Act".

The HRA had also brought challenges that were – at least temporarily – seen as a barrier to more effective prevention work, with the primary concern here being a lack of capacity – at both frontline and strategic levels – linked to the scale of change initiated by the HRA, the "very onerous" burden of recording action under the Act on H-CLIC, and high levels of recruitment and staff turnover. Despite the overall positive take on the HRA as promoting a better response for single homeless households, our key informant was also clear that maximally effective homelessness prevention would require actions extending well beyond those required under the Act, in particular in relation to universal and targeted prevention.

The 2019/20 Rough Sleepers Initiative – providing funding to the 83 authorities with the highest levels of rough sleeping – was identified as an enabler, as a "short sharp injection of cash which was very targeted". This funding facilitated the establishment of an assessment hub for people sleeping rough and enabled the borough to get their Housing First model "off the ground". Despite these significant positives, there was some frustration at the timescales involved, with the team (already short on capacity, see above) required to bid at short notice and if successful spend the allocated funding in a very short space of time:

“it was very rushed... [MHCLG] keep falling over themselves with new bids and it's very short timescales all the time to put bids in... that's unhelpful... it's not helpful [that] we're expected to get these bids in so quickly”

The Flexible Homelessness Support Grant was also welcomed as having offered a three-year settlement that enabled longer term planning, and the authority to fund ongoing prevention services within the council, albeit that the authority were at the time of interview back in a period of uncertainty not knowing about grant allocations going forward.

Welfare reforms cutting people's entitlement to benefits, especially the shortfall between Local Housing Allowance rates and actual rents, and Universal credit, were seen as a straightforward barrier to more effective homelessness prevention, both in driving homelessness, but also limiting households' housing options.

How can the UK Government enable more effective homelessness prevention locally

Our Brent key informant felt that whilst the primary capacity to prevent homelessness effectively lies at the local level, and in the local authority's capacity to build relationships with key partners across and beyond the council, the key role of national government is setting a positive framework in which that can happen. The following key national level changes that could facilitate better prevention were identified as follows:

- Reviewing and minimising the impacts of welfare reform on homelessness risk and prevention, including Local Housing Allowance rates and Universal Credit
- Increasing the supply of affordable housing and access to it, including by making it easier for councils to develop their own housing
- Regulating the private rented sector to make it a more secure and therefore attractive option for households. The consultation on 'Section 21' and ending 'no fault' evictions was seen to be a potentially promising development, although there were concerns about its future in the fast changing political context.

Case study 2: Fenland District Council and the wider Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Trailblazer area

Introduction

Fenland is a rural district council in Cambridgeshire, the East of England under conservative control. In 2017, Fenland led a bid to MHCLG in partnership with five other local authorities in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and other relevant partners. The group were awarded two years of funding under the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme to improve preventative interventions across these areas (Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer, 2018). The Trailblazer team champion and undertake 'pre-56 day' homelessness prevention. District councils, Housing Associations, and Cambridge County Council services are the main sources of referrals into the trailblazer, with DWP and Jobcentres, criminal justice and police, private landlords, individuals and families themselves, health partners, and others, also referring in albeit at a smaller scale (Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer, 2019). The main kinds of help offered by the team are providing advice and information, mediation, financial payments, or helping households access accommodation (ibid). The work initiated under the Trailblazer is now being carried forward into its third year via local-level funding across four of the original five local authorities, including Fenland. The Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer team sits within Cambridge County Council's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, which covers children's and adults' safeguarding and domestic abuse.

Individual local authorities participating in the Trailblazer focus primarily, though not exclusively, on their duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act. Within Fenland itself, the homelessness team is made up of generic officers. In South Cambridgeshire, another authority within the Trailblazer, officers have specialist roles relating to specific subgroups of the homeless or at risk population (those at risk due to domestic abuse and violence, single homeless households, those with support needs related to drug and/or alcohol use, etc.).

Effective homelessness prevention in principle

Asked about the key components of effective local homelessness prevention activity, our key informant emphasised three core points – partnership working across all relevant agencies, early intervention, and housing supply.

First, effective homelessness prevention was seen to require the involvement of all relevant public and voluntary sector agencies, an understanding within these organisations and teams regarding the early identifiers of homelessness risk, and a willingness and capacity to work together, rather than in silos, to address these risks:

“it wouldn't just be the homelessness services... that's the first thing. It wouldn't just be [on] them to reduce homelessness... People need to be working together, multi-agency partnership working, it's key.”

They went on to explain that this kind of approach requires:

“a different mindset with not just the homelessness officers and the housing advice officers but also the social workers, the mental health workers, the doctors, the nurses. It's a huge undertaking because... other agencies, partners, hospitals, you name it, prisons. They all say, 'But that's a housing issue; that's not our issue'... well, it's everybody's issue.”

The second key component of effective prevention according to our key informant involves a shift from crisis interventions to targeted prevention in response to early risk signs, which is closely linked to the partnership working agenda described above, as explained here:

“we've still got to be dealing with the crises and there's still going to be those homeless people that are rocking up on a Friday afternoon or whatever and it's crisis and all hands on deck but we need to be reducing that. The only way we can reduce that is by educating the services and changing that mindset”

Our key informant was clear that maximally effective homelessness prevention requires action “well beyond the 56 days” required under the Homelessness Reduction Act and “embedding that homelessness prevention from way back... upstream”, giving the following example:

“there could be a social worker working with the family, for example, and they've just missed one week's rent, that could escalate. If, for example, that social worker straightway thought, ooh, they've missed one week's rent, what can we do? Who can I speak to? What can I do to help with that situation? Then it would never escalate... We need to be avoiding crisis management. It's no good for firstly the individuals involved... the family or the vulnerable individual, and it's costly.”

The importance of tenancy sustainment work following rehousing (recovery prevention in our framework) was also emphasised as necessary to avoiding “setting people up to fail”.

The third key component of effective homelessness prevention identified was housing supply – or more specifically “building the right houses in the right areas that are affordable”.

Homelessness prevention in practice

Our key informant was of the view that Fenland and its partner Trailblazer authorities were “50% there” in achieving this in principle vision of maximally effective homelessness prevention. Specifically, they were of the view that the change of mindset required across a wide range of partner organisations and described above was “a slow process” to achieve, with “lots of work still to do”.

The Trailblazer team’s base in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub means that homelessness prevention work is “very much embedded” in children’s and adults’ social care services, with many of the Trailblazer’s referrals coming directly from these teams. This is a stark contrast to the challenges faced in other case study areas engaging social work teams. The inclusion of housing related questions in the area’s Think Family approach and Early Help Assessment tool was seen to be a particular strength. This assessment seeks to engage families where there are early signs of issues, and now includes questions about where the household lives, their landlord/housing provider and whether they have any issues with their housing. Including housing in this way has had the effect of creating early links between family social workers and housing providers, meaning housing are involved “right when you start working with the family”, rather than being ‘the last to know’. Similarly, a housing officer is also now routinely consulted on the housing aspects of children and adult referrals coming through the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and can act as a ‘navigator’ to assist households in relation to their housing needs.

A core feature of the Trailblazer has been a training development initiative focusing on Motivational Interviewing, a technique to support and enable positive behaviour change on the part of households engaging with the trained worker (Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer, 2019). Twelve officers from across public sector agencies and departments have been trained to roll out Motivational Interviewing techniques across wider teams. Our key informant describes the value of the approach:

“it's really good because it actually is about how you interact... with... vulnerable groups... it makes conversations a lot easier, so they're not so stressful for the staff but also motivating people to change... The family workers have... come back to me and some of the methods and the techniques used are really, really useful... so that's been really good... a real success”

Our key informant was also positive about the engagement with Housing Associations achieved in the area, despite them not being a public agency bound by the Duty to Refer. The Trailblazer team have actively promoted the National Housing Federation’s (NHF) voluntary Commitment to Refer (NHF, 2018). In large part as a result of this, the team are now better able to help prevent evictions from social housing.

Achieving effective joint working with other partners in the area has been more challenging, in particular criminal justice, mental health, addiction, and health services. Issues accessing appropriate and timely mental health support are a particularly acute gap in services from a homelessness prevention perspective according to our key informant, with statutory and voluntary sector services facing capacity issues ultimately linked to funding constraints:

“really I think mental health and health are the big areas that we need to be looking at and funding and to fill those gaps because there's loads of examples about people that have displayed behaviours that are considered antisocial, that they lose their tenancy through. It's mental health and they've not been able to access the services but had they only been able to access and everyone was working together, they probably would have kept their tenancy.”

A core focus of the Trailblazer is thus currently on improving access to and sustainment of housing among those with mental health, drug, and alcohol issues, although this is challenging “without any money”. Improving hospital discharge protocols and the links between health issues and housing is the next priority area.

Reflecting on how different subgroups of those at risk of homelessness are served by existing provision, our key informant identified families as especially well protected, reflecting the service structures and developments described above. Single adults were thought to be less well protected in several ways. First and foremost, single people’s continuing disadvantage under statutory homelessness legislation at the ‘rehousing duty’ stage was emphasised:

“you've still got the issues like with singles that the majority of them are going to be found not be in priority need, so the options are still really limited... Priority need is still - it's a very strict test. You've still got vulnerable people that are not to be found in priority need, so don't get put into temporary accommodation whilst they're found the most appropriate accommodation and things spiral.”

Second, single people were also seen to face greater challenges accessing affordable and appropriate accommodation outwith the statutory homelessness system. Particular mention was made of the challenges facing vulnerable single people under 35 year olds impacted by the Shared Accommodation Rate, for whom there was a concern that shared accommodation was often not suitable. The uneven availability of supported accommodation across the Trailblazer area was also a challenge, with access easier in Cambridge and Fenland than in Peterborough and Huntingdonshire. Those subject to Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements after committing violent or sexual offences are another (albeit small) group which Fenland and the wider Trailblazer area struggle to assist, especially because they often only receive notification from probation about such individuals leaving approved premises with very short notice – sometimes as little as a week – despite the fact that relevant services will be aware of this person’s need for accommodation six months prior to them leaving approved premises. Strengthening communication between housing, prison and probation services is thus a priority in the area.

Our key informant reported varying levels of success across the Trailblazer local authorities in preventing homelessness for households living in the Private Rented Sector. In Fenland itself, relationships between private landlords, the Discretionary Housing Payments team, and the Private Sector team are reportedly “really improving” having been “very poor”. This trend is thought to reflect a more proactive approach by the local authority to helping sustain private tenancies, rather than telling tenants to simply “stay until you get your bailiff’s warrant”. Preventing homelessness for PRS tenants is most challenging in the higher demand and most expensive parts of the region given landlords’ ability to “just serve a valid section 21 notice” if they wish to.

Local enablers of and barriers to effective homelessness prevention

A key barrier to effective homelessness prevention work locally was seen to be the uneven political buy-in of senior managers and elected members across the Trailblazer local authorities, with some local areas simply not committed to continuing the strong emphasis on prevention introduced via the Trailblazer programme. Making the case that investment in upstream prevention rather than crisis responses is required is reportedly a challenge:

“that is difficult to get across to politicians especially local members that you've got to put the money into early prevention and get away from the fact that putting the roof over the head is the answer to everyone's prayers!”

This echoes recent research from Crisis and the Frameworks Institute that among non-experts there is an “engrained pessimism about the likelihood of preventing... homelessness” (Nichols et al, 2018, p. 8).

A second key barrier concerned capacity in relevant local services, in particular mental health services, something that was squarely linked to funding issues in the context of local government budget cuts: “the capacity, the funding reductions they've had, it's been so epic that it's really difficult for them”. It is clear that voluntary sector organisations have been unable to fill the gaps left by these issues, with mental health charities in the area reportedly not taking any referrals at present giving the scale of demand and their own limited capacity.

Capacity was also seen to be an issue among the Trailblazer team itself, who are five strong, covering most of the Cambridgeshire area. Reflecting on how homelessness services are organised locally, our key informant pointed out that the weight of staffing, capacity and spend is on crisis prevention (reflecting authorities' statutory obligations) and argued that in order to prevent homelessness as effectively as possible there needs to be more focus on the kind of early prevention work undertaken by the Trailblazer team. Looking forward, the expectation is to maintain the targeted prevention work of the Trailblazer at current levels rather than expand it (with funding now being found locally for this following the ending of the MHCLG funding stream), but that crisis prevention at the local authority level will increase, with emergency prevention intended and hoped to decrease in response. While this shift away from crisis work was welcomed by our key informant, they saw a clear case for shifting resources more heavily to targeted upstream prevention.

The area's housing market context was identified as a third key local-level barrier to effective homelessness prevention, with the fundamental issue being a lack of affordable housing within the social and private rental tenures. This was seen to be a foundational constraint on the capacity of prevention work to secure sustainable positive outcomes:

“it's really difficult because, yes, we can do all this early intervention but we also need to put emphasis on what housing is available and are we giving it to the right people? There isn't enough affordable social housing. The private rented, especially in this area, the prices are astronomical and the Local Housing Allowance [rates] don't reflect that.”

Homelessness generated by evictions from the private rented sector was identified as a particularly acute issue: “landlords can just evict. They can just serve a valid Section 21 notice”. While an issue in local areas with particularly high and growing rent levels, this challenge was seen to have its ultimate origins in the regulation of the PRS at national level (see below)

Asked about local enablers of effective prevention, our key informant emphasised the willingness of local partners to get on board with this agenda from the start:

“how to approach it is to get all partners on board to start with... this is what happened with the Trailblazer... they had loads of people in a room before they did the bid to say, 'We're looking at doing this, working in this way, are you on board?' Because unless you've got people on board, there's no point and that was really positive and that gave us, as the team, a head start really.”

Also crucial was local partners' willingness to continue funding the work of the Trailblazer team after the MHCLG funding ended (see below). The visibility of homelessness in some parts of the area covered was seen to be relevant to this willingness and to homelessness being “on the political agenda”.

A final local level enabler was the collection and availability of data documenting the effectiveness and impacts of the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer early (pre-56 day) prevention work, which is not collected via national returns following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act:

“we've had the evidence to back up that this way works, so that's another thing... so actually collecting the right amount of data which we've been able to do... H-CLIC doesn't collect that data, the pre-56 days, so we've developed our own way of collecting it”

According to the Year 2 Review Report, by March 2019, the Trailblazer had finished working with over 1,000 households at early risk of homelessness (i.e. pre 56 days). The most common outcome was enabling households to remain in their existing accommodation (around a third of cases), with a further 10% securing alternative accommodation. Around a quarter were referred on to the relevant Housing Options team for further assistance (Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer, 2019).

National enablers of and barriers to effective homelessness prevention

The key national level enabler identified was the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme and funding, which enabled the establishment of an early prevention team and targeted prevention work across the five local authority areas initially involved. Our key informant was emphatic that without the programme, this work and associated outcomes (see above) “wouldn't have happened”. Despite being a positive enabler, the short-term nature of the funding and lack of continued attention to the early prevention agenda was a source of regret:

“I just wish it would continue, so obviously they did it for two years and then asked for evidence of what we'd done and then I think it seems to have fizzled out really. We were lucky that locally they want it to continue”

This lack of continued central government interest in early prevention was reinforced by the absence of any national reporting structure for pre-56 days prevention work.

Other national sources of funding were also cited as important enablers of homelessness prevention locally: the New Burdens funding provided to local authorities to ease the transition to their expanded duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act was seen to have been “really helpful” in enabling staffing levels to deal with increased demand under the new legislation. Once again, it was emphasised that these gains would be lost as that new burdens funding comes to an end. Similarly, our key informant emphasised the value of the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant and Discretionary Housing Payment funding in helping to prevent homelessness locally, though they did question the logic of “robbing Peter to pay Paul”, that is, reducing people’s entitlements to (for example) LHA only to meet the gap via DHP.

Beyond the funding attached to it, the Homelessness Reduction Act was also seen to have enabled positive homelessness prevention practice. Personalised Housing Plans in particular were described as a “really useful tool” giving households “ownership” and some “responsibility” alongside professionals to address their housing situation, though it was noted that there can be duplication with people having overlapping plans targeting their work status, and under adult or children’s social services, for example. It was emphasised that despite these positives, the new legislative framework only *requires* action when a household is at risk of homelessness within two months, which our key informant was clear is “not long enough”. They gave the example of a household in the PRS whose landlord has threatened to serve notice, arguing that it doesn’t make sense that a service response is not required in that situation.

Two key barriers to effective homelessness prevention were identified. First, the continued restriction of rehousing duties under homelessness legislation to those deemed to be in Priority Need. This was seen to be a fundamental issue inhibiting effective responses to single households. Though positive about this group now being owed prevention and relief duties, the 56 day period was not seen to be sufficiently long to resolve their housing issues. Second, the lack of security of tenure within the Private Rented Sector was seen to be an extremely important driver of homelessness and barrier to prevention. Our key informant thus argued that PRS regulation needs to be improved, specifically proposing that landlords' capacity to evict tenants on a no fault basis is removed, citing recent legal reforms in Scotland as a potential model (see Moore, 2017).

How can the UK Government enable more effective homelessness prevention locally

Based on this account of experiences in Fenland and the wider Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Trailblazer area, our key informant identified a number national level actions that would enable more effective homelessness prevention at the local level. These all pertained to the need to incentivize and enable local authorities to engage in early prevention work in advance of households being at risk within 56 days, including via the following actions:

- Addressing the resource and funding constraints identified above, by adequately funding local authorities and moving a way from time limited funding pots.
- Adequately funding mental health, criminal justice and probation, and drug and alcohol services so they have capacity to better engage with homelessness prevention partnership working arrangements and households at risk of homelessness.
- Measuring pre-56 days prevention work alongside work undertaken as part of authorities' obligations under the Homelessness Reduction Act.
- Promoting and enabling via best practice guidance multi-agency approaches e.g. Multi-Agency Hubs that bring together relevant professionals in one place to respond to the needs of households at risk of homelessness.
- Considering replacing the Duty to Refer with a Duty to Cooperate, which requires relevant agencies to support local authorities in their efforts to prevent and respond to homelessness.
- Regulating the Private Rental Sector to improve security of tenure, in particular, by removing landlords' ability to evict tenants on no fault grounds.
- Ensuring that households are able to access the Private Rented Sector by reviewing Local Housing Allowance Rates and the Shared Accommodation Rate.
- Improving the support available to single homeless households, by removing the Priority Need test from homelessness legislation.
- Ensuring an adequate supply of affordable social housing that is accessible for those who need it.

Case study 3: Newcastle City Council

Introduction

Newcastle is a 'core city' in the North East of England, under Labour control. Newcastle City Council (NCC) organise homelessness prevention work into three categories: what they describe as *primary* prevention, which targets those seen to be at risk of homelessness but not imminently (i.e. not within 56 days), through the Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach; *secondary* prevention, targeting those at more imminent risk of homelessness (i.e. within 56 days) who are entitled to assistance under the Homelessness Reduction Act through the city's Housing Advice Centre; and *crisis* interventions, for those who are 'literally' homeless, i.e. do not have any accommodation they can currently occupy, through the Housing Advice Centre, street outreach and the network of crisis and

emergency accommodation (NCC, 2019a). A key player in Newcastle is Your Homes Newcastle (YHN), the arms length management organisation of the city's council housing stock, who play a proactive role in supporting their tenants and preventing homelessness (see below).

In 2016, Newcastle became an 'early adopter' under the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme launched by the (then) Department for Communities and Local Government, receiving over £900,000 to promote and support innovative practice in homelessness prevention between January 2017 and March 2019.

Effective homelessness prevention in principle

According to our key informant, effective homelessness prevention requires a series of core ingredients. First, a particular mind-set that sees services "arranged around preventing and ending homelessness as opposed to responding in crisis". This in turn requires a strong understanding of the drivers of homelessness risk and an approach that responds "at the earliest point". Effective prevention next requires a "breadth of response" that takes "whatever opportunities" there are to identify homelessness risk, including financial need, medical need, loss of job and other life changing moments. The identification of risk needs to be proactive and "hardwired" into the system, involving using and sharing relevant information, case finding, and understanding what interventions can minimise or remove homelessness risk. Finally, this kind of approach requires active participation of "the main touchpoints of the state" within and beyond local authorities, including social care, DWP, health, justice and asylum services. These partners need to be proactively involved, which is likely to require some kind of "duty to co-operate".

Homelessness prevention in practice

At the centre of the city's primary prevention efforts is its Active Inclusion Newcastle (AIN) partnership approach supported by staff within the local authority's Active Inclusion Service. The service seeks to create, facilitate and support partnership arrangements and coordinate work that enables Newcastle residents to live a stable *life*, a guiding acronym that directs attention to people having somewhere to Live, an Income, Financial inclusion and Employment opportunities. Key features of the approach are a large internal welfare rights advice function, partly funded via council housing rents, plus a strong focus on providing information, resources, training and support to staff and volunteers in relevant organisations who may meet those at risk of homelessness, including those who are not specialists in welfare rights, debt advice, financial inclusion or homelessness prevention. The local authority provide the practical and governance arrangements structuring this partnership approach, including quarterly Homelessness Prevention⁷ and Financial Inclusion Forum⁸ meetings, chaired by the deputy leader of the council, and a plethora of information and resources providing tools for intervention (e.g. 'trigger point' conversation templates⁹), and reporting and reviewing progress and gaps¹⁰.

This heavy emphasis on early prevention, welfare rights advice and financial inclusion is seen as an essential element of the effectiveness of the authority's approach by our key informant. A particularly important element of this early prevention work was identified as the city's approach to debt owed by residents to the local authority. Our key informant felt that services in Newcastle have become

⁷ See <https://www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/housing/housing-advice-and-homelessness/information-professionals/newcastle-homelessness>

⁸ See <https://www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/benefits/welfare-rights-and-money-advice/information-professionals-and-volunteers-0>

⁹ See <https://www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/benefits/welfare-rights-and-money-advice/information-professionals-and-volunteers#trigger>

¹⁰ See <https://www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/housing/housing-advice-and-homelessness/information-professionals-homelessness-prevention>

“really good at... understanding the pressures on residents in terms of repayments, rent and council tax”. An important manifestation of this is in increased arrears levels in the city’s own housing stock, with this forbearance and willingness to support rather than evict tenants in arrears identified as a key component of effective prevention in the city in a recent study (Watts et al, 2019). The city’s very low evictions from its own stock are cited as evidence of the success of this approach. There were less than 60 evictions from the stock of 26,000 homes in 2018/19 representing a radical decline from levels seen prior to the introduction of preventing eviction protocols in 2007 (NCC, 2019a).

Under the Trailblazer programme Newcastle further developed its capacity to identify and support those at early risk of homelessness. One key initiative developed as part of the Trailblazer was the multidisciplinary team, which comprises of four specialist caseworkers from the city’s ALMO Your Homes Newcastle, the local authority’s in house welfare rights and debt advice teams, and the Jobcentre. The team aim to provide integrated casework for individuals at risk of homelessness where existing services do not provide the intensity of support required, and takes a proactive ‘case finding’, rather than referrals-driven, approach. Households at risk are found via a variety of methods, including the use of predictive analytics using data including council tax records, rent arrears data, Discretionary Housing Payments applications and awards, and those struggling to pay their energy bills (see Parker and Harrison, 2019).

The second key initiative pursued as part of the Trailblazer is the Jobcentre referrals pilot, which has involved city-wide training of Jobcentre Work Coaches to be able to identify early signs of homelessness risk and deploy ‘easements’ reducing work related conditionality until people’s housing situation stabilises. The pilot has also seen the development of active referral pathways from the Jobcentre work coaches to the Housing Advice Centre, Crisis (for single homeless households), or YHN for their tenants, depending on the household’s needs. YHN staff have in fact been co-located in the Jobcentre to assist tenants at risk ‘in situ’ since the introduction of Universal Credit (NCC, 2019b). Both of these pilots were identified as core strengths of Newcastle’s approach to homelessness prevention, something backed up by the findings of the recent study on homelessness prevention in the city (Watts et al, 2019) and internal reports detailing their design, delivery and outcomes achieved (NCC, 2019b; Parker and Harrison, 2019).

In terms of secondary prevention activity, the Housing Advice Centre deliver the city’s obligations under the Homelessness Reduction Act. Our key informant explained that this is a relatively small team, given the city’s explicit intention to target services, advice and support “upstream”. Nevertheless, early H-CLIC data recording activity under the HRA indicates high prevention and relief activity in Newcastle compared to other core cities (see figure 21 in Watts et al, 2019). An important additional area of secondary homelessness prevention in the city focuses on preventing homelessness after institutional stays, in prison, hospital or asylum accommodation. The city’s hospital discharge procedure, and the capacity provided by YHN to support effective hospital discharge in order to prevent homelessness, is seen as a particular strength.

The final element of the city’s homelessness system is its crisis responses, working with residents already in crisis situations. The city makes relatively low use of statutory homeless accommodation provision (owed to those in priority need) – though this has started to increase given new obligations under the Homelessness Reduction Act – and has made no use of Bed and Breakfast for this purpose since 2006. The city has around 730 bed spaces in crisis, emergency and supported accommodation, primarily hostels.

Commenting on the overall effectiveness of this network of services, our key informant cited the recent independent study of homelessness prevention in Newcastle (Watts et al, 2019), which concluded that the city:

“has low levels of homelessness compared to other core cities, and its surrounding Housing Market Area, on almost all measures... The most likely combined explanations... are Newcastle’s housing market context – a relatively large stock of council housing more conducive to homelessness prevention, higher social lettings rates and lower private rent levels – and the city’s very strong emphasis on and network of services for homelessness prevention.” (p.7)

Our key informant added that areas of particular strength are the city’s response to households at risk because of low income or financial exclusion, with effective interventions especially well developed for those households residing in the city’s council housing stock managed by YHN.

Both this evaluation and our key informant identified a series of gaps and areas for improvement in the city’s responses. It was acknowledged that the city’s hostel system is a crisis-response, but does not offer a sustainable and suitable resolution for those accommodated within it. Our key informant commented that people are “locked in... [and] circulate around the hostels”, with especially acute problems facing those with multiple and complex needs (Watts et al, 2019), something which the local authority wish to address by moving to a rapid rehousing approach and improving integrated and holistic responses for rough sleepers and those with complex needs:

“we would definitely want to have an integrated team approach to those people who sleep rough continually, or who are locked into the hostels. We find that the organisations that are funded currently to respond, respond from an institutionalised silo basis, so they do what is best for that organisation rather than best for that person, and so the wider multidisciplinary approach we’ve found works because it’s checks and balances within the team. It isn’t just somebody looking at rent, it’s also somebody looking at debt, also someone looking at employment. It’s also somebody looking at their income and poverty status”

A further limitation was the lack of Housing First provision in the city. Our key informant explained that such provision had been commissioned but with limited success, something they attributed to the lack of fidelity with the Housing First model. A key issue in this trial of the approach had been insufficient involvement from relevant agencies beyond homelessness and housing services: “there has to be a much stronger societal response, public sector response from other agencies to make those things work”.

More generally, a weakness in local responses reflects that partnership arrangements with some public sector agencies are not as strong as the homelessness and active inclusion teams would like, especially partnerships with the health sector (beyond the strong hospital discharge protocol) and social care services. Prevention work for those leaving asylum accommodation or prison is also challenging given issues receiving timely referrals from the Home Office and Community Rehabilitation Companies/probation respectively. More generally, assisting refugees leaving the asylum system to avoid homelessness is seen to be a challenging area, despite YHN providing a service to newly granted refugees to help them find accommodation and access benefits.

[Local enablers of and barriers to effective homelessness prevention](#)

Our key informant identified a wide range of local level enablers underpinning the city’s preventative responses. First among them was political buy-in from elected members:

“Locally, our politicians want everyone to have the benefits of a stable life, and to have a decent home and opportunity that goes with that.”

This political buy in has enabled the relative protection of homelessness budgets in the context of very significant budget cuts. Watts et al (2019) also identify strong administrative leadership within the local authority as a key enabler, characterised by a problem-solving, data-driven and evidence-informed culture of service development.

As noted above, a second key local enabler is the city’s YHN managed council housing stock, and wider housing market context which is more conducive to effective prevention than seen in other core cities. Participants in Watts et al’s study of prevention work in the city emphasised that it is the proactive management of council housing stock – not only its existence – that enable effective prevention, giving the examples of high levels of forbearance and low levels of evictions. Our key informant did highlight that housing associations in the city could play a greater role in homelessness prevention, for instance by funding internal advice services targeting their tenants.

While the partnership arrangements in place in Newcastle are seen to need further development, the willingness of various partners to play an active role on homelessness prevention was identified as a third key enabler. Work with the Jobcentres in the city was seen to be especially key here in identifying households at risk and actively referring them to appropriate support (see NCC, 2019b).

The independent research commissioned by the local authority to assess the effectiveness of prevention work in the area was identified as a final local level enabler, and reflects the city’s long term commitment to a data-driven and evidence-informed approach to homelessness¹¹. According to our key informant, such independent research is “a shortcut to credibility” when talking to partners about their potential role in homelessness prevention, giving the example of speaking to NHS partners about jointly funding services. They added that such research “really helps” secure buy in and commitment to homelessness prevention in the challenging funding environment faced as a result of austerity.

The key local level barriers to homelessness prevention were seen to relate to capacity within the authority to further develop and build upon existing responses, and the absence of a wide enough culture of prevention among partner agencies with a role to play on homelessness (see above). On the issue of capacity, the recently announced partnership between Newcastle City Council and national homelessness charity crisis, which aims to end homelessness in the city in a decade, was seen to be a partial solution.

National enablers of and barriers to effective homelessness prevention

At the national level, the Trailblazer programme was identified as a key enabler of homelessness prevention work within Newcastle. Our key informant explained that the “injection of money” was “incredibly helpful”, but so too the “very clear political statement” that accompanied the programme that national government were committed to homelessness prevention. This gave Newcastle City Council considerable leverage to progress and “accelerate” the agenda locally and “create the culture change and focus” required. On this point, it was seen as “disappointing” that national government’s “agenda changed” over the course of the programme, with increasing focus being placed on crisis responses to rough sleeping rather than upstream prevention. Our local informant felt that ultimately,

¹¹ See <https://www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/housing/housing-advice-and-homelessness/information-professionals-homelessness-prevention> for a range of internal and externally commissioned resources and evaluations of practice which have fed into service development over a number of years.

MHCLG “weren’t particularly interested in the findings” of the Trailblazer programme and that central government increasingly had “low expectations” on homelessness focused on ensuring people have a roof over their heads, rather than the foundations for a stable life.

The Homelessness Reduction Act was seen in part as an enabler of homelessness prevention practice, especially viewed through the national lens, in that it raised expectations about the level of prevention work required by local authorities. While recognising this positive impact, given Newcastle’s well developed early prevention work, the HRA was not seen to have gone far enough:

“The Homelessness Reduction Act and the element of recording that is related to it pushes responses from the local authority to a 56-day window, at most, and it doesn't, we feel, go far enough in changing cultures to be a preventative culture”

Specifically, Duty to Refer provisions included in the Act were perceived to be a step back from Newcastle’s current practice which seeks to work with partners not just to secure referrals, but as part of “a proper partnership approach” in which other agencies actively contribute to preventing homelessness. Our key informant thus favoured the introduction of “a stronger Duty to Cooperate” on other public agencies.

Cuts to local authority budgets combined with the welfare reforms reducing the income of poorer households in the city were identified as major national level barriers to effective homelessness prevention locally, not least given that Newcastle is among core cities worst impacted by these post-2010 policy changes (Watts et al, 2019). These trends were seen as challenging in a variety of ways, increasing households’ risk of experiencing homelessness and reducing the local authority’s resources to respond to those risks. Our key informant added that simply managing the impacts of these trends is itself a major burden on local authority’s capacity: “it’s not just about money, it's how much time goes into managing the lack of money, with no time left to do something better”.

A final barrier identified by our key informant concerns data sharing regulations. These were seen to have created fear among professionals about sharing data that could help identify and support those at risk of homelessness. Our key informant thus saw a key role for government in “creating confidence around safe information sharing and encouraging that” where it supports social goals like homelessness prevention.

[How can the UK Government enable more effective homelessness prevention locally](#)

Our Newcastle key informant identified the following key national level actions that would facilitate more effective homelessness prevention locally:

- The introduction of secure and sufficient funding for upstream (pre-56 day) prevention work that enables local authorities to avoid residents reaching crisis and reduce demand for emergency responses. This could usefully be supplemented by the introduction of data returns measuring such prevention work by local authorities.
- Strengthen the Duty to Refer to require relevant public sector agencies (health, DWP, offending and the Home Office) to actually co-operate in the prevention of homelessness.
- Introduce a requirement for private sector landlords to inform the local authority where a tenant falls into rent arrears and/or is at risk of eviction.
- Review the impact of welfare reform measures introduced since 2010 on homelessness and reverse those most severely impacting on homelessness risk. According to our key informant, priorities here should be ending the freeze on working age benefits (something taken action on since the time of interview), and reversing the benefit cap and the ‘bedroom tax’.

- Facilitate effective data sharing between key partners and the local authority to enable early responses to homelessness risk. Enabling data sharing between the DWP and councils is seen as a particularly important priority in this regard.

Case study 4: Reading

Introduction

Reading is a unitary authority in the south of England, under labour control. Prompted by the HRA, homelessness services have recently been reorganised into Family's and Single's teams, a third small team established to pilot targeted prevention work, and a further small team that works with the voluntary sector and commissions single homeless support services whose primary objective is to reduce rough sleeping.

Effective homelessness prevention in principle

In Reading, effective homelessness prevention is seen to require “robust activities” in each of the five categories of prevention laid out in the introduction. “Frontloading” universal and targeted prevention services in particular offers to “reduce the need for the more expensive crisis and emergency services”. This “bigger picture” approach, and especially targeted prevention efforts, requires a solid understanding of who is at risk of homelessness and a good grasp of existing data to identify them before crisis. The importance of working with partners within the local authority was also emphasised, in particular adult social care, children's and mental health services, leaving care workers, probation, and prisons.

Homelessness prevention in practice

According to our interviewee, Reading is some way “down the line” to achieving this vision of effective prevention involving a robust focus on upstream - and especially targeted – prevention. There is a current focus on ‘pre-56 days’ prevention in Reading, including seeking to engage and support those who, for example, have begun to fall behind in their rent. The authority have also very recently signed up to a service helping them identify those at risk via predictive analytics. Our interviewee, however, was of the view that there was more work to be done:

“We are doing a good job of managing the demands of the Act, however we are yet to deliver a full range of targeted upstream prevention that I think is integral to its effectiveness, even if it is not legislated for. We've got good relationships set up and we've got working protocols... I would like us to consider the focus of our services as a whole to allow us to be able to deliver that kind of prevention work. So I think we've got a way to go”

To the extent that work beyond the local authority's legal duties is currently taking place, this was seen to reflect the *ethos* of the HRA – that the authority are “taking [the HRA] as a very serious piece of legislation, and... are going to solve people's housing situation”, and a political driver to address high levels of rough sleeping in the area. This non-statutory activity, however, was seen to be hard to maintain in the context of limited resources and capacity.

Our interviewee also pointed out, however, that the HRA had incentivised (albeit does not required) non-statutory activity focusing on recovery prevention i.e. keeping people in accommodation after the local authority's formal duties have been discharged. Whilst this activity has reportedly been prioritised by the council for some time, there has been added pressure given the increased demand from single person households under the HRA. This in part reflects an imperative to ensure private sector landlords remain willing to accommodate this group:

“Otherwise we end up in a crisis situation, which not only creates another homeless situation, but also is going to annoy landlords with whom we have placed people, leading to circumstances where the landlord is reluctant to let to the council again. So we're doing quite a lot of work that we weren't previously for single people around ensuring that that solution around the 56 days is sustainable in the long term”

Strengths of Reading's homelessness prevention services were seen to be the authority's commissioned supported single homelessness services, run by a 'hub' (recently reorganised from a 'pathway' structure) involving three voluntary sector providers, and complemented by a street outreach service. This was seen to offer “a robust response in relation to those people who have a moderate level of support need and are requiring more of a crisis or emergency prevention work”. A further strength identified was the council's partnership working with the voluntary sector to reduce rough sleeping. It was felt that there is still work to be done across all areas to develop “the targeted/universal prevention that we want to move towards”. Complementing these services, a Housing First service is also delivered in the area.

Our interviewee also highlighted improvements in finding “good solutions” for families experiencing or at risk of homelessness, reflected in reducing use of temporary accommodation overall and B&B hotels specifically. The city's Rent Guarantee Scheme, which not only guarantees deposits, but also pays rents during void periods and rent direct to landlords during tenancies which is then recouped by the council from tenants, was identified as “one of our main prevention levers for families” and described as “proving to be very successful” in providing longer term accommodation for over five hundred households in the city to date¹². The Council sought to respond quickly to changes in the private sector, reshaping the scheme to ensure it meets the needs of both landlords and tenants. This scheme is supported by wider work with landlords in the area, conducted by the in house Rent Guarantee Scheme Team, including a supported Landlord's Forum and newsletter¹³ all of which aim to maximise the “levers” available to the council to “support landlords to help us prevent homelessness”. This existing work will soon be complemented by the recruitment of a Tenancy Relations Officer to work within the Rent Guarantee Scheme.

Our interviewee highlighted a number of areas that could be strengthened to improve Reading's homelessness prevention work. Key here was strengthening relevant partnerships, in particular those with adult social care. To help meet needs in this area the council are in the process of recruiting a mental health social worker to work within the council's housing services, something being funded via the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant. It is hoped that this post will embed a better understanding of the Care Act 2014, not least to enable staff to be able to advocate for households they're working with, speed up Adult Social Care assessment processes and decisions, and support those experiencing or at risk of homelessness who are entitled to support under the Act to access services. While this may be a short term post, it is hoped the role holder will take relevant housing-related knowledge and understanding back to the social care team, enhancing understanding and communication in the longer term.

Local enablers of and barriers to effective homelessness prevention

The primary local level barrier to more effective prevention identified by our interviewee was capacity, both at the frontline and strategically. While it was felt that homelessness services within the local authority were currently “not badly funded”, this was largely the result of short-term additional

¹² See <http://www.reading.gov.uk/rgs>

¹³ See http://www.reading.gov.uk/media/5836/Landlord-focus-newsletter/pdf/Landlord_Focus_issue_13.pdf

funding accessed via MHCLG, including via the Rough Sleepers Initiative. Our interviewee explained that this model of funding local authority services makes long term planning and investment in more upstream forms of prevention particularly difficult:

“It is very difficult to strategically set up services when you're having unexpected, short term funding come in that needs to be spent against very specific parameters. It doesn't give you much chance for being flexible or give capacity for long-term thinking... It's frustrating because actually emergency prevention and crisis prevention can be planned on a more short-term basis... [but] when you're trying to think longer term and more targeted and universal services in line with the ethos of the Act, you need longer run in time for that kind of work and we don't have any guarantees around the long-term funding...”

Reflecting themes anticipated above, cross-sector buy-in was identified as a second key barrier. Better engaging adult social care was identified as a “top priority” for the team at the moment, reflecting increasing pressures on health and social care provision in the area. Links with other statutory services such as probation and DWP were also seen to be a challenge, especially given the recent changes in this area and the move to Community Rehabilitation Companies. While engaging these partner agencies effectively was raised as a ‘local barrier’, both these issues were in fact seen to require national actions to resolve them.

The third barrier identified related to use of data to identify those at early risk of experiencing homelessness. Our interviewee felt that while there was ample data out there to work with, local authorities lack the resources, skills and capacity to negotiate data protection regulations and make maximum use of this information:

“you have to have some really robust analytics that sit behind that and I don't think any local authority is in the position to develop that themselves.”

The reorganisation of the team into Families and Singles specialisms was seen to be a recent positive change and enabler given the different partnerships required to offer effective support to these groups. Our interviewee felt that more consideration needed to be given to ensuring that services were set up to be able to effectively deliver further upstream ‘targeted’ and ‘universal’ prevention work, ensuring the most efficient use of resources.

National enablers of and barriers to effective homelessness prevention

When asked about enablers and barriers to homelessness prevention at the national level, our interviewee first emphasised the positive impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act. Key to its impacts has been the “culture change” it has brought in terms of promoting ‘upstream’ including pre-56 day (universal and targeted) prevention:

“the thing that has changed around the upstream prevention is culturally... it has brought about a requirement to do the upstream because that's the only logical way to deliver services if you're looking at the 56 days.”

Our interviewee was also very positive about the expansion of the MHCLG Homelessness Advice and Support Team (HAST), which they described as having been “supportive” and “helpful”. Key to this supportive role has been the team’s flexible and locally sensitive approach:

“they've been good, I think that's been a really good initiative... In the past there has been a tendency for specialist advisors to provide generic advice ... [But the HAST] have listened, have understood local problems and have helped define solutions.

Funding accessed via MHCLG was also identified as an enabler that the area have been able to use “to really good effect”. It was also emphasised that funding that was ring-fenced for homelessness related work specifically was “always helpful” given “internal politics” about resource allocation. This positivity however should be weighed against some concerns about resources. Our interviewee felt that whilst a clear positive development in the homelessness prevention sphere, the HRA “needs to have been resourced better and... local authorities... supported with it a bit better”. Additionally, their comments on the additional resources they had accessed via MHCLG were made with the caveat that it was “short-term and last minute” funding, which was “frustrating” and ate up staff time given the resources required to bid for and manage that funding. Moreover, and crucially, it was emphasised that “If you want to set up more strategic services, we need a longer forecast of how long we're going to have money for”.

In terms of national level barriers to effective homelessness prevention, the stand out theme here concerned Local Housing Allowance rates, which were linked directly to affordability challenges for households, which had historically lead to increased use of B&B hotels as temporary accommodation and restricted move-on into the private rented sector:

“when LHA was frozen it was a real problem in Reading as we are very reliant on the support of the private sector to meet housing need. We had a very successful deposit guarantee scheme at the time and we lost a significant number of landlords... the numbers dropped by the hundreds over a couple of years and our households in B&B shot through the roof. “

Following representations to government, LHA rates for the area were in fact increased which has somewhat eased these pressures. The local authority have now reconfigured the rent deposit guarantee scheme in order to guarantee rent at LHA rent levels, aiming to provide landlords a more attractive offer and financial reassurance, which was successful in arresting the decline in the amount of property procured. Universal Credit and the Benefit Cap were highlighted as other aspects of the welfare reforms programme that have hindered homelessness prevention. Combined, these experiences in Reading led our interviewee to question the extent to which central government is “joined up across departments... in terms of their ways of thinking” about homelessness, given that conscious policy choices have transparently led to increased homelessness and made prevention harder (see Fitzpatrick et al, 2019b). Beyond this central welfare reform theme, the pressure on health and social care in the area were identified as a further barrier to effective homelessness prevention, with considerable time and effort spent advocating for individuals to get the support they require to avoid housing issues, and ultimately, homelessness.

Issues faced locally engaging probation services and the DWP were, as noted above, also seen to have national-level solutions. More generally, these reflections led our interviewee to emphasise the challenges faced on the homelessness side when key partners have no obligation to assist in resolving or preventing homelessness:

“there needs to be some level of emphasis on the other services to engage at a national level with homelessness that isn't just about us bashing on a door all the time”

That the local authority have “no levers” to secure buy-in and cooperation from other key partners was thus seen as a key barrier.

A final barrier mentioned related to the lack of social housing in what is a high demand area with limited available land for new build, albeit that the council (as a stock owning authority) has now started to develop some new supply on brownfield land. The stagnation of social housing development was seen to require national as well as local level solutions.

How can the UK Government enable more effective homelessness prevention locally

Several national government actions were identified as having the potential to enable more effective homelessness prevention in Reading, these being:

- Legal reforms to secure partner buy-in, through a statutory Duty to Co-operate with the local authority in relation to homelessness prevention and response.
- Review and address Local Housing Allowance rates to ensure that the PRS is and remains an affordable option for those on low incomes; address the negative impact of Universal Credit and the Benefit Cap on homelessness.
- Regulation of the private rented sector was seen to offer the potential to reduce the flow of households into homelessness and enable more flow out of homelessness into sustainable rehousing, not least helping change households own attitudes to the PRS as a “decent... stable” option.
- A national funding model that gives local authorities sufficient resources available over a time scale that allows them to strategically plan prevention services, rather than short-term, cash-limited pots that are capacity-intensive to apply for and spend.
- Support local authorities to access and utilise available data to better predict homelessness risk and target relevant advice and assistance.

Caste study 5: South Norfolk District Council

Introduction

South Norfolk is a rural district local authority near Norwich, the East of England. The authority is under Conservative control. The homelessness and housing specialists that sit within the Housing and Benefit team is made up of Housing Solutions Officers, who have a ‘generic’ role, rather than focusing on families or single person households as in some local areas. Officers stay with particular households through the prevention, relief and rehousing stages as appropriate. A ‘Help Hub’ facilitated by South Norfolk Council operates in the area involving partnerships between a range of relevant services to identify households needing support at the earliest stage possible. ‘Community Connectors’ working within the hub structure are the community based first line of contact with households needing early help, and this is one route into housing assistance for those at risk of homelessness. South Norfolk and Broadlands, a neighbouring district authority, have recently started a process of efficiency-driven collaboration, moving towards a ‘two councils, one team’ model, with this merging of teams current underway in relation to housing, benefits and homelessness.

Effective homelessness prevention in principle

The most important aspect of homelessness prevention in theory was seen to be primary prevention in the form of ensuring adequate housing supply or simply ‘building homes’ in our key informants words. Working effectively with partners was also seen to be essential, both partners within the local authority (e.g. the Housing Benefit team and social services) and beyond (mental health services, addiction support providers, private landlords etc.). Supported accommodation for “people who aren’t... ready for long-term accommodation” was also seen to be important.

Homelessness prevention in practice

South Norfolk engage in prevention work with households at risk of homelessness pre 56 days. Key here is the areas early help model and team¹⁴, which involves over 50 partner services working to give households the support they need at the earliest possible stage, to avoid negative outcomes like

¹⁴ See <https://www.south-norfolk.gov.uk/residents/south-norfolk-help-hub>

homelessness over the longer-term. As part of this model, 'Community Connectors' are the first line of contact within the community for those facing problems: "they're really the external face of the council and are easily accessible". In combination with traditional access routes, these Community Connectors are one key route into services in the area, including homelessness and housing services for, for example, "those people who are struggling a little bit with their rent and they're a little bit behind and a bit worried". This early help ethos is reflected in the priorities of the homelessness and housing team themselves: "we don't just wait for the 56 days, we would love someone coming in 200 days before when it's much easier to sort out".

Core to the authority's approach to homelessness prevention is that there is one Housing and Benefit team, rather than a homelessness and housing, and benefits, team working separately. The team comprises housing and benefit team leaders, housing and benefit support officers, admin support officers and specialist housing officers and benefit officers. This structure allows for people at risk to be identified quickly and questions related to benefit entitlement to be answered and resolved at the earliest opportunity. It's seen as a key way of identifying those at particular risk of facing problems in the transition to Universal Credit:

"If someone's going from housing benefit to UC and there's been a bit of a problem with housing benefit... they've struggled in administering their housing benefit... We know they're going to struggle with their Universal Credit, so why just let them go to the big wide world of Universal Credit without a little bit of support?... we might as well get that working now.... bringing the two teams together and working with early help does allow that to work"

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) were highlighted as an extremely important resource in relation to homelessness prevention, with considerable emphasis placed on the need for that funding to remain in place in the future. DHP was described as a "really really... effective system", with the DHP team working closely with Housing Solutions and Housing Benefit officers. The DHP team take a proactive approach, combining immediate financial help to reduce rent arrears, with wider help setting up a sustainable payment plan to address the remainder. This approach reportedly has the dual advantage of meaning that the cash-limited DHP pot lasts longer, and the households is encouraged to take "a bit more responsibility over the debt that they've incurred". Other key homelessness prevention interventions identified in the area were: the Rent in Advance and Deposit Scheme, enabling households to access the Private Rented Sector more easily¹⁵ and the support available to those in supported accommodation to "train them to take on aspects of the tenancy".

According to our key informant, the local authority struggle most where those approaching services have mental health and or substance misuse issues. Local mental health services covering the case study area have been formally recognised as in crisis (in 'special measures') for several years¹⁶, with clear impacts on homelessness risk:

"There is not the provision there to meet the demand of Norfolk residents, we sustainably have people coming in who aren't getting the support they need and therefore it's causing them homelessness issues"

In order to help "fill the gap" funding secured via the County Council has been used to commission a specialist mental health provider to work within the Early Help team. This 'fix' is not seen to

¹⁵ See <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/resources-for-practitioners/prs-database/south-norfolk-council-rent-in-advance-deposit-scheme-rads/>

¹⁶ See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-norfolk-48790817>

compensate for the lack of a functioning statutory mental health service, but to offer some help relevant to homelessness prevention work.

In relation to substance use as a risk factor for homelessness, commissioned services in the area have recently moved from one service provider to another, and there were seen to have been issues in this transition that have prevented some people getting the support they need. While the immediate 'walk-in' service is seen to be "really quite effective", following up with people after that appointment has been subject to delays, sometimes missing the opportunity to engage when people are willing and able to. Underlying this transitional issue is a more fundamental concern that there is insufficient capacity to meet demand, though this will not be clear until the transition between providers is complete.

Our key informant also highlighted challenges addressing homelessness risk among households impacted by various welfare reforms. The impact of the Benefit Cap was highlighted, and while they were in general supportive of Universal Credit as a "good system that will work eventually", they emphasised that "the transition period is very, very difficult for some people". The lack of available low-level budgeting support within local authority services was seen as an added challenge since the Universal Support contract was awarded to Citizens Advice.

A recent challenge in relation to homelessness prevention has been the withdrawal of the commissioned supported accommodation provider, after it merged with a much larger organisation. This was felt to reflect that more rural areas like South Norfolk are less appealing to big providers than urban areas where there is higher demand.

Our key informant described third sector providers as playing a complementary role in terms of homelessness prevention in the area. There has been recent county council investment in specialist mental health capacity within the Early Help model, provided by a third sector partner. Solo, a social housing provider has established a lodgings scheme to assist those unable to afford independent accommodation¹⁷. Finally, Citizens Advice were identified as playing an important role in supporting households moving onto Universal Credit via the national Universal Support contract, although the removal of any funded budgeting support from within local authority teams had also created challenges.

Local enablers of and barriers to effective homelessness prevention

Our key informant identified a series of local level enablers of effective homelessness prevention in South Norfolk, including an ethos at senior levels that acknowledged the value of intervening early:

"we've done lots of research in the past and... it's... more expensive to deal with someone under homelessness than it is prevention. It is therefore worth investing in that early help model and getting officers to deal with all prevention aspects early on to avoid extra cost later... A case takes... ten times longer... when they're... [already] homeless"

This understanding underpins the early help model described above which seeks to link those at early risk with help as early as possible. Several additional enablers identified concerned the structure and organisation of the homelessness team, specifically, having Housing Benefit and Housing Solutions Officers in the same team in a way that builds "shared knowledge" and responsiveness to early problems and enquiries, and the generic roles of Housing Solutions Officers that means households can stay with the same officer through the prevention, relief and rehousing stages (as appropriate),

¹⁷ See <https://www.solohousing.org/accommodation-seekers/lodgings-scheme/>

giving people a “seamless service” and “continuity” and also meaning that people don’t have to “tell their story all over again” and can build a relationship with their officer.

The key local level barrier identified was difficulties accessing support from relevant partner agencies, in particular mental health services, but also addiction services. Mental health services in particular were described as having very high caseloads and seriously struggling to meet demand.

National enablers of and barriers to effective homelessness prevention

The Homelessness Reduction Act was identified as a key national level enabler of homelessness prevention practice in South Norfolk in several ways. While our key informant felt that homelessness prevention practice in the area was strong before the Act came into force, it was acknowledged to have “tightened up our policies and procedures”. Perhaps more importantly, having the authority’s preventative role defined in statute was seen to protect homelessness prevention in the future in the context of “council budgets being under sustained strain due to diminishing government funding”. The Act’s Duty to Refer provisions also seem to have helped ensure that other relevant organisations are more aware of their role in relation to homelessness prevention than was previously the case:

“The Duty to Refer has really increased the profile of homelessness. Whilst some partners have not fully utilised it, it has avoided people who traditionally come to us and say ‘the family I am working with are being evicted tomorrow, I don’t know where they’re going to live, as housing I need you to help urgently’”

A key theme raised in this interview was the fundamental importance of resources in enabling or inhibiting homelessness prevention locally, and the role of national government in shaping this resource context. Reflecting on the resource context to date, our key informant felt that the streams of funding that had been made available in recent years were “welcomed and really useful”. They gave the example of the rough sleeping coordinator funding, which had enabled a more proactive approach to be taken to finding those at serious risk. It was noted however that the short-term nature of the funding means any gains risk being only temporary:

“If it’s one-year funding it can take a couple of months to get set up, by the time we get everything set up it’s nine months, it’s not just that, you’ve got limited months on the service which can stop abruptly”

The New Burdens funding the area received had been used to fund supportive roles within the team, freeing up Housing Solutions Officers to focus on client-facing work. When that funding ends, officers may therefore have less time available to work directly with households at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

The General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) were identified as a barrier to effective homelessness prevention, leaving local partners unable or unwilling to share information with the local authority regarding a household’s risk of homelessness. Data sharing agreements to facilitate such partnership-based early identification had become very important locally, but reportedly can take an extremely long time to develop and agree.

How can the UK Government enable more effective homelessness prevention locally

The following key actions that could be taken at national level to facilitate better homelessness prevention locally were identified:

- Increase the supply of genuinely affordable housing. While the area has seen new build in recent years, this has been at Affordable Rent levels which are out of reach for many on low incomes/in receipt of benefit.
- Reforms to improve the affordability of the Private Rented Sector, through increasing Local Housing Allowance rates or regulation of rents.
- Ensuring that the wide range of local services relevant to reducing homelessness risk are sufficiently funded over the long-term, including Children’s Services, the Police, mental health and addiction services, and homelessness and housing services themselves.

Case study 6: Wychavon and Malvern Hills District Councils

Introduction

Wychavon and Malvern Hills are two primarily rural District councils in Worcestershire, the West Midlands. Wychavon is under conservative control, while there is no overall control of Malvern Hills District Council. The two authorities share a senior management team and housing and homelessness service. This service includes case workers, making assessments and decisions under the Homelessness Reduction Act and meeting the authorities’ subsequent duties, and a team of specialist ‘outreach workers’, who have an explicitly preventative focus and can give more intensive and personalised help to households when it is required. Across the wider county, local partnerships have been established in recent years to share good practice, aid understanding and develop joint action plans to better address homelessness and housing issues across district council boundaries.

Effective homelessness prevention in principle

Our key informants emphasised three key components required to effectively prevent homelessness in principle. First, council’s require “the right kind of funding” to enable them to “be able to deliver on a range of issues and work across a range of cohorts” including, for example, prison leavers and rough sleepers. Key here is both the *level* and *stability* of funding, with longer-term clarity about the funding available preferred because it gives teams stability, facilitates building “the right type of culture”, helps retain trained staff with appropriate skills and experience, and enables teams to plan services over a reasonable time period.

Second, “the right kind of... partnership arrangements” were identified as an essential ingredient for effective prevention. Exactly what the partnerships need to look like will, according to one of our key informants, depend on the nature of the population at risk of or experiencing homelessness locally. For instance, Wychavon are a stock transfer authority, necessitating strong working relationships with housing association partners. That many people rough sleeping in the area have a history in the care system was given as another example necessitating strong partnership arrangements with children’s services.

A third key factor in effective homelessness prevention was seen to be the culture within the housing and homelessness team. This was seen to be especially crucial in the context of the implementation and bedding in of the Homelessness Reduction Act, which demands a new way of working among frontline workers.

Homelessness prevention in practice

The local authorities’ services are reported to be organised in a way that is “heavily focused” on prevention. The approach taken has been to ensure a team that has the relevant and diverse expertise needed to prevent and respond to homelessness among key subgroups of the population at risk and experiencing it, and thus includes specialist outreach workers focusing on financial inclusion, families, and rough sleepers, and a young person’s pathway worker (jointly commissioned with the county

council). Having such specialist officers was seen to be “really important” in facilitating “more dedicated one-to-one” provision, leaving case officers free “to do the inquiries and make... decisions” and able to refer on to specialist outreach workers where “a bit more intensive support one on one” is needed.

There thus appears to be some focus and resource dedicated to targeted prevention in the area, but our key informants also described some work underway further upstream. A theatre company is funded to go into local schools to deliver a play on the theme of homelessness and rough sleeping. This is seen to play a role in addressing the “wider cultural piece about expectations”, namely that “the homelessness route... isn’t just about giving you keys to a council property... [but] actually about a wide range of housing options”.

Relationships between local authority housing teams and housing associations were identified as a strength of homelessness prevention work in the area. Particularly important here has been work to ensure access to housing association accommodation for those with support needs and/or a history of arrears. The approach has involved ensuring good lines of communication with housing association partners, combined with a proactive approach to risk assessing prospective new tenants and addressing any past arrears so these are not a barrier to rehousing. This can involve, for instance, the local authority partially paying off the arrears and agreeing a repayment plan to clear the remainder with the householder. According to our key informant, “Those relationships about managing the concerns about customers and finding solutions to overcome them is really key”. The local authorities also have an early notification system in place to ensure that they are aware of housing association tenants at risk of eviction at an early stage. Our key informant explained that the kind of support and intervention that can follow from an arrears notification can be wide ranging. An example was given of a recent case, the resolution of which involved financial inclusion advice on a Universal Credit claim and Council Tax liability, help securing white goods, help accessing support for mental health problems, and help to access opportunities to combat social isolation. As such, prevention work was described as “addressing a whole range of needs that somebody might have... so that you can leave them in a sustainable situation”.

Another key strength of homelessness prevention work in the area was identified as the cross-county partnerships that have recently been established. These “district homeless partnerships” meet every two months and involve a range of statutory partners, housing associations and voluntary sector partners, with elected council members also sometimes attending. These partnerships aim to enable local authority housing teams to better understand how services are organised in other districts, share best practice, and learn from each other’s work. These groups have developed action plans on various themes, including sourcing furniture from recycling projects and increasing donations to those projects; pre-eviction protocols; and alternative giving schemes as a response to begging in the area. Our key informants felt these partnership structures had facilitated the development of “fairly robust” strategies across districts, though our key informants did highlight the resource demands of working in this cross-district and partnership driven way.

The area’s street outreach officer was highlighted as a third particularly important element of homelessness prevention work. This role spans the county and is strongly prevention focused, involving working with commissioned accommodation services for single people and couples, and day centres, and links to the areas StreetLink referrals process. A key focus is identifying people at risk of sleeping rough in the area and putting a plan in place to avoid this, involving actions from local authorities themselves as well as key partners. This “coordinated response” is seen to be essential. This area of work has been enhanced by the appointment of a 12 month rough sleeper co-ordinator funded via the Rough Sleepers Initiative who is working to ensure that every person sleeping rough in

the area has a Personal Housing Plan in place. Cross-district learning is seen to be an important component of improving practice in this area.

Despite these strengths, our key informants were of the view that “we’re not... where we need to be yet” on homelessness prevention, and identified a series of weaknesses and gaps in current provision. As in other areas, insufficiency of support available to those with – especially low level – mental health problems was a key concern:

“a number of people that are coming to our services will have low-level mental health issues or even higher levels than that. Actually, for us to be able to refer people to mental health services, my frontline officers are telling me that that's a real challenge, people can't get into those services... So actually the support that potentially could begin to help people to turn their lives around, to be able to sustain tenancies by dealing with some of their mental health issues, we're not able to get that. Our mental health services are saying, 'Actually, we're bursting at the seams.’”

The thresholds determining access to adult social care interventions were also seen to be problematic and to exclude people in real need of support and at risk of homelessness, at a cost to the public purse and other partners in the end:

“the thresholds for access into services are too high for some of the people we're having to deal with. Yet we know some of the complex cases that we're dealing with, that they cost all of the partners a lot of money. So sometimes it's about casting those thresholds aside and just trying to have joint working protocols where we have an agreement on how we're going to work on certain client groups. That is a challenge.”

One key informant gave the example of a woman with mental health problems who was, ultimately, evicted from social housing, a process which required police involvement. The local authority were then involved in the (very challenging) process of securing access to mental health support for this individual, as well as suitable alternative accommodation. In the end, following involvement from very senior management within the local authority, adult social care became involved in providing support for the woman in question. Our key informant was frustrated that securing such within-authority joint working was such a battle and didn’t happen more readily and faster “at the frontline”.

A further weakness was identified as the areas continued use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation. Our key informants explained their motivations and need to use such accommodation as follows, noting that the supply of Bed and Breakfast accommodation is under strain given competition from other areas:

“[Bed and Breakfast accommodation is] not something we want to use, but where we have some uncertainties about customers, and we want to get to know their situations a bit better before we place in temporary accommodation, we do still use temporary bed and breakfasts. We have a very low supply and because we're under competition from neighbouring councils, that is an area of risk for us”

Homelessness and homelessness risk among those with complex needs was seen to be “the hardest to solve” in this area, largely because effective interventions by definition require the coordination and involvement of multiple services:

“it's not just accommodation, it might be mental health, it might be substance misuse, issues around accesses to social services, etc. They're the hardest to coordinate and particularly

where people don't meet thresholds for eligibility, but you know that they need that support to enable them to have a sustainable solution”

A shortage of supported accommodation outside of the county’s urban centres was also seen to be a key issue here. The accommodation offer for looked after children in the area was identified as another area of concern, with our key informants feeling that there could be much stronger join-up between county-level looked after children’s and through care/after care services and housing and homelessness teams at the district level.

Local enablers of and barriers to effective homelessness prevention

The rurality of the area was seen to be create some challenges for homelessness prevention work. Our key informants explained that in a rural environment, co-locating with partner services was more challenging than in a city. As an alternative, they had directly invested in having more expertise *within* the team, incurring higher direct costs to the authority. The accessibility of services for households at risk was also seen to be challenging given the areas rurality, meaning that either households face high travel costs or services must “be out there in the community” which is “very resource intensive”. Our key informants felt that such investment was required to deliver the Homelessness Reduction Act effectively:

“If we're truly going to deliver the Act in a way it's intended, that's what we do need to do. Ideally, seeing people from other partner agency offices and that also would help the partnership working in terms of a better understanding of each other's services, limitations, opportunities, etc.”

The local housing market was identified as a further barrier to effective prevention, given the “massive issue” of affordability in the area. One key issues is how local authorities work with private landlords (to ensure access to the tenure and prevent homelessness from it):

“The private rental sector in our areas is quite expensive and quite... buoyant... Rents are above the Local Housing Allowance rate and therefore it can be really difficult... to access suitable and affordable private rent for people because what we don't want to do is set people up to fail... it is an option and we do find we come across some landlords who are prepared to negotiate their rents down because they feel that they're meeting a key local need [but] it is quite difficult, it's hard work.”

Compounding these issues, other local authorities are reportedly placing homeless households in private rented accommodation in the area due to the supply and affordability constraints they face.

In universal prevention terms, a key concern was how to ensure an adequate supply of housing to address the “affordability gap”. According to our key informants, in some parts of the area (especially Wychavon) there had been recent new build of affordable homes, but there was already concern about the challenges that would be faced when that building work is complete and the homes filled.

A further barrier to assisting people experiencing or at risk of homelessness was seen to be specific household preferences about the location of temporary or settled housing they were willing to accept, something which can be a particular problem in rural areas with dispersed settlements and limited or expensive transport links. A key informant gave the example of a man rough sleeping in a park in the area and unwilling to be accommodated outside of a specific geographical area.

A final local-level barrier identified by our key informant related to IT infrastructure to enable effective targeted prevention work across relevant partners. For example, it was felt that a rough sleeping data

system could enable better engagement and information sharing between relevant partners, and smooth referral processes into supported accommodation.

In terms of enablers, the localised partnerships described above were seen to be especially important, so too that housing is “politically... a big ticket issue” at the moment and a strong focus for elected members across the county.

National enablers of and barriers to effective homelessness prevention

The Homelessness Reduction Act was seen in relatively positive terms and as an enabler of better prevention work. Personal Housing Plans were seen to be especially valuable in requiring action from both the local authority and households themselves, though it was felt that this was a significant change of practice that households themselves were not yet entirely on board with:

“The Personal Housing Plans are all about actions, not just through the authority but also for the customer, ensuring that if they need support that that support is made available to them and agreeing actions to be taken forward. That in itself for our customers is a huge cultural change because many of them approaching the service don't even know that there's been a change in the way homelessness is dealt with or what the expectations of them might be. There is a bit of resistance”

Our key informants were of the view that the Duty to Refer component of the Act represented a missed opportunity in failing to place a duty on partners to actually *assist* in the prevention and resolution of homelessness. They explained that “if that [step] had been taken it would mean we had a much more robust negotiation tool than we do at the moment”. More generally, weak or absent buy-in from other local services within and beyond the local authority was seen to be a barrier to effective prevention and this was seen as in large part reflecting under-funding in the context of national level austerity since 2010. This underfunding impacts on homelessness prevention work in an important way by leading to restrictive eligibility criteria, set too high to be of as much benefit as needed to the homelessness prevention agenda:

“they are all under-funded and I think that's a driver behind it, but because of that, they have to focus on I suppose the cases that have got the most complex needs, sometimes their eligibility criteria does not help us access those services for customers. Because we can't do that, it then makes it very difficult sometimes for us to find placements for people without the relevant support that's needed for those people to be able to live in that accommodation independently. So it's a bit of a cycle, a negative cycle”

There was thus a sense that housing teams within local authorities were left to ‘pick up the pieces’ of failures elsewhere in public services.

As above, our key informants were also of the view that the “culture change” required to deliver the Act effectively had been “underestimated” given that the Act requires a “completely different way of working”. Given this underestimation many frontline workers are “still not confident” and “struggling” to use the legislation to its full potential. Issues were also reported recruiting new staff with the relevant skills to meet the increased demand brought about by the legislation. Adequate and sustained resources were identified as the key ingredient to build and maintain that team and culture, with concerns voiced about the potential for resources to be further reduced.

As has been seen above, short-term funding available from central government has enabled the area to enhance homelessness prevention work, in particular that focused on the prevention of rough

sleeping, though – reflecting a theme in all case study areas – the short term nature of this funding was seen to be problematic, making the sustainment of gains extremely difficult:

“we can be successful to bid and get somebody in for a year, but then without the funding to be able to do the continuation of that, sometimes... that work is then lost and it's very short-sighted really. If we're not careful, the government invest in things short-term, but then have to go because there just isn't the funding to sustain it longer-term. In a way, that's all a bit of a waste”

This issue of short-term funding was seen to compound the staffing issues and ‘culture of provision’ issues discussed above, as explained here:

“nearly 50 per cent of [the homelessness team] are on fixed-term contracts that are linked to short-term funding so that's a real challenge for us in getting the right type of culture that we want within the team. People are constantly just thinking about well, two years is going to be up soon, or my fixed-term contract is coming to an end. So it's actually really difficult for us to get some stability within the team”

How can the UK Government enable more effective homelessness prevention locally

Our key informants identified the following actions that would help enable more effective prevention at the local level:

- The introduction of a Duty to Co-operate or equivalent provisions to ensure that partners within and beyond the local authority play the role required to prevent homelessness. Fundamentally important here is the role of adult social care, children’s services, mental health services and housing associations.
- Action to ensure that local authorities have the resources (financial and otherwise) to recruit and retain frontline staff who have the time and skills to deliver the Homelessness Reduction Act effectively and to its full potential. This could usefully involve the development of a national ‘Homelessness Academy’ resource enabling the swift online training of current and new staff, and providing the infrastructure to share learning about ‘what works’ between local authorities. It was acknowledged that H-CLIC data would enable some of this, but there was a perceived need for more qualitative practice-driven information sharing.
- Work to ensure the accessibility of private rented sector accommodation for low income households (e.g. via adequate Local Housing Allowance rates) and the quality of private rented sector accommodation, through better regulation. Also important here was action to address out of area placements into private rented sector accommodation from other local authorities (primarily in London) that can drive up rents, restrict supply and circumvent appropriate referral routes into other required services.

Conclusion

There is a remarkable commonality of views among our case study authorities regarding what maximally effective homelessness prevention looks like ‘in principle’. The key ingredients are seen to be first, sufficient funding of the right kind; second, a strong emphasis on early prevention (universal and targeted prevention in our five way framework, sometimes also referred to as upstream or primary prevention); and third, effective partnership working involving the meaningful cooperation of other agencies and actors with roles relevant to homelessness prevention (including for example other parts of the local authority; health, mental health, and justice partners; the Home Office; and private landlords). Other components of effective prevention also mentioned include an ambitious mindset

(that homelessness needs to be prevented and ended, not managed) and access and ability to utilize data on homelessness risk to target interventions.

Our case studies provide a detailed picture of the prevention work underway in these local authorities. In every case, this prevention work extends beyond that required in law under the Homelessness Reduction Act, with some authorities engaged in highly ambitious targeted prevention work, and – albeit to a lesser extent – universal prevention work, seeking for instance to secure an adequate supply of affordable housing and reduce poverty. Some authorities also reported a focus on sustaining people within their accommodation after periods of homelessness (recovery prevention), despite the limited funding available and absence of any statutory duty to do so. Given our sampling strategy, i.e. to purposively select authorities engaged in pro-active prevention, these results are not surprising, and should not be taken as representative of wider practice. They do, however, indicate the strengths, weaknesses, enablers and barriers to ambitious prevention work among English local authorities.

Locally, the key enablers of success identified included the buy-in, support and leadership of local politicians. Sometimes this reflected ambitions to ensure residents in the area have the makings of a stable life (as in Newcastle), whereas in other areas, housing and homelessness were a central political priority because of the visibility of rough sleeping. The leadership and ethos of the staff team and senior management within the local authority was also important. Some of the most positive aspects of local prevention work were the result of effective partnership working with particular agencies, which sometimes involved co-location, for instance with Jobcentre Plus or social care. An enabling housing market context (private landlords willing to let to households at risk of homelessness, council housing stock etc.) was also seen to be helpful. Access to and ability to use data to identify those at risk of homelessness and evidence on the effectiveness of local interventions were another enabler identified. Our case study key informants also saw various aspects of the structure of their teams as enabling homelessness prevention work though there was some disagreement about what was most effective. Having a joint Housing Benefit and homelessness team – or at least close working relationships between them – was sometimes seen to be helpful. There was some disagreement about whether ‘generic’ or ‘specialist’ roles within the housing and homelessness teams were most effective. While a number of common themes emerged in case studies’ identification of local enablers, the extent to which these were present in particular areas varied substantially. For example, while Newcastle cited the buy-in of local political leaders as a crucial enabler, the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Trailblazer faced challenges in this area. Similarly, case study authorities clearly faced very different housing market context, some of which were more enabling than others (see Watts et al, 2019).

A number of enablers of effective prevention were identified at the national level, including the particular funding streams that have enabled local authorities to expand, accelerate or pilot particular prevention services or initiatives or simply increase capacity. These included, funding allocated via the Rough Sleepers Initiative, the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer Programme, the New Burdens funding attached to the HRA, and the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant. The Homelessness Reduction Act was also commonly identified as an enabler, with specific mention going to the culture change it had engendered, and the new tools it had introduced including Personal Housing Plans and the Duty to Refer. The expansion in expertise and support offered via the MHCLG was also seen to have had positive impacts.

Despite these positives, none of the areas we spoke to were able to meet their vision of maximally effective homelessness prevention in practice, even though these areas were purposively selected as having ambitious and impressive homelessness prevention responses in place. In fact, every area reported a range of ways in which prevention activity falls short of their aspirations. Key themes here

included the inadequate offer to single adults at risk of experiencing homelessness, including (but not limited to) those with complex needs. Relatedly, the suitability and availability of supported accommodation was a key theme. Some authorities' priority was to move away from such provision to a rapid rehousing approach, whereas others were focused on ensuring sufficient supply of such accommodation, which could be difficult, especially in rural areas. Affordability of accommodation was a key issue in most of our case study areas, and something local authorities had limited levers to address. Inadequate access to mental health and addictions services was a very strong theme across the case study areas, so too difficulties securing social care support for vulnerable adults. Partnership working arrangements with health, justice and asylum seeker services were frequently identified as inadequate, meaning that opportunities to intervene early to prevent homelessness were often lost.

There was a great deal of consensus in relation to the barriers underpinning these gaps and weaknesses in prevention services. At the local level, the key issues identified were the local housing market context (high rents, and insufficient supply of affordable housing, difficulty accessing social housing, evictions from the PRS, etc.); a lack of buy-in or understanding of homelessness prevention among political leaders; a lack of buy-in and cooperation from key local partners; capacity issues and high thresholds in relevant services, in particular mental health services and adult social care; and capacity and caseload issues within the local authority housing/homelessness team, that especially minimize options for non-statutory early prevention work. While the presence and strength of these *local* level barriers (e.g. the nature of the local housing market context) varied between case study authorities, there was a strong commonality of themes in relation to the *national* level barriers inhibiting homelessness prevention. Key issues concerned the inadequate overall funding for local authorities combined with homelessness specific funding being short term and narrowly targeted; the lack of specific funding for early prevention work; insecurity of tenure within the private rented sector; and welfare reforms, especially Local Housing Allowance rates, but also the design of Universal Credit, the Benefit Cap and Bedroom Tax, the Shared Accommodation Rate extension, and the freeze (soon to end) on working age benefits. While the Homelessness Reduction Act was seen in positive terms, specific aspects or limitations of it were seen as a barrier to prevention work, including that the Duty to Refer falls short of requiring relevant partners to cooperate in preventing homelessness; that the 'priority need' distinction is still retained for the rehousing duty; and that it does not require prevention work further 'upstream' (though some did argue that the ethos of the Act encourages it). A final barrier receiving mention was data protection regulation which inhibits information sharing to identify and target those at risk of homelessness.

This case study analysis also offers a very clear set of findings with regards to the national government reforms local authorities view as best able to enhance, enable and incentivize better homelessness prevention locally. These messages are discussed in more depth in the concluding chapter of the report, but relate to: the reversal of the most pernicious aspects of welfare reform; regulation of the private rented sector to enhance security of tenure; actions to increase the supply of genuinely affordable housing and access to it; sustainably funding early (pre 56 day) prevention work; promoting early prevention work through clear national government prioritization of this agenda, measuring early prevention work and establishing good practice sharing opportunities and training; adequately funding local authorities in general and services relevant to homelessness prevention in particular to ensure they can do their bit (especially statutory mental health and social care services); and supporting and enabling data and information sharing between key partners to identify and assist those at risk of homelessness. Various legal reforms to homelessness legislation specifically were also seen to hold important potential in enhancing homelessness prevention activity, most centrally strengthening the Duty to Refer to require a wider range of partners to co-operate with local authorities in preventing homelessness. Suggestions were also voiced to require private landlords to

notify local authorities where a tenant falls into rent arrears or is at risk of eviction (prior to serving a section 21 notice) and removing the priority need distinction from homelessness legislation, as has been done in Scotland and is being considered in Wales.

4. Conclusion

This study has sought to establish the kinds of prevention activity being undertaken by local authorities in England in 2019 (and before the coronavirus pandemic) using a typology that distinguishes between five kinds of prevention: universal, targeted, crisis, emergency and recovery. It has also sought to understand the impacts of UK Government policy and funding decisions on local authorities' ability to undertake effective homelessness prevention activities, and identify actions that central government could take to enable and incentivise more and better prevention work. This concluding chapter seeks to draw out the main conclusions of the research in relation to these questions.

Understanding the kinds of homelessness prevention activity being undertaken locally is hampered by a number of factors. First, our online survey and case studies with local authorities confirms that the five way typology of prevention developed in Birmingham and the West Midlands (see chapter 1) and subsequently taken up by the Prevention Task and Finish Group (2019) and Fitzpatrick et al (2019a) is not widely used by local authorities. Indeed, local authorities responding to our survey sometimes struggled to distinguish which kinds of services and interventions fit where within this categorisation. Moreover, it appears that no other typology of prevention available in the literature (e.g. between primary, secondary and tertiary interventions) is widely understood and utilised by LAs. This suggests that efforts to enhance local authorities' knowledge of the full range of different types of homelessness prevention according to available models in the practice, policy and research literature may in and of itself have a role to play in improving practice in this area. So too, of course, would research efforts to address the evidence gap in relation to effective homelessness prevention identified in chapter 1 (Centre for Homelessness Impact, 2018).

Second, and relatedly, local authorities are only required to collect data pertaining to crisis prevention work i.e. activity they are obliged to carry out under the HRA, though it seems that some LAs are characterising work undertaken in discharging of their prevention duties as 'targeted prevention'. It is also worth noting that the pre-HRA P1E prevention statistics did allow LAs to capture prevention activity occurring further 'upstream', as the time frame was not limited to those at risk of homelessness within 56 days. In some areas, local data collection and reporting gives a clearer sense of the nature and quantity of targeted and universal prevention in particular, as in the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Trailblazer area and Newcastle (see chapter 3), but this data is not comparable across local authority areas. As discussed below, this suggests a need to revisit whether the current H-CLIC recording system is fit for purpose in recording local authority prevention activity, though any attempt to change practice in this area should be cognisant of strong local authority concerns about the administrative burden already associated with H-CLIC.

Despite these issues, our online survey of local authorities and case studies begin to give an indication of the nature and scope of prevention work across responding local authorities. These findings largely endorse the analysis of Fitzpatrick et al (2019a), who based on a review of homelessness policy across the UK, argued that while there has been progress in developing crisis prevention activity (not least through the introduction of the HRA and before that the Housing Options model), there has been less progress on universal and targeted prevention and emergency and recovery prevention. We would add the following points to this analysis focusing on England specifically.

First, almost all local authorities who participated in this research (either as survey respondents or case studies) are engaged in prevention work extending beyond their legal obligations under the HRA. This is not necessarily the case in all local authorities, given our sampling of especially proactive authorities in the case study phase and that more proactive areas may also have been more likely to respond to the online survey. The pattern of proactive prevention we see among participating

authorities is likely explained by the influence of the Housing Options approach that drove homelessness prevention activity from the early 2000s, and local priorities to prevent homelessness effectively (often prompted by local political leadership). Intermittent central government support of early intervention (e.g. the Trailblazer programme) is also likely to be relevant especially in local authorities that participated in such programmes. This continued emphasis on non-statutory prevention is especially noteworthy in the context of straightened and radically reduced local government funding and the 'row back' to statutory activities occurring across local authority services. There are indications, however, that the prevention 'offer' may be less positive for single person households than families, with local authorities reporting continuing challenges ensuring effective preventative responses for this group (see below).

Second, this non-statutory prevention activity is unevenly spread across the five types of prevention distinguished by the typology used in this report. Our research would indicate that local authorities are least engaged in universal prevention, though there are some exceptions (anti-poverty work and efforts to maximize the supply of affordable housing, for instance). This lesser emphasis on universal prevention makes sense given the limited (though not entirely absent) levers available to local authorities to reduce population level risk of experiencing homelessness (see chapter 1), and the absence of both funding for and measurement of this kind of prevention. The next weakest area of prevention activity according to this research appears to be recovery prevention, which is not surprising given what we already know about the impact of local authority budget cuts on Supporting People type funding streams, though it is disappointing in light of the shift towards the Housing First model. There appears to be somewhat more targeted and emergency prevention activity. The emphasis on targeted prevention is likely to reflect the broader than crisis prevention activity most LAs have been engaged with under the aegis of the Housing Options approach for many years, albeit focusing to a large extent on families. The somewhat greater emphasis on emergency prevention is likely explained by levels of rough sleeping in many areas that have grown substantially since 2010 and (relatedly) central government emphasis on rough sleeping in recent years.

Third, the role of the Homelessness Reduction Act in incentivising or disincentivizing different forms of prevention appears somewhat complicated, and variable, across local authority areas. In some places (e.g. Newcastle), there is a concern that the HRA forces a focus on crisis prevention at the expense of interventions further up or downstream, especially where resources are strained and where (unlike in Newcastle) there is a lack of political buy-in to the prevention agenda. Relevant here is that H-CLIC does not allow authorities to record their pre-56 day prevention work. In other areas (e.g. Reading), the HRA appears to have encouraged a focus on targeted and recovery prevention in order to minimise demand under the more generous statutory framework and maintain the co-operation of private landlords by minimising evictions among formerly homeless individuals. It may also be that the preventative *ethos* of the HRA encourages prevention activity beyond what is legally required and helps establish joint working between partners now obliged to refer to local authorities under the Duty to Refer. It is also worth noting that the Duty to Refer is not always effective in enabling LAs to intervene before crisis given that some partner agencies do not effectively meet their obligations here, or because some key partners (housing associations, health partners, the Home Office/asylum seeker accommodation providers) are not bound by the duty. This is, of course, consistent with the Duty to Refer having improved practice compared to the pre-HRA period.

These patterns of prevention activity are the result of a number of factors, including (as our analysis makes clear) the presence or absence of local level enablers and barriers, including:

- the level of political and partner agency buy-in;

- funding decisions made locally;
- the strengths and weaknesses of other relevant services locally including social care and mental health services;
- the nature of the local housing market;
- the circumstances of those at risk of experiencing homelessness in the area (their income, support needs, etc);
- the ability to recruit, train and retain staff;
- the ethos and skills of the housing/homelessness team;
- the structure of that team and the caseloads they face;
- the level of strategic planning in the homelessness/housing arena etc.;
- limited understanding of the full range of possible prevention activities; and
- limited evidence on effective preventative interventions.

Only some of these factors are within the control (full or partial) of the local authority itself, with many depending the actions and decisions of other local actors (landlords, other public and voluntary sector agencies, residents etc.). Moreover, though these factors were identified as local level enablers or barriers of effective homelessness prevention, it is important to recognise that central government has many tools at its disposal to mitigate these barriers and enhance these enablers.

It is also the case that central government itself generates (whether intentionally or not) its own set of enablers and barriers, which impact enormously on homelessness prevention at the local level. Put differently, central government fundamentally shapes the landscape and context in which local authorities pursue (or not) homeless prevention activity. This report identifies a range of ways in which central government action has positively enabled prevention work locally. Key among these has been:

- Making funding available for prevention work of various kinds, including through the New Burdens Funding, the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant, the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer and the Rough Sleepers Initiative;
- Providing funding for Discretionary Housing Payments;
- Publicly endorsing and prioritising homelessness prevention as in the case of the Trailblazer;
- Providing expertise via for instance the MHCLG's Homelessness Advice & Support Team;
- Requiring local authorities to prevent homelessness for individual households via the Homelessness Reduction Act, and providing tools for them to do so (e.g. Personal Housing Plans and the Duty to Refer).

It must be acknowledged, however, that local authorities who participated in our online survey and as case studies found it easier to identify ways in which central government has *inhibited* prevention work locally than ways it has enabled it.

First, while the **funding** opportunities above were all seen to be helpful, their narrow remit, short time scales, and competitive structure were viewed as extremely unhelpful, in particular in draining team capacity and preventing LAs from being able to plan and sustain effective services over the longer term. The lack of specific funding for early prevention work (pre-56 days) is clearly an important factor in explaining the relative lack of this kind of activity, and the same can undoubtedly be said of recovery prevention activity. The wider context of much reduced local authority spending power linked to post-2010 austerity is of fundamental importance here, with local authorities facing hard choices about what to fund, and early intervention approaches often hard to justify despite having the potential to reduce the need for crisis responses in the longer term. Local authorities seek a set of funding arrangements that allow them to both plan and invest in homelessness prevention and minimise the

need for emergency responses. The main central government policy reforms called for were as follows:

- A national funding model for homelessness prevention that gives local authorities sufficient resources available over a time scale that allows them to strategically plan relevant services, rather than short-term, cash-limited pots that are capacity-intensive to apply for and spend;
- An explicit national-level focus on upstream (pre-56 day) prevention work, and associated funding regime, that enables and encourages local authorities to avoid residents reaching crisis and reduce demand for emergency responses. This could usefully be supplemented by the introduction of data returns measuring such prevention work by local authorities;
- Greater focus on and secure funding for housing-related support ('Supporting People') services, including the Housing First approach but also support for those with less complex/acute needs, including potentially a requirement on local authorities to provide such services;
- Adequate funding of homelessness-relevant local services, including mental health, adult and children's social care, and drug and alcohol services so they have capacity to better engage with homelessness prevention partnership working arrangements and households at risk of homelessness;

Second, it will come as no surprise that **the post-2010 welfare reform programme** is centre stage in local authorities' minds when considering the role of central government in undermining local homelessness prevention efforts. Most pernicious appears to be changes to Local Housing Allowance rates, Universal Credit and the benefit freeze too, with the benefit cap and bedroom tax also seen as key obstacles to prevention in some areas. Local authorities are universally of the view that the welfare and housing benefit system in the UK could play a much more positive role in preventing homelessness. Specific requests for national government policy change included reviewing and minimising the impacts of welfare reform on homelessness risk and prevention, including:

- Local Housing Allowance rates (n.b. since the research was conducted, and in response to the coronavirus pandemic, the government announced Local Housing Allowance rates would be increased to match 'the 30th percentile' of rents in the area)
- Universal Credit including direct payments and the waiting period;
- the freeze on working age benefits (n.b. since the research was conducted, the Government has announced that the freeze will be lifted in 2020, but with none of the ground lost during the freeze made up);
- the benefit cap;
- the 'bedroom tax';
- extension of the Shared Accommodation Rate to under 35s.

A particularly strong focus here was on ensuring that households are able to access the Private Rented Sector, with reforms to Local Housing Allowance Rates and the Shared Accommodation Rate thus seen to be especially crucial. These themes ultimately translate into a call for national government to utilize its unparalleled access to the levers over universal prevention activity (see chapter 1).

Third, the **regulation delineating the obligations of private landlords** is seen to be highly problematic from a homelessness prevention perspective. Crucially, landlords' ability to end assured shorthold tenancies on 'no fault' grounds is seen to be especially problematic. The primary call for central government reform was:

- to end 'Section 21' no fault evictions.

But also:

- to require landlords to notify the local authority when a tenants accommodation is at risk, and
- to introduce rent controls (as an alternative or in addition to increasing Local Housing Allowance rates).

Government action to suspend new evictions from social or private rented accommodation during the coronavirus pandemic will offer important insights into the possibilities for future reforms to rental tenures and their role in preventing homelessness.

Fourth, **national housing policy** more generally was seen to be able to play a more positive role in relation to homelessness prevention, with the key issues here being the supply of and access to (genuinely) affordable housing, including crucially social housing. Relevant here is the continued impact of the Right to Buy. Social landlord reticence to let to those on a low income is an issue in some areas (see Fitzpatrick et al, 2019b) and national levers could help address this. Key calls for central government reform included:

- Increasing the supply of genuinely affordable and social housing and access to it, via national level investment and by making it easier for councils to develop their own housing, and safeguarding existing supply by ending the Right to Buy;
- Improving social rented housing allocation systems ensuring that those at risk or experiencing housing are not excluded from it.

These recommendations again translate into a call for national government to utilize its unparalleled access to the levers over universal prevention activity.

Fifth, while the **Homelessness Reduction Act** tended to be seen as an overall enabler of prevention work locally (reflecting its explicit aims) certain elements of the new legislative framework were identified as either unhelpful or not as helpful as they could be in achieving this aim. The Act is seen to be unnecessarily administratively burdensome, pulling LA staff away from the frontline. The Duty to Refer is seen to fall short of engaging local partners sufficiently, both because not all relevant actors are bound by the provisions, but also because even when they are they do not always comply and – crucially – because it does not require local partners to actually co-operate with local authorities in preventing homelessness. The absence of any requirement to measure prevention activity beyond that required under the HRA was seen as a further inhibitor of more ambitious prevention work by some. Proposed central government reforms in this area were as follows:

- Replace the Duty to Refer with a Duty to Cooperate¹⁸, requiring relevant agencies to support local authorities in their efforts to prevent and respond to homelessness;
- Extend the Duty to Refer or reformed Duty to Co-operate to a wider range of partners, including Housing Associations;
- Reduce the administrative burdens associated with the Act, in particular by simplifying the H-CLIC recording system;
- Introduce a means of recording and monitoring (as well as funding, see above) pre-56 prevention work (though this must be balanced against the need to reduce the administrative burdens on local authorities).

¹⁸ While this was the call made by participants in this study, Birmingham and the West Midlands Combined Authority are deploying the language of ‘collaboration’ (i.e. a Duty to Collaborate) rather than ‘cooperation’ to signal that responsibility should be genuinely shared between relevant agencies and partners.

A key additional theme here was that single people at risk of or experiencing homelessness continue to receive a less effective response than families, despite the significant expansion in their entitlements brought about by the HRA. This is in part because local authorities' duties to assist this group have only recently been extended under this new legislative regime, but also because the majority are still not entitled to the 'full rehousing duty' giving the continued presence of the Priority Need test. While one local authority recommended the removal of this test, a more general call to help local authorities continue to improve responses to single people is also relevant here. Specific reforms called for included:

- Improving housing options for single people in general including those with specific vulnerabilities and support needs, including adequate funding of housing-related support (i.e. Supporting People), expanded Housing First provision, and strengthened regulation of supported accommodation;
- Improved support for people with mental health issues and substance dependencies, including (as above) the adequate funding of statutory services in these areas to enable lower eligibility thresholds to be in place and to ensure people have access to timely support when they are ready to engage;
- Taking action to ensure greater involvement from health services and the NHS in homelessness prevention activity.

Sixth, **data protection regulations** appear currently to be playing an unhelpful role in relation to homelessness prevention, leaving local partners unclear about whether and how they are permitted to share information with the local authority about circumstances putting a household at risk. As such, local authorities called for:

- Clear guidance and the provision of support and tools to enable fair and transparent information sharing between all partners relevant to homelessness prevention.

Seventh and finally, our analysis would suggest a role for **skills development, knowledge exchange and strategic support** in relation to homelessness prevention. Local authorities show highly variable levels of understanding of the range of homelessness prevention activity possible, and the lack of emphasis on the role of homelessness strategies and associated delivery arrangements and action plans in driving practice in this area is notable and might be considered a missed opportunity. Central government and other actors could take the following actions to enable local authorities to prevent homelessness:

- Ensure that local authorities have the resources (financial and otherwise) to recruit and retain frontline staff who have the time and skills to deliver the Homelessness Reduction Act effectively and to its full potential;
- Provision of training materials, resources, learning opportunities, feedback and support to enable local authorities to further develop strategic responses to homelessness covering the full range of preventative interventions spanning the five-way typology deployed in this report.

The ultimate question driving this study has been 'What changes should be made to national policy and funding mechanisms that would improve the ability of local authorities to prevent homelessness?' and our analysis has revealed a very clear set of areas in which central government action could help enormously. Indeed, central government responses to the coronavirus emergency have starkly demonstrated the levers at their disposal to prevent and resolve homelessness. It is essential that such efforts extend beyond the crisis. Addressing the damaging impact of welfare reform and cuts to local

government funding are key among them, but the nature of funding made available; private rented sector regulation and other key aspects of housing policy; specific aspects of the HRA framework; data protection; and strategic skills and understanding of homelessness prevention options could all also play a significant role in levelling up homelessness prevention work across English local authorities.

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6. Appendix: Online survey

This study seeks to provide an independent analysis of homelessness prevention activity underway in local authorities across England. The survey seeks to understand these issues from the local government perspective in order to identify government actions that will enable local authorities to prevent homelessness, as well as discharge their homelessness duties.

The survey is being undertaken by Neil Morland & Co Housing Consultants (NM&Co) and the Institute of Social Policy, Housing and Equalities Research (I-SPHERE), Heriot Watt University for the Local Government Association (LGA).

The dataset will be shared only within the research team plus the LGA and results will be published only in aggregate. Individual local authorities will not be identified in any published research output.

1. Please provide us with your contact details.
 - Name & Job Title
 - Local Authority
 - Email Address
 -
2. Are homelessness prevention activities in your local authority area organised through a prevention framework or pathway?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't KnowIf yes, please describe the framework or pathway.
3. To what extent, if at all, does your local authority provide or fund homelessness prevention services extending beyond its statutory duties under homelessness legislation e.g. targeting people at early (pre-56 days) risk of homelessness or preventing repeat homelessness?
 - a. To a large extent – we provide a significant amount of homelessness prevention services that we are not legally required to
 - b. To some extent – we provide some homelessness prevention services that we are not legally required to
 - c. We only provide homelessness prevention services that we are legally required toPlease elaborate briefly on your answer.
4. What, if any, **universal prevention** activities are carried out in your local authority area, including those services commissioned and delivered by the Council and also others, to reduce the risk of homelessness amongst the general population e.g. affordable housing supply, poverty reduction initiatives, universally available information/advice/guidance on welfare rights, debt, etc.?
5. What, if any, **targeted prevention** activities are carried out in your local authority area, including those services commissioned and delivered by the Council and also others, that focus on people at a high potential risk of homelessness because of their characteristics e.g. for persons leaving prison, hospital, care, or the armed forces; victims of domestic abuse; other vulnerable adults; people in rent or council tax arrears or other forms of debt.?
6. What **crisis prevention** activities are carried out in your local authority area, including those services commissioned and delivered by the Council and also others, during the

56-day period during which someone is legally considered to be threatened with homelessness e.g. help to remain in existing accommodation, assistance to obtain alternative accommodation?

7. What **emergency prevention** activities are carried out in your local authority area, including those services commissioned and delivered by the Council and also others, for people who are immediate risk of homelessness, including rough sleeping e.g. assistance to obtain accommodation?
8. What **recovery prevention** activities are carried out in your local authority area, including those services commissioned and delivered by the Council and also others, to prevent repeat or chronic homelessness e.g. assistance from adult social care, children services and other public bodies and/or support from housing associations and voluntary organisations, including floating support?
9. Since April 2018 – March 2019, what quantity of people in your local authority area were prevented from becoming homeless due to (please enter number and state if this is exact or estimate);
 - a. Universal prevention activities
 - b. Targeted prevention activities
 - c. Crisis prevention activities
 - d. Emergency prevention activities
 - e. Recovery prevention activities
10. Indicate the level of priority given to providing each form prevention activity in your local authority area;
 - a. Universal prevention activities
 - b. Targeted prevention activities
 - c. Crisis prevention activities
 - d. Emergency prevention activities
 - e. Recovery prevention activities
 - i. Very high priority
 - ii. High priority
 - iii. Low priority
 - iv. Very low priority

Please elaborate briefly on your answers.

11. In your local authority area, how much co-operation is there between the Council and other public bodies, housing associations, and voluntary organisations, to prevent homelessness (e.g. common policies, pooled budgets, joint commissioning, shared service delivery, joint working protocols, single pathways)?
 - a. More than enough
 - b. Enough
 - c. Not enough
 - d. Nowhere near enough

Please elaborate briefly on your answer, highlighting particularly strong/effective examples of co-operation and gaps/weaknesses in co-operation.

12. Does your local authority have plans to increase/reduce the following kinds of prevention activity over the next 1-3 years?
 - a. Universal prevention activities
 - b. Targeted prevention activities
 - c. Crisis prevention activities
 - d. Emergency prevention activities
 - e. Recovery prevention activities

- i. increase
- ii. reduce
- iii. maintain at current level
- iv. don't know

Please explain below why your local authority plan to make these changes.

13. From April 2018 – March 2019, how much did your local authority spend on (please enter amount and state if this is exact or estimate)

- a. Universal prevention activities
- b. Targeted prevention activities
- c. Crisis prevention activities
- d. Emergency prevention activities
- e. Recovery prevention activities

14. From April 2018 – March 2019, where did funding for the following kinds of prevention activity undertaken in your local authority area come from:

- a. Universal prevention activities,
- b. Targeted prevention activities,
- c. Crisis prevention activities,
- d. Emergency prevention activities, and
- e. Recovery prevention activities;
 - i. local government
 - ii. other local public bodies
 - iii. Combined Authority/Greater London Authority
 - iv. Ministry of Housing, Communities, & Local Government
 - v. other national government ministries, agencies and public bodies
 - vi. Philanthropic/voluntary sector
 - vii. Other
 - viii. Not applicable

If you have selected 'other' please indicate for each prevention activity what this other funding is.

15. In your local authority area, how stable is the funding for

- a. Universal prevention activities,
- b. Targeted prevention activities,
- c. Crisis prevention activities,
- d. Emergency prevention activities, and
- e. Recovery prevention activities;
 - i. Not very stable – secure in the short-term (e.g. Less than 2 years)
 - ii. Moderately stable – secure in the medium-term (e.g. 2-5 years)
 - iii. Stable – secure in the long-term (e.g. more than 5 years)
 - iv. Other
 - v. Not applicable
 - vi. Don't know

If 'other' has been selected for any of the categories, please indicate for each prevention activity how stable the funding is in your own words.

16. In your local authority area, what, if any, local barriers, hinder homelessness prevention activity? (please describe barriers for Universal, Targeted, Crisis, Emergency, and Recovery prevention activities)

17. In your local authority area, what, if any, local enablers, help facilitate the homelessness prevention activity? (please describe barriers for Universal, Targeted, Crisis, Emergency, and Recovery prevention activities)

18. What, if anything, does the UK Government do presently to enable homelessness prevention at the local level?
19. What, if anything, does the UK Government do presently that is a barrier to homelessness prevention at the local level?
20. What actions should the UK Government take that would enable and/or incentivise homelessness prevention activity in your local authority area (legal/policy reform, guidance, investment/funding changes, other changes)?