



**East Midlands Homelessness Forum
Service User Consultation**

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Groundswell UK

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1. Introduction

Groundswell UK is a registered charity that believes that homeless people are not the problem, but must be part of the solution to homelessness. Groundswell is the leading user involvement and self-help organisation working in the field of homelessness in the UK. It provides training in service user involvement, conducts research to ensure homeless people's opinions can help shape policy and gives out small grants to groups of people with experience of homelessness who want to start up their own projects. See www.groundswell.org.uk for more information.

The East Midlands Homelessness Forum (EMHF) is a group of people from government, local authorities and voluntary organisations like Shelter, Framework Housing Association and Action Homelessness. It wants to identify the major issues of homelessness in the regions, discuss the main issues of homelessness in the region, identify good practice, offer practical solutions and foster a collective approach which will inform and strengthen delivery of future editions of the homelessness section of the East Midlands Regional Housing Strategy.

Groundswell's Core Beliefs

- Homeless people are not the problem, they must be part of the solution
- Homeless people hold the key to solutions in their experience and knowledge
- Homeless people have a right to information to make choices about their own lives

Groundswell's Key Aims

- Enable homeless people to set up and run their own projects
- Increase homeless people's influence in policy and decision making
- Increase homeless people's meaningful involvement in the services they use

In 2007 Groundswell was invited by the EMHF to gather the views of people experiencing homelessness across the region. We approached this task by working closely with a team of **peer researchers** (people who have experienced homelessness and have received training in facilitating groups and research) to deliver **5 focus groups and 20 interviews**, targeting rough sleepers, families with children, young people, people from black and minority ethnic communities and homeless service users in rural areas to find out:

- People's reasons for becoming homeless
- Their experience and views on measures designed to prevent homelessness
- Their experience of help in finding accommodation and their views on accommodation
- How they getting money to pay for accommodation
- Their experience of support services
- How they access essential services
- What their medium and long term aspirations are
- Their opinions on the best and worst things about services
- Their views on a range of services
- What the East Midlands Homelessness Forum can do to assist people who are experiencing homelessness
- How the EMHF should involve service users in planning better services?

2. Methodology

Who did we speak to?

This research represents the views of 60 people across the East Midlands. We ran 5 focus groups with 36 people and we interviewed 24 people (whose profile is outlined below):

Age range	Male	Female	Total
16-25	5	5	10
26-40	4	2	6
41-55	4	2	6
56-70	1	1	2

Ethnic background	Number	Percentage (of total)
White British	16	65%
Asian	2	9%
Black British	2	9%
Black African	1	4%
White Irish	3	13%

This report is abridged and indicates the main themes and recommendations that Groundswell has made to the EMHF. The full report can be obtained by contacting Groundswell.

3. Findings

3.1 Factors Contributing to Homelessness

36 people were involved in 5 focus groups across the East Midlands. They were asked to suggest factors that might contribute to people becoming homeless then to mark which of the factors contributed to them individually becoming homeless. The main five contributing factors are indicated below:

Contributing Factor	Number of respondents
Family pressures	21
Drugs	21
Prison	16
Domestic violence	13
Separation/relationship breakdown	12

3.1.a Family Pressures

People selected family pressures as well as domestic violence, separation or relationship breakdown, the latter being a result of specific family pressures that had impacted on them. The reasons and stories talked about under family pressures were various.

One third of those interviewed had experienced some time in care. All but one said that this had not been a positive experience and saw a direct relationship between this experience and their reasons for being homeless.

Some experiences were linked to the council's interpretation of the homeless act, specifically around intentionality, that did not take account of individuals' circumstances.

Recommendations

- There is a need to look at people's experiences of family life, particularly where there is the presence of abuse, as a possible reason for them being vulnerable under the Homeless Act, in the same way that domestic violence is viewed. These investigations should be done sensitively, possibly with the use of third party advocates brought in upon detection of the issues by the council by investigating officers
- The impact of having been in care should be assessed, with a view to this again being possible grounds for vulnerability
- There is a need for earlier intervention with mediation that could be triggered through mechanisms such as school and work where it could be detected earlier. There is also a need to consider comments about how bringing in such services impacts on already vulnerable families who may feel under attrition

3.1.b Drugs

Drugs, as a contributing factor to homelessness, were as significant as family pressures to people participating in the focus groups. One third of people interviewed said drugs were a contributing factor.

While most indicated the use of drugs as a contributing factor in becoming homeless, some also saw it as a trigger for them wanting to change their situation. Most comments in relation to preventing drug-related homelessness indicated that faster access to services was required, such as to a 'script', 'detox', or 'rehab'. However the criteria of local connection, a pre-requisite for most social housing, mitigates against such solutions.

Three out of the 21 who counted drugs as a contributing factor thought that more support would have helped.

It was basically about drugs. I had to make life better for me and my child, or else I'd still be on drugs

If I'd stayed there, all like the drug dealers knew where I was living and stuff. There was quite openly drugs on that estate, neighbours being on drugs, so I had to move, do you know what I mean?

If I'd got my script when I first asked to go on one I would never have lost my house

People die on waiting lists

Recommendations

- The partnership should promote counselling and self help initiatives for drug users
- Issues around moveability of the drug using homeless population and the inability to go back to certain areas should be taken into account in terms of

3.1.c Prison

16 people who participated in focus groups were ex-offenders. 6 people talked about needing a place to go when released and that place should be safe, and organised before release.

The main reasons for me becoming homeless was being in prison and drug use

Three mentioned the need for support: "It can be hard to settle outside".

One commented that 'bail hostels' lead to re-offending.

Recommendation

- The partnership should prioritise the development of resettlement services for ex-offenders as it is doing in the East Midlands Resettlement Strategy and support the recommendations around resettlement from 'Custody to

3.1.d Domestic Violence

13 participants stated that domestic violence had contributed to them becoming homeless.

The main reason for me becoming homeless was domestic violence and problems at the flat where I was. That's the main one. I just couldn't cope in there no more. He made me put all the support behind me. I needed support there to help me through things and people to talk to. So I'm glad I'm in a place like this

Recommendations

- To support, but also to promote alternative to, refuges. Alternative need to include the supportive element and could include such initiatives as supported lodging schemes or self help mentoring schemes not necessarily attached to accommodation
- Agencies, including the police, should actively work together to accommodate the needs of women escaping domestic violence and promote understanding of its dynamic

3.1.e Separation/Relationship Breakdown

The impact of relationship breakdown was various. Often it became an exacerbating factor for other difficulties or led to difficulties in other areas.

Many women talked about losing their council property as a result of leaving their partner.

I was depressed after my marriage break-up and money matters and rent arrears just got on top of me

I split up from my husband. Tried to start again – did not work. I moved around the local area (Norwich). I had to move out of

Recommendation

- To see the splitting of tenancies as a legitimate course of action, but that this will take some mediating, preferably with support for both parties

3.1.f Other Factors contributing to Homelessness were financial issues, problems with the Council housing benefit department and people getting caught up by the Habitual Residency test.

3.2 Usefulness of Services Accessed

In focus groups participants were asked to list the services they had used and to then vote on which of those had been useful and not useful. Most people felt the services they had used were useful. Of the 7 people who had accessed Connexions, 5 had found it useful. Of the 10 who had accessed Housing Options, 7 said they found it useful.

Conversely some participants interviewed held strong negative opinions about services they had accessed. 3 out of 6 said that social services had been not been useful and all 6 of those who had accessed council-provided housing said it was not useful.

You know, there's not many services that have really been very helpful to me at all

3.3 Experience and Views on Preventative Measures

We asked participants if they had heard of, and what their opinion was of, preventative services:

Service/Level of Awareness	Percentage of respondents
Mediation: friends & family exclusion	
Heard of, been offered, v. polite, no use at all	5%
Heard of, been offered, polite, no use at all	5%
Not heard of	90%
Home Visit	
Heard of, not been offered	25%
Not heard of	75%
Outreach: private sector landlord and tenant	
Heard of, not been offered	13%
Not heard of	87%
Outreach: rent arrears and anti-social behaviour	
Heard of, not been offered	45%
Not heard of	55%
Tenancy Support	
Heard of, been offered, polite, helpful	5%
Heard of, not been offered	33%
Not heard of	62%
Sanctuary Scheme for Victims of Domestic Violence	
Heard of, been offered, v. polite, v. helpful	5%
Heard of, been offered, polite, no use at all	5%
Heard of, not been offered	28%
Not heard of	62%
Approved Private Letting Scheme	
Heard of, polite, not very helpful	5%
Heard of, not been offered	36%
Not heard of	59%
Accredited Landlord Scheme	
Heard of, not been offered	10%
Not heard of	90%

Service/Level of Awareness	Percentage of respondents
Money Advice/ Income Maximisation	
Heard of, been offered	15%
Heard of, not been offered	15%
Not Heard of	70%
Discretionary Housing payment	
Heard of, not been offered	13%
Not heard of	87%
Rent Deposit Scheme	
Heard of, been offered, very helpful	5%
Heard of, been offered, helpful	5%
Heard of, been offered	15%

The figures largely speak for themselves. For every service the majority of people had not heard of the service, ranging from 55-90%. There was also a sizeable percentage, from 13-45%, who had heard of the service but had never been offered it. Whether the service was not offered because it was not appropriate is unclear but given the demographics and nature of the services, this could not account for all of these cases. Where people had used the service, people had found the service to be polite, but were evenly divided on whether they were useful or not.

- Recommendation**
- To promote council services related to homelessness to the public and homeless people, including the promotion of peer education schemes

3.4 Difficulties Accessing Services

Respondents identified the following services as difficult to access:

Service	Number of respondents
Job Centre	17
Employers	16
Local authority	12
Housing Benefit	10
Private accommodation	10
Hostel Provision	10
GP's	10 across all 5 focus groups
Personal Benefits	5
Landlords	4
Education	1 (people access it but with issues)

3.4.a Job Centre and Personal Benefits

Common issues were identified both from focus groups and interviews.

- Slow turnaround of processing benefits
- 2 focus groups talked about treatment by staff, which was described as: “too impersonal”, “we avoid it”, “staff look at you and decide you’re going to be trouble”
- Lack of job options available

Recommendation

- The partnership should publicise the turnaround targets for the benefits agency and the fact that homeless people are allowed to use services and daycentres as proxy addresses

3.4.b Employers

Common issues were identified both from focus groups and interviews.

- 4 people mentioned issues around not having a fixed address
- 5 people mentioned issues around lack of training and qualifications
- 4 the 5 above talked about issues when trying to get training or education:
 - lack of support on training programs
 - not being able to do progress to work course because on methadone script
 - being sent on course by JSA but with pregnant girlfriend on the streets didn't want to be away from her
 - “it’s really hard for people with circumstances like ours to do education”.

Recommendation

- To liaise with organisation such as Off the Streets and into Work to investigate how training and work based programmes can be more accommodating of homeless people’s needs

3.4.c Housing Benefit

3 focus groups discussed housing benefit and identified the following difficulties:

- Slow turnaround
- The process of claiming is too complicated and information is difficult to understand
- No assistance in dealing with arrears

Recommendations

- The partnership should publicise information on the turnover targets of housing benefit and complaints procedures.
- The partnership should liaise with the courts and judges to try and establish councils trying to evict people for arrears culminated thorough slow payment of housing benefit as being illegitimate grounds for eviction

3.4.d Private accommodation and Landlords

3 focus groups discussed housing benefit and identified the following difficulties:

- The deposits required on tenancies are too high – council grant is not enough
- Some tried to use rent deposit scheme but private landlords would not accept it
- 3 found landlords not wanting housing benefit claimants: “DSS mess them around”
- 2 said they were discriminated against because homeless
- 1 needed treatment once in accommodation

Recommendation

- The partnership should promote greater publicity and funding for the councils schemes for working with private landlords. There should be active involvement of homeless people in the design and monitoring of such schemes

3.4.e Local Authority

Some in one focus group felt that the system discriminated against people with no support needs. Another felt that that the needs/priority system is unfair. However, it was not just that people did not receive what they wanted that made them negative, it was the way they were treated. One person has been barred from the department (illegally denying them a service from the council). Another felt that council services are hostile towards young people. Other feelings were more general, from how they were treated to inefficiency regarding paperwork.

- 6 people said they had found council-provided housing was not useful
- 3 respondents said Housing Options not useful
- 6 said housing advice was useful
- The common feeling was that there was lack of clarity with all information including how long claims will take, the system in general and how the points system works
- People reported a general feeling that it is unfair

In housing options, they made me feel like I was guilty because I went in and said I'd been made homeless because of rent arrears. I felt like they just didn't think I was top priority, I got that impression

got no feedback from the housing office

What I find hard about the council is them losing all the paperwork. They misuse information and were telling me to get lost. They do lose the stuff I'm still waiting letters

Recommendations

- The partnership should promote greater transparency of the points schemes for housing allocation with periodic review involving consultation with stakeholders including homeless people
- Service users should be involved in the writing of standard correspondence ,for example, refusal letters

Recommendations (cont'd)

- There should be greater promotion of the complaint procedures for housing options, training for staff on homelessness issues and involvement of homeless people in the quality monitoring of services

3.5 Views on Accommodation Provided

People who were interviewed were asked to think of two accommodation providers they had accessed in the last year and rate them in the following areas:

- Security and Comfort
- Other facilities (laundry room etc)
- How well did people get along
- Meals and communal areas
- Support services generally
- Key working
- Client/service user involvement
- Staff attitudes
- Rules and regulations
- Visiting policy
- Accessibility and effectiveness of complaints procedure
- Pet policy
- Activities provided

You're not allowed visitors after a certain time, you have to book your overnight stays. They've only got one bedroom flats and expect, like, four people to be in there. I've got 3 kids stuck in a one bedroom flat

I can't cope with hostels. It's not the hostel, it's who lives in them. Too much bickering. I don't like bickering. I don't like liars. I mean you've got to lock your door because you don't know if

Most projects were rated in the mid-range, closer to good. The areas most people thought were poor or very poor were user involvement, activities and visitor policies. The next worst were rules and regulations, complaints procedure and pets policy. The results concur with a report produced for Supporting People in 2005 that found a correlation between rules and procedures and a lack of user involvement. People did not feel ownership of policies and felt they were designed for the ease and protection of the staff rather than clients.

Recommendations

- Hostels should be audited, involving consultation with clients, on a regular basis, based on the criteria used in the research. Particular emphasis should be placed on user involvement, activities, visitor policies, involvement and attitudes towards rules and regulations of hostels and pets policies
- A project that promotes and works with agencies to involve clients in the drawing up of house rules, including visitor policies, should be undertaken
- Activities not necessarily to do with people's immediate needs; but aimed at the promotion of involvement, the development of self efficacy and confidence should be seen as legitimate areas for funding by Supporting People
- Training should be provided for clients on the issues they may encounter from other clients in hostel accommodation

3.6 Improving Services – the Best and Worst

3.6.a Best Interventions and Services – Key-working and Support

People in interviews felt that they needed support and that good key-working and a good key-worker were some of the most important things. 12 people in Focus Groups said that one-to-one meetings, their support or key worker and being listened to were the best things about the services they received.

Within this listening and consistency were seen as at least as important as the person being able to actually effect practical change. Others wanted the nature of the support to be more flexible. It was not so much that the support was regular, it was that it was there at the point at when the person needed it and that the worker was pro-active in getting there at the right time.

While people are homeless, give them all the support to get over the issues they've got. So when they do get a new tenancy they haven't got the issues they've had, so that they're settled and they know how to manage the tenancy properly

Now I've been homeless I'd like to get involved in helping other people, further myself, better myself and help other people knowing I've got the backup of what you've gone through, not watching anyone else get into the same mess I got in

She approached me on the street when I was drinking, waiting to score some drugs. She knew what I was doing. She knew me for some time and said: "When are you going to change this lifestyle?". I said: 'I'd love to change it right this minute.' She said to call her at 12 o'clock. I went in at 12 o'clock that day and within 2 days she had me with a doctor in the drug agency and she had me scripted up and sorted out

This emphasises the importance of more informal ways of working with people, and of just being around, waiting for the right point to intervene. In a recent piece of research (Seal et al: 2004) it was found that the more chaotic clients do not necessarily need intense support and often do not respond to more rigid support structures. They prefer it to be short but often, at a time of their choosing and within their control.

There was an interest in support being delivered by peers, with people actively wanting to deliver this. Some felt this was a more effective way of working, with users having unique angles to pass on, while others thought that that it was simply practical and more efficient, given the busy schedules of workers.

Listen. Listen to what our views are. Not just write them down on pieces of paper and try and work it out later

I could do community service. I could be a listener. You don't have to be a writer to be a listener. (The individual could not read or write) And give advice on what I know

The Salvation Army once or twice a month should sit everybody in a room and say their points of view because there's a lot of people they could help. Because project workers, they're so busy, they can get people in to help them as well, people who have been homeless before

Recommendations

- Key-working, and support in general, should be emphasised in hostels
- The emphasis of key-working should be beyond the practical and included psychological and emotional work, all of which can be seen as legitimate under supporting people funding
- Training on active listening should be compulsory for all hostel workers, not just resettlement workers. All clients should have a least one dedicated worker who follows them through the hostel

3.6.b Best Interventions and Services – Direct Access

People who were interviewed showed a high level of appreciation for direct access services, seeing them as the most tangible support they got.

The importance of such direct access services as a precursor for people being involved in secondary services, (see 3.6.d below), should be recognised. In addition, for some the actual service was less important than how they were treated by these services.

In fact one of the most common denominators to people valuing the service was how they were treated, even when they did not get what they wanted or needed, it was important to be treated with respect and afforded some dignity.

It's a place you can go to and they'll provide you with meals. And fresh clean clothes. There's a doctor that you don't have to be registered to

Just how they explain things and they follow everyone up in the same procedure, so nobody gets better service than others. They treat everyone really fairly

It's really well organised. The staff are very polite and nice. There's staff here with security on, so you feel secure, because I didn't feel secure where I was living before

Recommendation

- Supporting People should insist more on a focus on clients views of services as a part of their reviewing process and talk to homeless people directly about their experiences

3.6.c Worst Interventions and Services – Delays in Processing

By far the most common comment about 'worst' element of service provision was about things taking too long. People referred to Local Authorities, the Job Centre and Housing Options.

3.6.d Worst Interventions and Services – Night Shelter Capacity

Of all the services, people said that there were not enough night shelters. With the dominance of Supporting People as a funding base, which brings with it an expectation of movement on the client's part, the number of night shelters across the country has dwindled (Seal: 2005). People thought that while there were night shelters, there were not enough.

People also found the allocation system too random, it was rarely done on the basis of need but on first come first served, which may actually mitigate against need, those in most need often not being the best timekeepers.

More positively people liked the Derby Nightshelter because it did not run this system and getting a place meant you had it for a few nights, affording people more respite and a space to plan more strategically what was going to happen next.

It seems that night shelters' should be valued. It is not helpful, or realistic, to say we only work with those who are contemplating change, many people's are more complex than that. Supporting People, and agencies, should recognise this and value pre-contemplative work for what it is.

If you get kicked out on a Friday and have nowhere to go and you need to sort out your money or clothes, you have nowhere to go. The night shelter only has 9 beds

I find night shelters when there's only 12 beds in a night shelter and when they open the door the first 12 through get a bed and if you don't get in you don't get a bed

In Derby they have another system. Like if I secured a bed last night and if I got in there tonight I secure a bed there tonight for myself

Recommendations

- Night shelter and pre-contemplative services, such as primary care services, should be seen as a priority and be seen as legitimate services for funding from Supporting People as a part of getting people into the cycle of change
- Access to beds should not be done on the basis of first come first served but on need, with a minimum of two night stays

3.6.e Worst Interventions and Services – The Need for Information

Given the previous findings showing the extreme lack of knowledge people have about council services, it seems this is an area that needs some work. In a previous piece of research (Groundswell: 2005) Groundswell found that this is done most effectively through peer networks, as people value knowledge from other clients, often over the information given to them by workers. Positively, this report has already discussed how clients wanted to see and participate in more peer led work, (see 3.6.a).

The best thing they can do at the minute is point you in the right direction for accommodation. They need to make it clear to you that there are other places that can help you. There's no point walking around looking for things that don't exist

I only know about the refuges. I didn't know about anything else, like the help with rent arrears. I probably wouldn't be in this situation now

Recommendations

- There should be a publicity campaign about the existence and nature of services. These should be done in homeless services but also services such as doctors, work and benefits agencies
- There should be investment in developing homeless peer educators, who are again trained in the nature of existing services

3.6.f Worst Interventions and Services – Opening hours

There were great concerns about the opening hours of services, particularly front line and primary care services. Interestingly, the main concern was what may happen to people before and after services close.

Clients are not necessarily asking for more opening hours but for services to be mindful of when they are open. It seems services may not be opening with the needs and lifestyle of their clients in mind, their opening times are driven by some other imperative.

For example, the night shelter opens at quarter to nine and closes at eight o'clock in the morning. In between that time, what do you do? What do you do? There's a lot of lads getting into trouble, committing offences and all that but there's no need for it. If they had somewhere to sit.

Recommendation

- Opening hours should be reviewed regularly in consultation with the clients who use such services

3.7 Short and Long Term Aspirations

People's short term goals were on the whole realistic. Even those who used this question to attack the unfairness of the situation or erroneously attack other groups, such as asylum seekers for being put first, would calm down and be fairly realistic. People tended to either want something modest or recognised that what they needed was a stop gap or a place for respite.

Longer term the picture was a little more complicated, and interesting. There seemed to be three trends in people's responses:

Some were fairly realistic, albeit with some trepidation about their options and what the future would bring.

I'd do with a bedsit. Not a problem. I have a partner, right. A bedsit would do me and my partner fine

Short term – my own space, so I could get on with my work, it's quite hard around here, noise or whatever

I'd just like more stability and security, to be able to get re-housed in an area you want, not where the council is just going to throw you in and a few months down the line you're going to be back here because of problems happening

Others talked about their ambitions for going to college, meeting a partner, having a normal home, etc. The concern here is where these ambitions become unrealistic, like myths of a perfect life they want to lead with idealised notions of family that they have never experienced. Snow and Anderson (1987) talk about such fantasy creation, seeing it as a reaction to the starkness of their present circumstances. These unrealistic expectations must be managed otherwise people may be set up to fail, failure that causes an individual to give up entirely, to embrace the homeless life style.

I like sleeping rough. I like the way I am. I've been doing it for that long now, it wouldn't be the same. I've lived on the street all me life, know what I mean?

I'm not ready to move back into a flat yet. Not at all. That's not me.

A third reaction was that some people found this a difficult question to answer. Several authors (Butcinsky: 2007, Daly: 1996) note how many homeless people, through living a very hand to mouth, precarious existence, focussed on the present, and lose the ability to think long term about their lives. They only have plans in terms weeks, days or even minutes. Consequently some found they could not answer the question, were irritated by it or just wanted to avoid it.

Recommendations

- There should be acceptance of homeless people's need for respite as well as engagement in the process of change
- For some, long or even short term goals are an unrealistic expectation and support should be provided that works towards these rather than expecting them in early support plans
- People's long-term aspirations, where they seem unrealistic, should be managed to avoid people setting themselves up to fail

3.8 Consulting Service Users

The most common reaction we got when asking people about being consulted was that they would like to be and felt that it had not been done enough.

People also thought that this needed to be through direct contact with homeless people rather than a paper based exercise. People did not feel they would fill in a survey left for them but wanted to talk to someone directly. There was also a call for more long-term work, following people through and tracing their thoughts on their journey and experiences. People also seemed to value that conducting these surveys were clients and ex-clients

The government needs to send more people round to talk to homeless people to see their point of view and see exactly what they could do

Get more people from the council to come in at least once a week and sit down and interview people that use the services. See them every week and keep up with them

They're doing the right thing by doing this survey

themselves. They felt they could have a higher degree of openness and honesty and also that it was something they could aspire to themselves.

For others this social contact should go further. They wanted meetings, finding the interaction with others to be of benefit.

Importantly, people felt that the environment for these meetings was important and wanted them to be held in 'their' environments, normally the hostels and day centres that they used. In the past many consultation events were held in supposedly neutral venues but it was felt that they were venues familiar to, or at the convenience of, the council. A final point made by one client was of constituency, ie, who should be asked about these issues, whether it should be rough sleepers or other classed as homeless.

This may sound like a difficult thing to achieve, to consult those who are not readily linked into services, but this may again be an argument for the development of peer work, as they could be better reached by their peers. Groundswell has worked with a number of councils who have made use of the street networks that exist as a source of information, research and even education. Groundswell has been asked to provide more detailed recommendations in regard to ongoing involvement of clients in the EMHF. (See Appendix 2)

Meetings and interviews each week

Maybe once a month, they should meet somewhere, everyone that's homeless, go through the council. They could bring the mayor in at Christmas, he was here last year. We know what needs to be done

It's no good asking people that are already in accommodation. It's the people who are living rough that need more support than someone who'd live in a flat. I've lived on the streets. I know how hard it gets and it is a terrible time... but it is worth asking the homeless themselves

5. Appendix 1 – Summary of Recommendations

3.1.a Family Pressures

- There is a need to look at people's experiences of family life, particularly where there is the presence of abuse, as a possible reason for them being vulnerable under the Homeless Act, in the same way that domestic violence is viewed. These investigations should be done sensitively, possibly with the use of third party advocates brought in upon detection of the issues by the council by investigating officers
- The impact of having been in care should be assessed, with a view to this again being possible grounds for vulnerability
- There is a need for earlier intervention with mediation that could be triggered through mechanisms such as school and work where it could be detected earlier. There is also a need to consider comments about how bringing in such services impacts on already vulnerable families who may feel under attrition

3.1.b Drugs

- The partnership should promote counselling and self help initiatives for drug users
- Issues around moveability of the drug using homeless population and the inability to go back to certain areas should be taken into account in terms of local connection and allocation

3.1.c Prison

- The partnership should prioritise the development of resettlement services for ex-offenders as it is doing in the East Midlands Resettlement Strategy and support the recommendations around resettlement from 'Custody to Community'

3.1.d Domestic Violence

- To support, but also to promote alternative to, refuges. Alternative need to include the supportive element and could include such initiatives as supported lodging schemes or self help mentoring schemes not necessarily attached to accommodation
- Agencies, including the police, should actively work together to accommodate the needs of women escaping domestic violence and promote understanding of its dynamic

3.1.e Separation/Relationship Breakdown

- To see the splitting of tenancies as a legitimate course of action, but that this will take some mediating, preferably with support for both parties

3.3 Experience and Views on Preventative Measures

- To promote the existence of council services related to homelessness to the public and homeless people, including the promotion of peer education schemes

3.4.a Job Centre and Personal Benefits

- The partnership should publicise the turnaround targets for the benefits agency and the fact that homeless people are allowed to use services and daycentres as proxy addresses

3.4.b Employers

- To liaise with organisation such as Off the Streets and into Work to investigate how training and work based programmes can be more accommodating of homeless people's needs

3.4.c Housing Benefit

- The partnership should publicise information on the turnover targets of housing benefit and complaints procedures
- The partnership should liaise with the courts and judges to try and establish councils trying to evict people for arrears culminated through slow payment of housing benefit as being illegitimate grounds for eviction

3.4d Private accommodation and Landlords

- The partnership should promote greater publicity and funding for the councils schemes for working with private landlords. There should be active involvement of homeless people in the design and monitoring of such schemes

3.4.e Local Authority

- The partnership should promote greater transparency of the points schemes for housing allocation with periodic review involving consultation with stakeholders including homeless people
- Service users should be involved in the writing of standard correspondence ,for example, refusal letters
- There should be greater promotion of the complaint procedures for housing options, training for staff on homelessness issues and involvement of homeless people in the quality monitoring of services

3.5 Views on Accommodation Provided

- Hostels should be audited, involving consultation with clients, on a regular basis, based on the criteria used in the research. Particular emphasis should be place on user involvement, activities, visitor policies, involvement and attitudes towards rules and regulations of hostels and pets policies
- A project that promotes and works with agencies to involve clients in the drawing up of house rules, including visitor policies, should be undertaken
- Activities not necessarily to do with people's immediate needs; but aimed at the promotion of involvement, the development of self efficacy and confidence should be seen as legitimate areas for funding by Supporting People
- Training should be provided for clients on the issues they may encounter from other clients in hostel accommodation

3.6.a Best Interventions and Services – Key-working and Support

- Key-working, and support in general, should be emphasised in hostels
- The emphasis of key-working should be beyond the practical and included psychological and emotional work, all of which can be seen as legitimate under supporting people funding
- Training on active listening should be compulsory for all hostel workers, not just resettlement workers. All clients should have a least one dedicated worker who follows them through the hostel

3.6.b Best Interventions and Services – Direct Access

- Supporting People should insist more on a focus on clients views of services as a part of their reviewing process and talk to homeless people directly about their experiences

3.6.d Worst Interventions and Services – Night Shelter Capacity

- Night shelter and pre-contemplative services, such as primary care services, should be seen as a priority and be seen as legitimate services for funding from Supporting People as a part of getting people into the cycle of change
- Access to beds should not be done on the basis of first come first served but on need, with a minimum of two night stays

3.6.e Worst Interventions and Services – The Need for Information

- There should be a publicity campaign about the existence and nature of services. These should be done in homeless services but also services such as doctors, work and benefits agencies
- There should be investment in developing homeless peer educators, who are again trained in the nature of existing services

3.6.f Worst Interventions and Services – Opening hours

- Opening hours should be reviewed regularly in consultation with the clients who use such services

3.7 Short and Long Term Aspirations

- There should be acceptance of homeless people's need for respite as well as engagement in the process of change
- For some, long or even short term goals are an unrealistic expectation and support should be provided that works towards these rather than expecting them in early support plans
- People's long-term aspirations, where they seem unrealistic, should be managed to avoid people setting themselves up to fail

Appendix 2 – Ongoing Involvement of Clients (Recommendations)

Aim: To develop a sub-group of the East Midlands Homelessness Forum (EMHF) made up of people with experience of homelessness to ensure that homeless people's views are heard at this level and that strategic direction in homelessness in the East Midlands benefits from the experience and perspective of homeless people

- Step 1. Include 'client feedback' as a standing agenda item on the EMHF agenda
- Step 2. EMHF members visiting local projects to inform them of the role of the EMHF and promote the idea of the Client Forum
- Step 3. Establish training program in peer facilitation based on the model developed by Groundswell for St Mungo's with the addition of basic training in research. Ensure this program is accredited and expenses for individuals' travel and refreshments are allowed for
- Step 4. Train between 6-10 clients in peer facilitation and research. The St Mungo's programme included 8 days training and one-to-one support. The original EMHF members visiting local projects could provide this one-to-one support
- Step 5. Trained clients initially work with EMHF members facilitating groups at projects in their area
- Step 6. Trained clients work independently with groups in their area, facilitating groups to discover their concerns and request feedback on work undertaken by the EMHF, feeding back to the Forum in person or written or via the phone
- Step 7. Evaluate the program
- Step 8. Establish another training program in 12 months time to account for the fact that trained peer facilitators will move on