



London Borough of Croydon Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013 Client Consultation Report

May 2008

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1. Introduction

The London Borough of Croydon – Croydon Council (CC) – commissioned Groundswell to consult with people currently experiencing homelessness in the borough in order to inform their Homelessness Strategy 2008- 2013.

Specifically, CC wanted to gain a greater understanding of three main areas of homeless people’s experience. Firstly, the consultation was to discover more about their experiences to date: where it was that people went to first when having housing issues and why they went there; what sort of expectation they had of CC; the actual experience they had on first approaching the Council and their ongoing experience.

Secondly the consultation was to gain a clearer understanding of homeless people’s aspirations around housing and around training and work, and what barriers people faced when trying to reach those aspirations.

Finally, CC has indicated a commitment to making the service users’ perspective central to the decision making process on both policy direction and its practical implementation. This research marks the start of this process, with the third focus being to gain an understanding of what specifically service users wanted to be involved in, and what barriers they faced to getting more involved.

Groundswell consulted with 40 people experiencing homelessness in Croydon using Peer Research methodology – 18 took part in one to one interviews and 22 in focus groups. This was followed by a stakeholder consultation event.

At the end of the report, we make clear recommendations to be included in the new homelessness strategy. These are drawn from the findings of the focus groups and interviews with homeless people, and from further input by Croydon stakeholders at the consultation event.

2. Executive Summary

Headlines From the Report

The Assessment Process

- There is a lack of transparency and understanding around the assessment processes, housing nominations and what services can and cannot be provided by whom. Lack of clarity on how 'priority' is determined appears to be having an adverse impact on clients and staff in Croydon's homeless sector, establishing false expectations and leading to frustration and lack of communication.
- Clients received inconsistent treatment from staff, with most reporting a negative experience. This may well be related to the fact that their expectations, such as **"at least getting a place to stay that night"**, were not met.
- It is the case that many people who present as homeless will be turned down after going through the assessment process – this decision is most often a shocking experience for people who are more than likely in a vulnerable position already. People did not feel that they were given appropriate support or options at this time.

Resettlement

- Participants saw not being priority, lack of housing and confusion around the housing list and nominations process as the biggest barriers to resettlement
- Most people sited good keyworking as the essential ingredient for assisting their resettlement

Private Accommodation

- Over 50% said they would be prepared to move into the private sector.
- Saving for deposit and being able to afford rent were the most sited issue.
- People needed stronger assurances in regards to length of tenancy and rights before they would feel able to move into the private sector.
- Some were prepared to wait as long as it took to get a council property.

Training and Employment

- The majority of participants expressed a desire to be in work or training – however, very few actually were.
- Participants cited ‘cost’ and ‘living in temporary accommodation’ as the biggest barriers to **training**, whilst ‘lack of qualifications’ and ‘lack of experience’ were seen as the biggest barriers to **working**.
- Some believed that if they earned the minimum wage, which was all they expected to get, then working would not make financial sense.

Client Involvement

- Most people we spoke with wanted to be involved, either out of the desire to help others or feeling strongly that things needed to change.
- The most popular things to being involved with were “speaking with young people about the realities of homelessness” and “participating in a forum with other people experiencing homelessness”
- The biggest barrier was “there’s not enough information” and the next biggest barrier was “no one asks me”.

3. Acknowledgements

Groundswell would like to thank and acknowledge: the researchers involved in the project, Corine Davidson, Andrew Campbell and Stine Burmølle; and Mike Seal, who assisted Groundswell by analysing the results from the interviews.

Our gratitude to all the project staff who made us feel welcome and encouraged their clients to participate, including staff at: SLYMCA, CCHA, ARP, Gilroy Court, Knights Millennium Foyer, Leaf House and Alex Truss at the Probation Service.

Finally, we would particularly like to thank the people who participated in focus groups or one to one interviews for speaking so openly and generously about your experiences. Those interviewed were asked if they were happy for us to thank them in person, and many of them agreed. Unfortunately it proved impossible to thank specific participants, as our confidentiality procedure was somewhat too thorough and we were unable to retrieve their names after concluding the study. We apologise and would like to reiterate our gratitude to all those who took part.

4. Methodology

Groundswell conducted this consultation using Peer Research, which means that people with experience of homelessness were involved at every stage of the research process. We use this process because we believe it:

- Shifts the power base and ownership of the research process to 'non experts', thus reducing the 'academicism' of research, making it more accessible and usable for clients and service providers.
- Helps to create more appropriately designed research tools – not just the wording of questionnaires but how to promote, reward with respect and organise research.
- Often creates greater empathy between interviewer and interviewee and a tendency to describe or explain in more depth as a result.
- Reduces hierarchies within the research environment (between researcher and researched but also between 'academic' and 'peer' researcher).
- Uses research as a tool of empowerment.
- Makes real attempts to transform the material conditions of existence for marginalised groups, not merely to describe the world but to change it.

Survey questions and focus group guides:

The surveys and guides were developed by the Groundswell team, which includes: trained researchers with personal experience of homelessness; Mike Seal – academic and author; and Groundswell core staff, in consultation with the London Borough of Croydon's Homelessness Strategy Manager Rebeccah Clews, Homelessness Strategy Project Officer Sarah Apiny and Homeless Persons Section Manager Paul Aston.

The interview and focus group were tested with people who have experience of homelessness – who were able to identify inappropriate assumptions and language and provide feedback to researchers on their interviewing and facilitating technique.

Promotion

We aimed to speak with 40 people altogether, including under 25s, over 25s, people sleeping rough, ex offenders and families. Providers working with these groups were approached by both the Homelessness Strategy Manager and Groundswell staff, and times and venues for the research were agreed. Posters and A5 leaflets were produced to advertise the research and sent to named people at the projects that would host the groups and interviews.

Research

One to one audio recorded interviews, including a number of structured and semi structured questions, were completed with 18 people. All interviews took place within homeless provisions in a confidential space – at no times were staff present.

Three focus group/workshops were held: two for families – one at Leaf House with two participants and one at Gilroy Court B&B with eight people – and another for under 25s at South London YMCA where 12 people attended. Opinions were gathered utilising a combination of listing and ranking exercises and discussion related to the themes of the research.

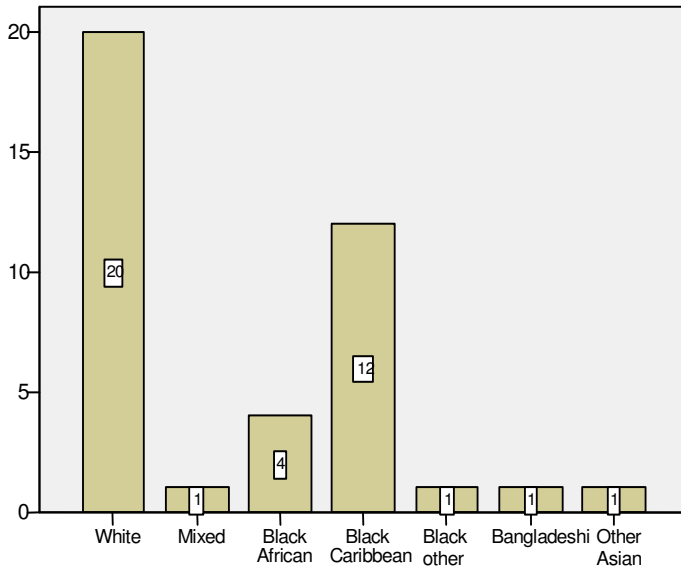
Stakeholders Event

Finally, on the 22nd of May Groundswell facilitated an event where stakeholders, including clients, were invited to hear preliminary findings and issues/questions and problems that were emerging from what clients said. 23 people participated, representing statutory and non-statutory agencies with an interest in homelessness. Participants voted on the issues/problems/questions that concerned them most and the top four were discussed in detail, with each group producing ideas on how they might be overcome. Participants voted on the ideas they thought would have most impact and would be most achievable. Results from this event have been worked into the recommendations, and a table of the ideas appears in Appendix A.

5. Demographics

A total of 40 people experiencing homelessness participated in this research.

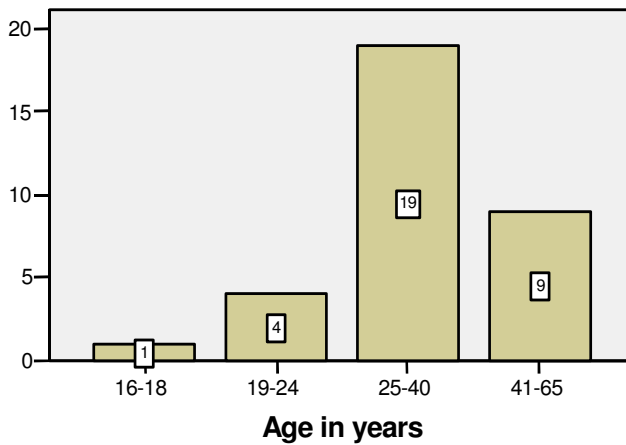
Ethnicity



Black and minority ethnic representation

In terms of ethnicity the sample is very representative. In its last review, Croydon identified that 50% of its applicants were from minority ethnic groups, and 33% were African Caribbean. This compares favourably with the statistics above of 51.4% and 29.7%, respectively.

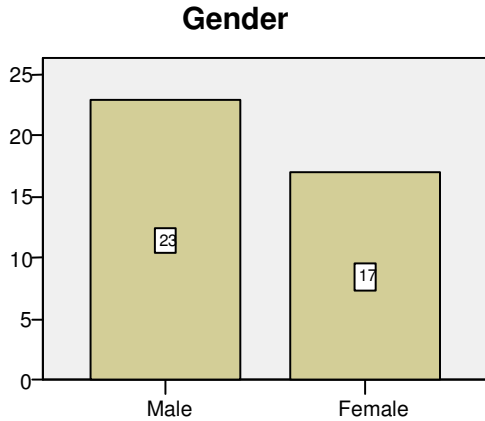
Age



Age

The Croydon 2004 survey found that 150 out of 1100 presentations were 'young people', although the term is not numerically defined. Assuming that 'young

people' denotes under 25s, this would make our sample very representative. Similarly the report indicated that 3% (40) were under 18s, again making this sample broadly representative.

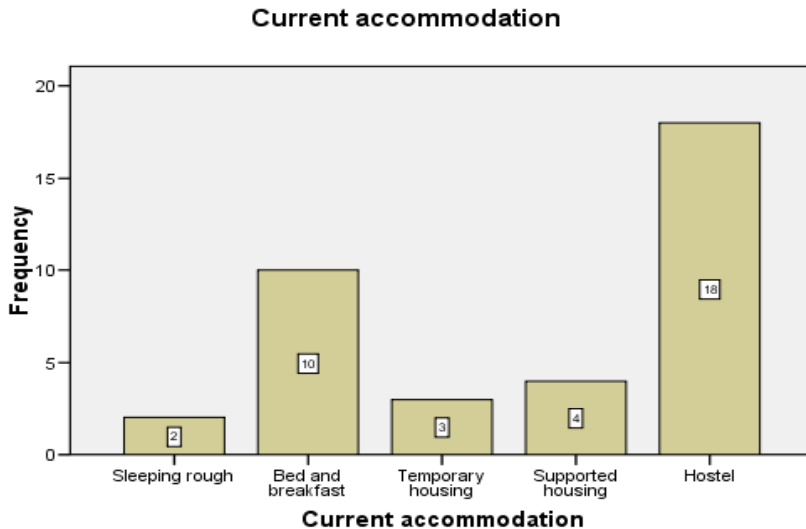


Gender

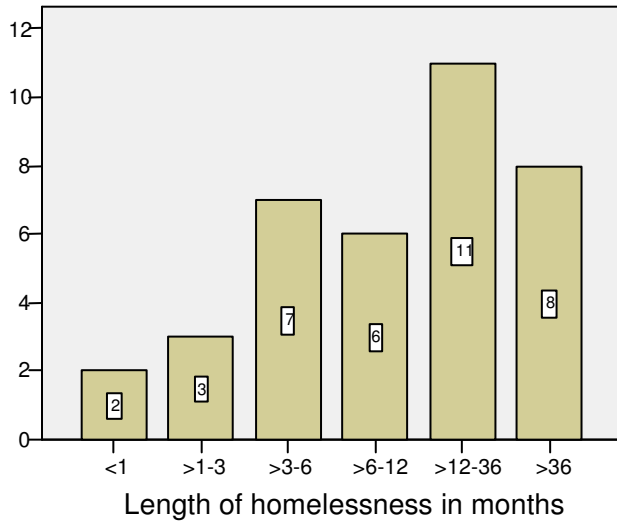
Overall, a high proportion of women were represented in this study. While Croydon do not keep statistics on this issue, according to several profiles of rough sleepers and hostel residents, 80% of single homeless people are male. Similar statistics are not kept for homeless families, although such households traditionally have a large percentage of female membership (Crisis: 2003). Accommodating this may put the figure for homeless women at around 25%, slightly above the average. Women's perspectives are often underrepresented in homelessness research, so it is interesting that this was not the case in this study.

Families

We spoke with 10 families. Croydon in 2004 indicated that half of their applications were from families. This sample therefore has a slight over-representation of single homeless people.



Length of homelessness



Length of homelessness

While figures are not available for Croydon, the spread of time spent homeless is broadly compatible with national figures (Crisis: 2004), directly comparable figures being 18-25% at 0-6 months and 15% at 6-12 months.

6. Findings

6.1 Causes

The causes of homelessness are well documented, with family breakdown, drug and alcohol abuse, criminality, bereavement and mental health issues the most common. What we discovered was that most people had a complex combination of at least three of the above, where one issue arises and leads to another one. A common theme for participants was family breakdown in one form or another, but it was often the case that beneath that breakdown was drug and/or alcohol abuse, and mental health issues which may or may not have been related. The following narrative illustrates how one cause is often interrelated to another and makes the case for preventative work. As one participant put it: **“Get a better knowledge of why people are homeless and maybe that would prevent people from being homeless.”**

I lost my brother when I was younger, you know, at 13 – he was only 17 at the time. So I went through all those kind of things. So I grew up quite quickly and most of my friends, even a few of my friends were always older than me but even still quite immature. But I was...I’ve been quite an old man quite young. I’ve got a big grown man in a young person’s body. So I didn’t have too much people to really kind of pour out my problems and my issues and so on. That helped. I spoke to him and that helped. You know as I said being homeless you do ...it’s not good. I won’t lie I did do quite a bit of crime that year. You know got into crime, and er... yeah just you know, you start probably drinking a little bit more than you probably should do and even smoking and all these kind of things like that...okay I haven’t got an address so if I do criminal activities, it’s not like they can come and kick my door down at 3 am in the morning and take me out of my house. Because I haven’t got a house.

The following quotes indicate that the complex combination of factors is widespread. This map of experiences informs the entirety of this report, as when people go through the assessment process, try to move on to a stable tenancy or approach training or work these experiences are at the forefront of their minds.

I was actually living in Hull. And it was about 1985 it would be. And my wife died. And everything just went...she was only 39.... And everything just went up the wall – I started drinking, couldn’t work, I worked for the railway 27 years I did. I was in the forces as well as a member of British Legion. And then I started drinking too much, can’t work as it turned out, so when I did eventually get out of it, I came down to London because there was work down here and it was finding accommodation was just impossible.

my mum kicked me out. My mum kicked me out because she said I can’t stay there. Because obviously I was Muslim – she’s Christian she doesn’t like you know get on with all of that stuff.

We had a four bedroomed house from the Housing Association and my kids went into care, and I was.... I got banged up. And then went downhill from there really.

I snapped. I actually.. I was so... got to the point I actually went to the hospital and I asked them to assess me because I felt as though I could seriously hurt somebody at the time because I was so... I just felt that I could snap at any minute, if someone said the wrong thing.

6.2 Dealings with Croydon Council

Fewer than half of the people we spoke with approached Croydon Council first when becoming homeless. Of those who did not, six went to drug and alcohol services including ARP, Mainliners and Drug Agency; three went to HAP<25; and two went to probation services. Many of those who did not first approach the council stated that this was because they felt that they would not get help, in the main because they understood that they would not be priority and as a result would not be assisted.

Most people we spoke with had fairly realistic expectations of what the council could do for them. They did not expect to be housed immediately, but were under the impression that they would receive some sort of assistance – either in finding some immediate emergency accommodation, sign posting to another service or locating the necessary documentation to prove their priority.

Participants' main interaction with the Council's Homelessness services was being assessed to decide if they were priority or not. This experience was more often than not a difficult one where most people felt "disbelieved" and "mistrusted".

Many people believed that they had not been treated fairly and should have been accepted as priority; particularly an issue for people whose problems could be seen as discretionary – such as depression. Some indicated that evidencing their position was impossible, especially in the case of domestic violence, and they therefore abandoned the application process. Others indicated that they had a strong case for being accepted as priority, specifically individuals who had received psychiatric intervention, were under eighteen and diagnosed as schizophrenic.

I had to convince him that I was really ill. He didn't believe my word – I had to literally go and struggle to get my doctors' letters it was just the fact of.... I mean surely if they would have looked in their computer, and done a bit more research they would have seen that I am in mental health. I gave them the number for them to do it themselves but I had to do it myself.

In contradiction to the majority viewpoint, one young person was very positive about the process:

I went to Croydon Council – the members of staff were very helpful , very helpful and seemed like they...genuinely cared like. They showed care and you know. I explained that...because I had a bit of ID problem. But they worked something out with me do you know what I mean. Birth certificate and certain things but you know they really did help me...

Several others indicated that they had been dealt with fairly and efficiently; more often than not these people had been found to be priority need.

The wait for a decision on priority status was a distressing factor for some, further compounding an already difficult situation. On finding out that they were not priority, most people indicated that there was not much assistance available beyond being given “a list of places”. One young person was not even told about HAP<25. In one focus group there was general agreement that being assessed as not priority is **“the end of the story”**. It seems that this decision was not always conveyed with the sensitivity you might expect. Significant numbers felt **“disrespected”**, like staff were a **“bit rude”** and **“weren’t bothered”**.

“well they just said I weren’t vulnerable enough and just left me out on the street basically”

Significant numbers felt that more should have been done to help at this point:

Even point you in the right direction, tell you about other projects. Because I think it’s hard for single homeless people – there’s not that much advice and help out there for us. So I think Croydon Council should have more responsibility if they can’t do anything for us then they should point us in the direction of a project that could help us.

Some believed that the way they felt about how they had been treated was related to their own frustration that their situation has not been resolved in the way they wanted, and perhaps less about the attitudes they encountered. A total of 24 of the 40 people involved in the research indicated they were not accepted as priority.

Lack of understanding about why people were made priority or not was common, with almost a quarter of participants not even certain whether they had been accepted or not. Individuals regularly mentioned one group or another that they thought were automatically priority, which as far as we understand was not the case. This misinformation must add to the confusion and frustration people feel: **“I tried my best to help myself – but I need someone to deal with my case now – I don’t understand why I’m not considered priority.”**

A significant number of participants across interviews and focus groups indicated that if one person were to deal with their case, they would find it easier to understand what was going on and furthermore wouldn’t have to go through their story over and over again.

Beyond placement in temporary accommodation, people did not seem to have much interaction with the council apart from “handing in forms”. Some of them mentioned no contact with the council for more than 2 years, backing up previous perceptions that once you were on the housing list you received yearly contact at best.

We asked people in interviews to make suggestions about what Croydon Council could do for people experiencing homelessness that they do not do at the moment. In terms of physical provision, a number of people said that there needs to be a night shelter in Croydon – one said there needs to be emergency accommodation especially for young people. Others focused on the attitudes of staff and being offered alternatives when it is apparent the council has no duty of care.

They have to make you feel comfortable. They make you feel so uncomfortable. When I left that place I was in tears, with bags – I didn't know what to do. They didn't make me clear of anything. Just basically get your bags, we can't help. They didn't give me any alternatives.

It is unclear what factors make for a bad experience and a good experience with the council, apart from a general trend that those who have had a duty towards them reported slightly better experiences. Suffice it to say that the service people are receiving is not consistent and seemed to be determined by individual council officers.

6.3 Getting and sustaining tenancy

There were a minority of people we spoke with who were not interested in moving on at all from temporary accommodation:

Being truthful on that mate, I don't want to move on. I like it here. I don't want to move on, mate. I don't want the responsibilities and all that like. I am alcoholic, I am a drug addict. Yeah? And I just don't want the responsibilities of accommodation. I would rather just stay here, mate. If they chuck me out of here, I'd just go and sleep by outside Aldi's. Simple as that.

This was not the case for most though. The majority wished to move on, but believed that the biggest barrier to getting a tenancy was not being priority. The second biggest barrier they perceived was not enough accommodation and, related to this, the long housing list. In addition to the length of the housing list, confusion/ lack of understanding came up time and time again in relation to the housing list and nominations process.

Some believed that the length of time in temporary accommodation was what made it difficult to move on, specifically saying that they had become or feared becoming institutionalised. There was acknowledgement that good keyworking helped: **“just really making sure you've got the right keyworker that's handling all your paperwork correctly, keeping you posted on things that's happening with**

the council and nominations and all these sorts of things like that.” A small number of participants believed that they were not getting the right sort of information from their keyworker – even though this issue arose in a minority of cases, it is still concerning as we found that in many cases keyworkers were brokering deals in regard to the Housing List.

Private sector

40% of participants had experience of renting in the private sector, and over 50% indicated that they would be interested in going into the private sector. However, for most of them financing that possibility, both saving for a deposit and paying private rent, seemed unrealistic:

Cause I basically struggle alone, once I've paid the rent here, once I've got my food and shopping, bit of my tobacco money, I put a few pounds on just with travel money, like oyster cards and that's it basically – I'm skint... you're sort of left with maybe one or two pound left maybe, if you are lucky... It is hard. I can't save at all. It's not enough money to save. I sometimes struggle as it is. Sometimes, the odd week, i might have to go a bit low on food and that... I end up going for handouts like to Queens Gardens... they give out like soup, sandwiches, loaves of bread etc.

Many were under the opinion that private landlords would not accept housing benefit and suggested that there should be a list of “viable landlords” or property made available to people experiencing homelessness.

Others were concerned about stability in the private sector, and some of this group indicated that they would continue to wait for a council property no matter how long it took. The particular issues concerning them were: the length of tenancy; fear that they would be asked to leave at short notice, at the whim of a landlord, and plunged back in to homelessness; people also felt that they did not know their rights or how to fight for them if they had issues with a private landlord. Interestingly the individual quoted below associated this stability with independence.

because when you've got a council place, you sign a tenancy which is normally a long hold tenancy. If they want to get you out of there, it's a lot more procedures then getting you out of a private. Private for example, they own the buildings – if they want to sell it or move you out, they can. Whereas Croydon Council ...a council is a little bit more fair. If you had noise, you would get warning letters, all these little things... if something breaks, Croydon Council fix it, you phone the landlords you can wait for donkeys. I had a boiler that didn't work and I waited 11 weeks to get hot water from my landlord because he was too busy in another country to worry about my heating. You know so, so it's just a case of I don't find them ideal at all. They don't give you stability and independence that you feel you need.

We asked what people thought the Council could do to encourage more people to access the private sector. The response was clear and directly related to the issues above: an accessible rent deposit scheme, a list of recommended landlords who accept Housing Benefit, support around dealing with landlords and assistance to cover high rents, advertising in projects like the YMCA, Knights Millennium Foyer and CCHA, protocols with private landlords that would ensure fair treatment of tenants.

6.4 Getting and sustaining training and work

Of the 40 people we spoke with, eight were currently participating in training and four were working, two of those in voluntary positions. Despite these low numbers, over half of the people interviewed said that they wanted to get work and most of these indicated that they wanted to access training. So what is getting in the way?

Many people mentioned that their housing situation was the biggest barrier – either the environment or the anxiety at not having a stable home put training and work well down their priority list. Specifically in relation to training, participants said that the cost and finding places on courses were barriers. In relation to work, they said lack of qualifications and experience were significant barriers. What came out of the focus group at the YMCA, backed up by some people interviewed, was the issue of people’s criminal records being a barrier, whilst families participating in focus groups highlighted childcare as a barrier.

People interviewed who wanted to work were mostly, interestingly, split between trades, working in building or as an electrician, and care work with young people or marginalised groups.

6.5 Getting Involved

A large majority of people said they wanted to be involved. People especially showed interest in “speaking with young people about the realities of homelessness” and “participating in a forum with other people experiencing homelessness” (both selected by 15 out of 18 people). Other options were very popular also – see table below:

Involvement options given	# of people (of 18)
Speaking to young people about the reality of homelessness	15
Sitting on a forum with other people experiencing homelessness	15
Decisions at accommodation you use	14
Being a mentor for other people experiencing homelessness	13
Decisions that affect all people experiencing homelessness in Croydon	13
Sitting on very formal meetings at council with senior managers	11
Staff recruitment	11
House meetings	10
Training staff	9
Inducting new staff in the homeless sector	8

The biggest barrier was “there’s not enough information” and the next biggest barrier “no one asks me”. Only 5 out of 18 people indicated that a barrier for them becoming involved was “not enough incentive”.

Interestingly no clients attended the consultation event, despite the fact that 61% of people interviewed said they would be interested in “going to council and participating in very formal meetings with senior managers” and Groundswell staff promoted the event when conducting the interviews and revisited the projects two weeks prior to the event. Many people interviewed when asked who else should be involved included keyworkers; as keyworkers attended the event and show a real commitment to improving services for clients in Croydon – perhaps the key to greater client buy-in is via keyworking staff.

7. Recommendations

- 1. Assessments.** Croydon Council should review its assessment process, to ensure that:
 - 1.1.** There are clear procedures in place for the assessment process, meaning that the assessment experience is consistent for clients regardless of which staff member they are dealing with. The assessment process should then be independently monitored.
 - 1.2.** Staff are trained in delivering assessment procedures to these standards.
 - 1.3.** Clients are involved in developing and monitoring the assessment procedures.
 - 1.4.** Wherever possible ensure that the same staff member deals with any one individual.

- 2. Non priority clients.** Croydon Council staff should deal more appropriately with those who are deemed non priority:
 - 2.1.** Train staff in customer care and instil a greater consciousness of the harsh realities of homelessness and the likely impact that a negative decision will have on people.
 - 2.2.** Provide clients with clear, empathetic explanations, both written and verbal, indicating: what decision has been made about their priority status; up to date information on the housing alternatives now open and how to access them, and on support services available and how to access them.
 - 2.3.** Offer resources, such as phone calls, internet usage and travel fares, to ensure that those deemed non-priority are able to access the support suggested to them.

- 3. Information.** Croydon Council needs to provide produce and disseminate clear information on the Housing services it provides, how to access these services, who is eligible to use them and what to expect when using them. This information needs to be made available not only to the general public, but also to staff within the council and to other relevant support providers.
 - 3.1.** A wide information campaign for those threatened with homelessness, using diverse and relevant methods to reach suitable groups – for example, a text information service to people’s mobiles, in addition to posters, leaflets and web-based information. Disseminating through standard routs: voluntary sector services, criminal justice, drug and alcohol services, and broader through library’s, hospitals, GP’s, schools, clubs and associations,
 - 3.2.** An information campaign clearly explaining the Housing List and Nominations process.
 - 3.3.** An up-to-date, comprehensive website.

4. **Joint working.** The council should improve working links between its different departments, and with other organisations working in the homelessness field.
 - 4.1. Joint working protocol. A joint working protocol, should be created - firstly between the Housing and Social Services Departments, but ultimately for all services working with homeless people in Croydon. A meeting schedule should be drawn up to begin this process as soon as possible, to continue momentum from the Stakeholder Consultation Event.
 - 4.2. Induction and training. The council should review its induction and training to include learning about the work of other departments and meetings with staff from those departments.
 - 4.3. A shadowing or secondment scheme should be set up to enable staff to spend some time in another department or a partner agency. Part of the process should then be to share learning with their colleagues when they return to their jobs.

5. **Private rented accommodation.** In order to support more people to take up private rented accommodation the council should:
 - 5.1. Offer and publicise an easily accessible rent deposit scheme in projects like the YMCA, Knights Millenium Foyer and CCHA, and through Job Centre Plus.
 - 5.2. Create, disseminate and regularly update a list of recommended landlords who accept Housing Benefit.
 - 5.3. Offer support and housing advice around dealing with landlords.
 - 5.4. Promote protocols with private landlords that would ensure fair treatment of tenants.
 - 5.5. Create a council funded shopfront, with no fees for landlords, as a one-stop shop for private rented accommodation, information about other services, assistance in finding, securing and maintaining accommodation. The rent deposit scheme and other related services should operate from this site.

6. **Training & Employment.** In collaboration with a training provider, the council should create and promote training programmes designed specifically for people experiencing homelessness. Key elements of these programmes should be:
 - Recognised qualifications in the building and care work industries.
 - Direct links with employers to ensure a clear path into work.
 - Support throughout the training programme. This should assist primarily with housing, but also have the ability to sign post to other services such as drug/alcohol abuse and mental health. Support should continue to be offered into the first stages of work.

7. **Involvement.**
 - Council Staff should 'reach out' to clients, visiting the projects and taking opportunities to find out directly about their experiences.
 - When engaging stakeholders from direct services Croydon should request and expect representation from both staff and client groups

- Consider the establishment of and promote a forum for users of homelessness services, which would then be an ongoing resource for the Council to consult about issues of policy and implementation. The council should ensure that members of the forum receive appropriate incentives and have access to training and shadowing opportunities to enable them to participate meaningfully.

8. Prevention Education Programme. The council should create a programme which enables people with experience of homelessness to deliver workshops in schools and youth clubs to educate young people about the realities of homelessness and provide information on where to get support if housing issues arise.

Appendix A: Breakdown of results from Stakeholder Consultation Event

At the event on 22 May, participants were provided with a list of the issues and questions arising from the research findings, and asked to vote on the ones they considered most important. The following four scored highest:

Issue 1. How can private sector housing become an affordable/stable option for people currently experiencing homelessness? (scored 26 points)

Issue 2. How do we improve pathways between housing and other services to ensure that homeless people are able to access advice and assistance at as early a stage as possible? (scored 26 points)

Issue 3. In general, in the assessment process people felt “disrespected”, like staff were “a bit rude” and “weren’t bothered”. Others felt the staff were “very helpful” and “genuinely cared”. Can we make this process consistently positive? (scored 24 points)

Issue 4. The assessment process is unclear – many people don’t know if they are priority, or don’t understand why they aren’t. (scored 18 points)

The participants were invited to join focus groups to discuss these issues and generate ideas about how to address them. Each group then chose the ideas that they considered most useful and presented them to the rest of the participants. Everyone then voted for which ideas they believed would have the most impact, and which were the most achievable. Below is a table showing the results of this vote, with the ideas arranged from highest to lowest perceived impact.

Ideas – overall scores

Issue	Idea	Most impact?	Most realistic?
1	Shopfront – create a private renting one-stop-shop	22	19
3	Develop standards for assessment procedures, train staff to deliver them and involve clients in monitoring	19	19
4	Launch information campaign for those threatened with homelessness	17	13
2	Set up a joint working protocol for everyone working with homeless people in Croydon	16	3
2	Expand induction and training, including cross-borough shadowing schemes	13	24
2	Better website – up to date information for staff and general public	9	5
4	Improve joint working protocol between Housing & Social Services on assessment process	5	12
1	Get DWP to advise people on rent deposit schemes	2	4
1	Build better relationships with the private sector	0	2

Appendix B: About Groundswell

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.

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.

Appendix C: Focus Group Guide

Croydon Council Focus Group Schedule

Introduction

Who are we?

Introduce self, researcher experience (mention experience of homelessness) **Only got 1.5 hours!! – this time is for you folks to talk from your experience.**

What is this about?

Groundswell have been asked by the **Croydon Council** to run focus groups with 20 people and interviews with 20 people currently experiencing homelessness in Croydon to find out:

- Clients' views of the services provided by Croydon Council
- How they can help people to move on from homelessness
- How they can help people maintain tenancy
- How they can help people get the training and work they want
- And ways in which clients could be involved in an ongoing way in the planning and monitoring of services

Confidentiality

We will record the interview to make sure that all information is collected. Your names won't be linked to anything you say and the tape will be deleted right after use, so please feel free to say what ever you want.

- The Report will go to Croydon Council in the first place
- You can get the full report if you want – web site or ask staff member

Who is Groundswell?

Groundswell UK was established in 1996, **we believe homeless people are not the problem they must be part of the solution to homelessness.** Our job is to give people experiencing homelessness opportunities and skills to provide solutions to homelessness. Groundswell is independent of (...this project, where ever you are); and Croydon Council we want to represent your honest opinions, this is a chance to make your voice heard.

Who are you folks?

Quick round of names

Things to keep in mind for the next 1.5 hours

This focus group will take 1 ½ hours, we got a lot to get through – and you’ve got a lot of vital information to tell us – to help us get the most out of our time together here are some things to keep in mind:

- Mobiles off or on silent
- Be aware that some people are more confident than others to speak avoid talking over, interrupting, dominating
- Please ask if anything is unclear!!!!!!
- We all have different experience and opinions –we want to capture this so don’t worry if you think differently to someone else!
- Incentives are given in appreciation of time and contribution – we expect that everyone will stay to the end otherwise we are unable to pay incentive

The interview

CORINE LEADS AND ANDREW TAKES NOTES IN HIS BOOK (Question 1-4 incl.)

1. Positive and negative

1. To begin we’re going to ask you about good things (positives) and bad things (negatives) about the services Croydon provide to people experiencing homelessness. **(Flipchart: Shout out and list as accurately as possible)** *(don’t worry if you have to cut people off – explain that we will come back to these lists at the end).*

2. We want to find out about your first point of contact when you became homeless or were threatened with homelessness.

2a. How many of you used the council as the first point of contact? **(Hand vote)**

- Where or who else did the rest go to? **(List in notebook)**
- Why did you go to there instead of to the council? **(note taking)**

2b. Think about when you first made contact with the council, what did you expect to get and did you get it?

Prompts:

- *What happened?*
- *What did you expect to happen?*
- *What should happen?*

3. The next couple of questions are about your ongoing experience with the council.

3a. Who was placed by the council? **(Hands vote)**

3b. (questions just for priority(people with hands up)) Where did they put you? Did it meet your needs?

3c. What have your ongoing dealings with the council been like? (**Note on flipchart**)

4. The following questions are about getting and sustaining a tenancy.

4a. What sort of barriers are there to getting a tenancy in Croydon? (**Book note**)

4b. Have any of you been evicted from a supported accommodation?
- If yes: What went wrong? What could have helped?

Prompt – *other services / other people*

4c. So when your folks get a tenancy, what do you need to sustain it?
(Spider Diagram)

4d. Which of these are the most important (**sticky vote**)

ANDREW LEADS AND CORINE TAKES NOTES IN HER BOOK (Question 5-8 incl.)

5. The following questions are about housing in the private sector

5a. Do any of you have experiences with housing in the private sector?
(Hand vote)

5b. Did you run into any problems with landlords?
- What sort of problems? (**note taking**)

5c. What about the rest of you – Have you considered housing in the private sector?
- If not why not?
- If so what are the barriers? (**Discussion and note taking**)

5d. What can Croydon council do to make housing in the private sector more likely to be an option for you? (**Discussion – note taking**)

6. These ones are about work and training and how Croydon can help you get what you want in regards to work and training
TRAINING

6a. Are people participating in any sort of training at the moment? (**flip chart list**)

6b. At what point would you want the Council to approach you about opportunities and support around training? (**Discussion – notes in book**)

6c. How should the Council approach you about opportunities and support around training? **(Discussion and notes)**

6d. What are the barriers to achieve your training aspirations? **(Note down and Sticky vote)**

WORK

6e. Are people participating in any sort of work at the moment? **(flip chart list)**

6e. At what point would you want the Council to approach you about opportunities and support around work?

6f. How should the Council approach you about opportunities and support around work?

6g. What are the barriers to achieve your work aspirations? **(Note down on blank sheets and Sticky vote)**

7. Service User Involvement

Explanation: when we talk about service user involvement we mean people who use services like (hostels, day centres, advice centres even medical, education) being given the opportunity to have a say in all the decisions that will affect them – everything from who the staff should be to how the kitchen is run.

7a) What would you be interested in getting involved in? **(list on flip chart then vote)**

7b) What are the barriers for you getting involved? **(Discussion – note taking)**

7c) Can you think of any way to overcome these barriers? – What could be done to make user involvement more like an opportunity to you?

8. Positive and negative

1. Before we finish up come back to our lists... **(Shout out and list as accurately as possible)**

Invite to event

Incentives

Evaluation

Appendix D: One to One Semi Structured Survey Questionnaire

Croydon Council Homelessness Strategy - Semi-structured interview guide

Code Number.

Insert a code number here. The code number should be the first 3 letters of the project, your name and the number interview on this day (e.g. Corine's first interview at the Hub 25 would be hub/corine/1) Make sure you speak it into the recorder at the beginning of the interview.

Code number:

Introduction

Who am I...

Name. Independent peer researcher, homelessness experience, trained to be researcher/trainer. If prompted to talk about your experience : **Only got 40m- here to find out about you –**

Confidentiality

What you say in the interview is completely confidential. We will use what you tell us to write a report. Your name will not be linked to information in the report; we will use a code throughout.

The only reason that we would break confidentiality is if you let us know something that puts you or someone else at risk of harm.

Are you happy for me to record the interview: Y/N

Why are we here?

Groundswell has been asked by **Croydon Council** to run 2 focus groups and 20 interviews with service users in the homeless sector to find out:

- Clients' views of the services provided by Croydon Council
- How they can help people to move on from homelessness
- How they can help people maintain tenancy
- How they can help people get the training and work they want
- Ways in which clients could be involved in an ongoing way in the planning and monitoring of services
- Causes of homelessness

What you tell me today will help Croydon Council to understand what it's like for people experiencing homeless and using services in Croydon and how they must act to improve the situation and help more people resettle well.

Who are Groundswell?

Groundswell UK, been around since 1996, **Our job is to give people experiencing homelessness the right opportunities and the right skills to provide solutions to homelessness. Groundswell is independent of Croydon Council and (this project, where ever you are);** we want to represent your honest opinions, this is a chance to make your voice heard.

Interview

- 40 min max
- Paid £10 for completing the survey
- Any questions you don't want to answer you do not have to

The final report will be available to be accessed on the Croydon website when the Homelessness Review is published end of July.

Knowing all that information are you happy to continue? Y/N

Do you have any questions before we start?

1. Can you tell me the service or person you went to first when you became homeless or were threatened with homelessness?

1a. If it wasn't the council: Why did you go here first?

2. At what point did you first contact the council? (what was your housing situation at the time)

2a. Can you explain to me what happened when you first went to the council about your homelessness?

2b. What did you expect to happen?

2c. Do you know if you have been accepted as priority?

3. In the following questions I want you to think about all your dealings with Croydon Council since you first went to them about your homelessness.

3a. How do the staff treat you?

- Can you give me an example?

3b. How do you feel about what the Council are able to do for you?

- Does it meet your needs?
- Can you mention 3 things that Croydon should do (that they currently don't do) for people experiencing homelessness?

3c. Can you tell me anything especially good or bad about your experience with Croydon Council? (not more than 3 of each)

4. Can you tell me a bit about what happened when you first became homeless?

5. The next questions are about getting and sustaining a tenancy.

5a. What makes it hard to get a tenancy in Croydon?

- Do you have any examples?

5b. What sort of assistance do you need to help you move on from the accommodation you are in now? (...and beyond the physical things?)

5c. How can the Croydon council help you **now** so that when you get a tenancy you will be able to keep it?

5d. Once you get your own tenancy what sorts of things do you think you will need to help you keep that tenancy?

(SPIDER)

6. The next part of the interview is about housing in the private sector.

6a. Have you ever got housing through the private sector?

- If yes: Please tell me about it (go to Qu 6b)
- If not: Have you considered housing in the private sector? (go to Qu 6c)
- If not: Why wouldn't you think about finding housing through the private sector -?

6b. Did you run into any problems with landlords or hear about others who did?

- Can you give me an example?
- Can you think of anything that could have prevented this from happen?

6c. Croydon Council wants more people to be able to find accommodation through the private sector

- How should they do that?
- How should this work?
- Can you give an example?
- What are the barriers?

7. The next questions are about training and work, what you would like to achieve and how Croydon Council can help you get where you want.

7a. At what point would it be suitable for the council to offer people assistance around training or finding work?

7b. Are you participating in any training at the moment?
-If yes what?

7c. What sort of training do you want or need at this time?

7d. What sorts of things might get in the way of you **finding** this training, **getting into** this training, **achieving well** with this training?

7e. Are you working at the moment?
-If yes, what's the nature of it?

7f. What sort of work do you want or need at this time?

7g. What sorts of things might get in the way of you **finding** this work, **achieving well** at this work?

8. It's great that we can speak with you now – but Croydon Council wants people who are experiencing homelessness to give their ideas and comments more often – how do you think they should go about making this happen?

8a) What would you be interested in getting involved in? (circle as many as apply to you)

Training staff

Speaking to young people about the reality of homelessness

House meetings

Being a mentor for other people experiencing homelessness

Inducting new staff in the homeless sector

Sitting on very formal meetings at council with senior managers

Staff recruitment

Sitting on a forum with other people experiencing homelessness

Decisions at the accommodation you use

Decisions that affect all people experiencing homelessness in Croydon

8b. Any other areas you may be interested in getting involved in?

8c. Out of the ones you've chosen which of these would you MOST want to be involved in?

8d. Why?

8e. What would encourage you to get involved?

**8f. What are the barriers for you getting involved?
-circle as many as apply to you**

My time is limited

I don't have the skills

There's not enough info

I think it might jeopardise my chance of getting a flat

I don't care

It's not cool

I don't think it changes anything

it's boring

I've got more important things to do

There is not enough incentive

I have different issues to others people who are homeless

No one has asked me

I've tried before but nothing changed

8g. Which is the most significant – biggest- barrier

8h. Indicate how to overcome the most significant barrier

8i. Are there any other barriers?

8j. What gets you interested enough to go to meetings and events?

8k. Are you interested in being a part of a group with other people who are homeless/ ex homeless?

8l. Who else should be involved?

Thank you for completing the interview – Any questions/ comments?

Croydon Council will publish the outcomes in the Homelessness Strategy which will be on the website.

When we write reports we thank people who we have spoken with – would you be happy if we wrote your name in the report? Full name/ just first name/ alias – whatever it won't be linked to anything you have said.

Do you want to be acknowledged in this report? Y/N

INFO ABOUT THE EVENT ON THE 22ND.

INCENTIVE