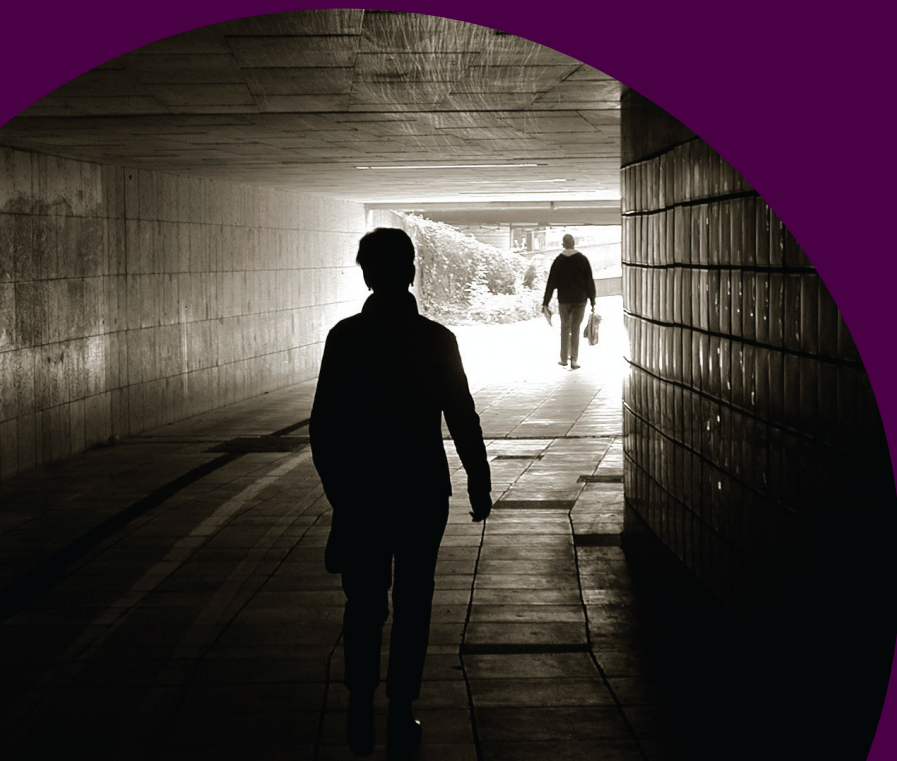


# STAYING IN

**UNDERSTANDING EVICTIONS & ABANDONMENTS  
FROM LONDON'S HOSTELS**



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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**This report has been funded by the Oak Foundation; their vision and support is greatly appreciated.**

We would also like to thank the members of our steering group who have guided the direction of the research. The organisations represented include Communities and Local Government, the Tenant Services Authority, the Chartered Institute of Housing, and the National Housing Federation. We would also like to thank our partners at The Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York and at Broadway for their contribution to the research.

Lastly, we would like to thank the clients, staff, managers and local authority representatives who shared their experiences and views with us.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Homeless Link is the national membership agency supporting organisations working directly with homeless people in England. Homeless Link has been funded by the Oak Foundation to run a project to reduce evictions and abandonments from London's homelessness services. This report looks at the causes and solutions and is the first stage of the project. The Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York provided advice on the research element of the project.**

## CONTEXT

There have been a number of central government initiatives in the last twenty years to reduce rough sleeping. In 1999, *Coming in from the cold*<sup>1</sup> built on previous successes and set an explicit target of reducing rough sleeping by two-thirds by 2002 and subsequently to “as close to zero as possible”. Despite the successes of these initiatives, the number of people sleeping rough in both London and England “flat lined” in 2003. The Places of Change programme<sup>2</sup> has invested £170 million in creating welcoming hostels in which individuals are able to rebuild their lives.

In 2006 Homeless Link launched a campaign to end rough sleeping by 2012. In November 2008 the Government launched its strategy, *No One Left Out: communities ending rough sleeping*<sup>3</sup>, in which it stated its commitment to ending rough sleeping “once and for all” in England by 2012. In the same month, the Mayor of London published his Draft Housing Strategy in which he pledged to ensure that this target was achieved in the capital.

## METHOD

For this research we reviewed existing literature and commissioned quantitative analysis of London's CHAIN data and SP outcomes/Hostels KPI data. Between July and October 2009, we visited 14 hostels and 2 day centres, as well as speaking to representatives from 4 local authorities and holding consultative focus groups with clients and outreach workers. At each hostel we interviewed the manager and held either focus groups or semi-structured interviews with clients and frontline staff. In total 64 clients, 14 hostel managers, and 40 frontline staff were involved.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

**From the literature we found that there were 5 frameworks for looking at evictions and abandonments:**

1. It is important to see eviction and abandonment in the wider context of social exclusion with eviction and abandonment impacting on the most socially excluded
2. There are individual risk factors for eviction and abandonment, with some individuals more likely to be evicted or abandon due to their demography, their support needs and level of resilience
3. Rent arrears and economic structural factors are a significant cause of evictions and abandonments
4. Evictions take places due to the hostel rules and boundaries and client behaviour
5. Improving outcomes for this client group is possible through improving team culture, involving clients in the formation of rules and boundaries and training staff in dealing with challenging behaviour, so that hostels can provide a positive experience of inclusion.

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1 <http://www.communities.gov.uk/archived/publications/housing/cominginfromcold>

2 [http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/places\\_of\\_change](http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/places_of_change)

3 <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/roughsleepingstrategy>

## PREVALENCE

### The 2009 CHAIN research on London's rough sleeper population<sup>4</sup> demonstrates change in evictions and abandonments between 2001 and 2008:

- The proportion of planned moves has grown and the level of abandonment has halved, but there is a slight increase in eviction levels
- The CHAIN report suggests that there has been an increase in substance misuse needs and resulting chaotic behaviour over this time which may have impacted on eviction rates
- Clients are twice as likely to have an eviction for behaviour as for arrears.

### Analysis of London's CHAIN data tells us that evictions and abandonment contribute to the levels of rough sleeping amongst those with the highest levels of need:

- 48% of clients who are evicted and 47% of abandoners are subsequently seen rough sleeping
- People who are evicted or abandon have usually been on CHAIN for some time
- 9% of people had multiple evictions and abandonments, but most people either only ever abandon or get evicted
- People who are evicted or abandon generally have high support needs, which are higher for the group getting evicted
  - 6 in 10 evictees and 6 in 10 abandoners had an alcohol support need
  - 6 in 10 evictees and 1 in 2 abandoners had a drug related support need
  - 4 in 10 evictees and 1 in 3 abandoners had recorded mental health problems.

### Additionally, analysis of hostel data and Supporting People data found that:

- Hostels with lower rates of unplanned moves have more exclusion policies
- Clients with unplanned moves are less likely to have had their support needs met.

## KEY FACTORS IN MAINTAINING TENANCIES ACROSS 14 HOSTELS

### Some factors cut across all types of evictions and abandonments:

- Whether evictions and abandonments are seen as preventable by the hostel, particularly the manager. Some interviewees stated that there is an adverse impact on other clients when evictions are not carried out.
- The availability of move-on was cited as a key factor that motivated clients to modify their behaviour and to maintain their tenancies.

*"...they are always swapping your keyworker, so you have to start all over again... We didn't participate. I couldn't see how we'd get out of there, people had been there six years, and there wasn't any point"*  
*Client, medium hostel*

- Relationships with staff were a key area highlighted by clients. Clients wanted staff who visibly respected and cared about them and had the skills to offer the level of support they needed. At a number of hostels, clients were dissatisfied with staff. Informal engagement was seen as particularly important.

<sup>4</sup> Cebulla A., Rice B., Tomaszewski W., and Hough J. (2009) Profiling London's rough sleepers. London, Broadway and Natcen

- The quality of the physical environment and availability of activities impacted on how motivated clients felt to maintain their tenancies.

*“it’s clean, spotless, that’s major.”*  
*Client, medium hostel*

- Many clients described hostels as tense environments or as boring. Mealtimes and night time were identified by both staff and clients at some hostels as a particular flashpoint for incidents. It was seen as important for staff to assertively maintain a safe environment and respond quickly and consistently to behaviour.
- Staff needed to have the time and the skills to challenge behaviour appropriately whilst on shift; using a less skilled team of night staff or agency staff could result in ineffective immediate responses with a lasting impact.

*“how well it’s dealt with will depend on who’s on shift- how its followed up, how its challenged. The manager will take action but the damage is done, its how it is dealt with at the time of the incident”*  
*Staff, small hostel*

- Some managers stated that having to report evictions, abandonments and serious incidents to their commissioner or another external person was important in increasing accountability and enabling a discussion about approach. It was seen as important that local authority monitoring focused on both the target to increase the proportion of planned moves, but also at the service provided.

### **EVICITION FOR BEHAVIOURAL ISSUES**

All the hostels experience challenges in managing clients’ behaviour. There are significant differences between hostels over what kinds of behaviour trigger sanctions, including eviction. Preventing eviction is both about preventing incidents from occurring and finding ways to respond to incidents without evicting.

Projects that evict least are those that regard problematic behaviour to be a support need and limit their use of escalatory sanctions. Staff teams at these services focus on the causes of problematic behaviour and look for individualised solutions. Issues are addressed face to face and with a level of mutual agreement from clients.

Clients who are evicted for behavioural reasons showed a greater resistance to reflecting on the causes than those who are evicted for arrears or abandoned.

### **There is a great deal of variety in the types of behaviour leading to sanctions:**

- Drugs and alcohol fuelled many of the incidents leading to eviction; alcohol often led to disruptive behaviour, whereas drug users would often not engage.
- Self harm is sometimes identified as an issue that could lead to eviction.
- Neighbourhood issues and anti-social behaviour are a particular challenge for some projects.
- Visitors can be problematic, both in terms of clients contravening visitor rules and visitors causing disturbances.
- Some hostels described instances of clients challenging rules leading to evictions; at a few projects there was an implicit suggestion that challenges to authority may have influenced the decision to evict on other grounds.

### **Hostels take different approaches to dealing with behavioural issues:**

- All the hostels have escalatory systems of warnings and other sanctions that can be triggered in response to behaviour contravening hostel rules.
- Some services developed alternative approaches, such as de-escalatory techniques, rewards and the withdrawal of privileges. One project uses an approach incorporating a meeting, discussion and written record similar to some warnings and contracts, but without including any threat of exclusion.
- At some services appeals are strongly encouraged to the extent that receiving a Notice to Quit (NTQ) is in practice more of a conditional threat than an actual eviction. Opinions vary on how useful this practice is.
- Some services use temporary exclusion to manage the risk that clients' behaviour presents. In many cases exclusion is for a few hours or nights only, but a minority of hostels exclude clients for longer periods. Views on this practice vary greatly, with one manager describing it as a "*discharge of responsibility*" and others seeing it as a way to manage short term risk to enable development of longer term solutions.
- Interviewees talked about the value of transfers to other provision and finding alternatives, with the Local Authority playing a key role. In some areas the system is formalised into a pathways approach, sometimes including case conferences.
- Many services emphasise the importance of involving the police when they believe an offence had been committed and described the benefits of this. Some hostels reported difficulties in getting the police to engage with them, and one hostel did not seem to use police even in serious incidents.

### **Regarding approaches to managing behaviour, the clearest distinction between hostels lay in how they used sanctions, based on their underlying ethos:**

- Hostels that are proactive in dealing with behaviour, but are not punitive had the lowest levels of evictions.

*"a stepped structured process doesn't work for this client group. If a warning system was used then 3 warnings would be used up in a weekend. If you start a process then they may disengage. Most residents here have been through the warnings process in other projects and it hasn't worked for them. We don't use a final warning, we might as well give up"*  
*Manager, very small hostel*

- There appeared to be a mismatch at some projects between expectations of behaviour and the client group that the hostel works with. At some projects, an ethos of recovery and change seems to be more significant than the support needs of their client group in influencing the level of tolerance towards behaviour.
- Some staff and managers expressed concern that warnings and contracts could lose their impact if over-used and at a few projects there seemed to be a form of 'sanctions inflation' occurring as a result.
- There was a strong emphasis amongst clients and staff on the negative impact of receiving warnings in the form of a 'letter under the door' which was experienced as 'antagonistic' and 'threatening' in comparison to a face-to-face interaction. Some projects adopt a more contract-based approach emphasising two-way discussion, an increased offer of support, and an individualised and mutually agreed warning or contract, with one client stating that:

*"The contract system is good, it makes you think they want to keep hold of you"*  
*Client, small hostel*

- The approach to managing behaviour ranges from trying to apply sanctions equally through to taking individualised responses depending on circumstances. *“Good staff will deal with an incident well, some staff are more willing to chuck you out. It’s common sense, you have to deal with an incident on it’s own merits.”*
- One of the strongest messages from clients is the need for approaches to behaviour to begin with a conversation about why the behaviour had occurred.

### **EVICTION FOR ARREARS**

The levels of eviction for arrears varied widely; some hostels had had no evictions for arrears, whereas at others arrears were the main cause of unplanned moves.

There was no clear association between the client group and the prevalence of eviction for arrears. Establishing and maintaining housing benefit claims and the collection of services charges (especially where they are high) presented challenges for hostels. We saw how individual hostel managers were able to bring about reduction in eviction for arrears with their approach.

#### **There were some key reasons for arrears:**

- Clients often struggle with financial hardship and debt and often can’t pay their service charge due to other debts, which include complex relationships of financial interdependence with other clients.
- Some projects with high service charges are notable for particularly high levels of eviction and abandonment associated with arrears. Some of the most expensive hostels have the poorest facilities for service users.
- A number of services identified clients entering employment as a particularly high risk group for arrears.

#### **Staff and clients identified the importance of a well-managed, consistent and assertive response to arrears:**

- Some projects help service users to maximise income and manage money more effectively.
- Most projects working with the highest need clients hold money for them in order to ensure that they pay rent and other bills.
- A number of services encourage clients to set up direct service charge and arrears payments from their benefits and this was seen as positive by many.

*“Rent should be paid automatically, none of this you choose, opt in or opt out. If you’re on the gear you’re not going to do it.”*

*Client, large hostel*

## ABANDONMENT

**A combination of factors, both inside and outside the hostel, led to a client's decision to abandon:**

- For many people who abandon, the immediate trigger lay in changes external to the hostel, which included escaping debts or being taken into custody.
- Across the hostels, a particular group of repeat abandoners were identified as entrenched rough sleepers. Some projects have successful approaches to engage with this client group, indicating that such abandonment could be prevented.
- Putting too much pressure on clients to engage formally with staff or other services was identified by staff as a key cause of abandonment, and at some projects formal keywork was optional for this group.
- Positive relationships with staff were identified by many interviewees as the most important factor in preventing abandonment.
- At a number of hostels there is a strong association between arrears and abandonment.
- Responses to abandonment vary in terms of how long a client had to return before their tenancy ended.
- The extent to which clients who abandoned are followed up differs between projects. It was seen as positive to inform street teams and actively pursuing clients.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Evictions and abandonments can and should be reduced to as close to zero as possible. This research shows that with dedication and combined effort it is possible. In order to make this happen, we would like to recommend the following actions:

### **At a National Level**

1. The Communities and Local Government (CLG) and the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) should publish data on outcomes for planned and unplanned moves from hostels and the TSA needs to revise and improve its data collection on evictions and abandonments from hostels.
2. National Indicator (NI) 141, the percentage of vulnerable people who achieve independent living, should be a priority in all areas.
3. The investment by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) in the Places of Change Programme should continue; the report shows that the commitment to quality accommodation helps reduce the numbers of people returning to the streets.
4. The CLG and TSA have a role to play in promoting and encouraging practice that contributes to reductions in evictions and abandonments from hostels.

### **At a Regional Level**

1. Government Offices and the London Delivery Board, in order to best monitor and support improvements in performance around NI141, should focus on the role that Local Authorities can play in reducing evictions and abandonments.
2. Homeless Link, CLG and the TSA regional advisers should support Local Authorities, Housing Associations and homelessness providers to promote and challenge poor practice and highlight the key findings from this report.

### **At a Local Authority Level**

1. The Audit Commission through the Comprehensive Area Assessment should ensure that their monitoring of performance around NI141 takes into account the full range of factors leading to evictions and abandonments.
2. Local Authorities should monitor the levels of evictions for behaviour or arrears and abandonment in their commissioned services as standard practice.
3. Local Authorities should lead a proactive local area approach to identifying alternatives to evictions, including case conferencing and sideways moves.
4. Local Authorities should consider, and if appropriate commission, specialist longer term projects for those with multiple needs.

### **At a Hostel Level**

1. Hostel managers need to make the reduction of evictions for arrears or behaviour, and abandonment a priority across their staff teams.
2. Hostel managers should performance manage staff to make informal engagement and a focus on the causes of behaviour commonplace.
3. Hostels should put in place policies to eliminate all evictions for arrears, involving welfare benefits agencies and through proactive payment plans.
4. Hostel policies should ensure expectations around behaviour are realistic.
5. Individual clients should be at the centre of personalised support plans.

# INTRODUCTION

**Homeless Link is the national membership agency supporting organisations working directly with homeless people in England. Seeking to improve services and to advocate policy change that will end homelessness, we support homelessness organisations by identifying and promoting good practice, publishing toolkits, advice guides and reports that help to improve how organisations work with homeless people.**

Homeless Link has been funded by the Oak Foundation to run a project to reduce evictions and abandonments from London's homelessness services. Homeless Link took the decision to act because unplanned moves from hostels and supported accommodation, in the form of evictions and abandonment, often results in people returning to repeat street homelessness. Many of Homeless Link's members have made headway in reducing the numbers of evictions and abandonments, so we know that change is possible.

**The project runs from Jan 2009 - December 2011. It has three main objectives:**

- to undertake comprehensive research to identify causes of unplanned moves and identify existing good practice
- to design and trial five methods of identified good practice that may provide new solutions in hostels with high levels of unplanned moves
- to develop a national Change Programme based on the outcome of the research and the trialling of approaches.

This report relates to the first objective, and represents the culmination of our first year of work to build an understanding of the prevalence, the causes and effective approaches to reducing evictions and abandonment. It also includes examples of good practice that we have gathered from around the country. The Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York advised us on methodology.

## CONTEXT

**There have been a number of central government initiatives in the last twenty years to reduce rough sleeping. The first targeted approach was the Rough Sleepers' Initiative (RSI) which ran from 1990 to 1999. As part of this process many traditional rough sleeping sites were 'closed down,' whilst hostel accommodation was modernised. The delivery of a number of services to rough sleepers passed from government agencies to the charitable sector.**

In 1999, a new strategy was published entitled *Coming in from the cold*<sup>5</sup> by the new Labour government to build on the successes of the RSI. This strategy set an explicit target of reducing rough sleeping by two-thirds by 2002 and subsequently to “as close to zero as possible”. The achievement of the goal was to be driven by the newly formed Rough Sleepers Unit (RSU). In London the RSU attempted to create a 'wrap-around' service for rough sleepers<sup>6</sup>. *Coming in from the cold* was widely heralded as a success with the two-thirds target achieved a year ahead of schedule in all regions except London. Despite the successes of these initiatives, the number of people seen sleeping rough in both London and England “flat lined” in 2003.

Research in 2004 by Homeless Link found that, whilst hostels play a critical role in tackling homelessness, a number of people living in hostels were ready to move on but are delayed in doing so for a variety of reasons. These delays lead to significant costs for local authorities, frontline providers and homeless people. The Move on Plans Protocol (MOPP) was designed to address these difficulties.<sup>7</sup>

Since 2005 the government has invested around £170 million nationally in the Places of Change programme<sup>8</sup> to create twenty-first century hostels. Emphasis has been upon creating welcoming hostels in which individuals are able to rebuild their lives and learn new skills through a range of education, training and employment opportunities. This sits alongside the introduction of the Supporting People programme<sup>9</sup> in 2003 with its Quality Standards Framework.

In 2006 Homeless Link helped reinvigorate the drive towards getting rough sleeping as close to zero as possible by launching a campaign to end rough sleeping by 2012. This target was subsequently endorsed by a number of politicians at a national, regional and local level.

In November 2008 the Government launched its strategy, *No One Left Out: communities ending rough sleeping*<sup>10</sup>, in which it stated its commitment to ending rough sleeping “once and for all” in England by 2012. The strategy disaggregates rough sleepers into three categories<sup>11</sup> and outlines different approaches for each. In the same month the Mayor of London published his Draft Housing Strategy in which he pledged to ensure that this target was achieved in the capital. Thus far great strides have been made, particularly in working with London's most entrenched rough sleepers.

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5 <http://www.communities.gov.uk/archived/publications/housing/cominginfromcold>

6 This was largely based on Contact and Assessment Teams on the street, ring-fenced hostel/shelter spaces and Tenancy Sustainment Teams

7 <http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/mopp-fullreport.pdf>

8 [http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/places\\_of\\_change](http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/places_of_change)

9 <http://www.homeless.org.uk/supporting-people>

10 <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/roughsleepingstrategy>

11 “Stock”, “Flow” and “Returners”

# DEFINITIONS

## HOSTEL

A hostel is defined as a temporary housing project for single homeless people who are rough sleepers or in immediate need of accommodation. In this report we have largely focused on projects providing 24 hour per day support, rather than second stage services, which may have lower levels of support.<sup>12</sup> All the hostels visited for the qualitative research house rough sleepers.

## EVICTION

Where eviction is used in this report, it refers to all instances where a client leaves their accommodation at the requirement of staff. Many hostel clients have licences to reside, rather than tenancies. Eviction will often refer to the termination of the 'licence' to reside.

## ABANDONMENT

When abandonment is used in the report, it refers to when a client departs the service voluntarily in a way that is not planned with staff. Most services have a definition of abandonment which is specific to their own project, including a specific length of absence after which absence is assumed and the licence to reside terminated.

## PLANNED AND UNPLANNED MOVES

The terms 'planned' and 'unplanned moves' are used in services funded under the Supporting People programme<sup>13</sup> in order to measure the effectiveness of the programme in moving people on to independent living. Services are required to report to Supporting People the number of service users who have moved on in a planned way from temporary living arrangements. A planned move is defined as 'a move to a more independent outcome that has been agreed with a service user as part of the support planning process.' This may include a move to permanent accommodation, a return to the family home, or to a supported housing scheme.

### An 'unplanned move' may include:

- abandonment or disappearance
- eviction or a departure due to a notice
- being taken into custody, where the service user has been remanded in custody or has received a custodial sentence
- sleeping rough
- suicide
- a move to an acute psychiatric hospital or a long stay hospital or hospice.

In practice, the distinction between planned and unplanned moves can be problematic, with services reporting differences across local authority teams and services in whether evictions and abandonments are categorised as planned or unplanned.

## LICENCE AGREEMENTS OR TENANCIES

Hostels generally use licence agreements, although some, particularly longer term projects, issue assured shorthold tenancies. The main difference between a tenancy and a licence is that a licence provides less protection from eviction. A tenancy gives

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<sup>12</sup> [www.homelesslink.org.uk/hostels](http://www.homelesslink.org.uk/hostels)

<sup>13</sup> Detailed Definitions of the Performance Indicators for Supporting People 2004/05, ODPM 2004 is available at [http://www.spkweb.org.uk/Subjects/Quality\\_and\\_monitoring/Performance\\_framework/Detailed\\_Definitions\\_of\\_the\\_Performance\\_Indicators\\_for\\_Supporting\\_People\\_2004\\_05.htm](http://www.spkweb.org.uk/Subjects/Quality_and_monitoring/Performance_framework/Detailed_Definitions_of_the_Performance_Indicators_for_Supporting_People_2004_05.htm)

you a legal right to live in a certain property, whereas a licence agreement gives someone permission to occupy a property in a way that is personal to the person it is granted to.<sup>14</sup> The licence is a legal agreement between the hostel and the occupier, and it should clearly set out the terms of the relationship between them, for example, how and when evictions will take place. The pros and cons of hostels using licences or tenancies have been debated since at least the 1980's<sup>15</sup>. Hostels are able to issue licences because they are not intending to create a legal estate in the land, by conferring the right of exclusive possession in return for rent paid.

Temporary exclusion bans are possible within licences, providing they are properly communicated to licencees, as there is no intention to give the right of exclusive, and uninterrupted, possession. To recover possession under a licence, the hostel must serve a Notice To Quit (NTQ); it should be set out clearly in their original agreement whether they will seek a court order or not.

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<sup>14</sup> See Shelter's website for definitions of different types of tenancies: [http://england.shelter.org.uk/get\\_advice/renting\\_and\\_leasehold/renting\\_agreements](http://england.shelter.org.uk/get_advice/renting_and_leasehold/renting_agreements)

<sup>15</sup> The leading case law is *Street v Mountford* (1985) which found that providing the agreement met certain criteria it was a tenancy rather than a licence.  
<http://www.letlink.co.uk/case-law/tenancies/street-v-mountford-1985.html>

# METHOD

## LITERATURE REVIEW

We reviewed the literature on the causes and prevalence of evictions and abandonments, current practice, and possible areas for change. The literature was identified using the CRASH index<sup>16</sup>, Homeless Pages<sup>17</sup>, and the British Library database. The review included literature relating to evictions and abandonments from social housing and exclusions from schools in order to place exclusion from hostels into the context of wider practice and to identify transferable approaches.

## QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

To identify what available data can tell us about eviction and abandonment we commissioned the following pieces of research:

1. Broadway's research department analysed London's CHAIN data<sup>18</sup>, looking at the longitudinal profile and outcomes of individuals who had been evicted or had abandoned.
2. The Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York analysed data to determine factors that were associated with eviction and abandonment from short term accommodation-based services for rough sleepers or single homeless people<sup>19</sup>. A sample of 76 services, defined on the Supporting People Local Services database as 'hostels' working with 'single homeless people with support needs' or 'rough sleepers' as their primary client groups, was identified. The data was drawn from three sources:
  - I. The Supporting People Local Services (SPLS) database which includes details of projects receiving Supporting People (SP) funding. It identifies hostel characteristics.
  - II. The Supporting People (Short-Term) Outcomes dataset 2008/9 which provides exit details for service users indicating economic, social and cultural circumstances and outcomes immediately on leaving the service.
  - III. The Key Performance Indicator (KPI) Workbooks are submitted to the local authority by projects receiving SP funding and include basic outcomes of moves from the service. All 33 London Boroughs were asked to provide the data from these workbooks relating to unplanned moves for projects targeted at rough sleepers and single homeless people with support needs. Two thirds supplied KPI data.

It is important to bear in mind the limitations of the data sources.<sup>20</sup>

## QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Between July and October 2009, we visited fourteen hostels and two day centres. We also interviewed representatives from four local authorities and ran consultative focus groups with clients and outreach workers.

The aim of the qualitative research was to explore a range of service types and experiences. The sample included hostels of differing sizes, with different client

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.crashindex.org.uk>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.homelesspages.org.uk/>

<sup>18</sup> CHAIN is London's most comprehensive and widely used database on homelessness, rough sleeping and the street population and is run by Broadway. Over 80 projects contribute information to CHAIN, recording actions and support needs of clients. The database records all contact with rough sleepers in London and their subsequent moves through hostel accommodation and is therefore a source of longitudinal information tracking pathways through homelessness.

<sup>19</sup> There are a range of supported housing accommodation based services delivered to these same client groups. However, these services did not form part of this analysis as they may be provided to clients at different stages of their pathways through homelessness and so direct comparison is not possible. Other services include rough sleepers and single homeless people as their secondary client groups. It is recognised that the client group that this study is interested in will have a range of different support needs and access a number of different services.

<sup>20</sup> Primary client groups, service IDs and names were reported inconsistently across the three datasets; Some local authorities supplied incomplete KPI data; the outcomes dataset has not yet been adopted by all hostels and the levels of data available indicate that they are not consistently completed for clients whose move was unanticipated; and finally there may be inconsistencies relating to the categorization of data such as 'unplanned' moves and primary client groups. Overall there were only 35 hostels with a complete set of data from SPLS, Outcomes and the KPI workbooks.

groups and with differing levels of unplanned moves proportional to planned moves, as reported in their Supporting People outcomes. The hostels are located across six central London boroughs: Camden, Kensington and Chelsea, Hammersmith and Fulham, Lambeth, Tower Hamlets, and Westminster.

The hostels were classified according to size as listed in the table below:

Category	Number of beds	Number of hostels visited
Very small	Less than 15 beds	2
Small	15 - 50 beds	5
Medium	50 -100 beds	4
Large	100+ beds	3

At each hostel we held semi-structured interviews with the manager and either a focus group or semi-structured individual interviews with clients and frontline staff. In total 64 clients, 14 hostel managers, and 40 frontline staff were involved. We also interviewed four local authority representatives, including Supporting People Managers and Street Population Coordinators.

Staff interviews and focus groups focused on the levels and causes of eviction and abandonment; approaches used in managing arrears, evictions and abandonments; how decisions are made; and what could be improved. The client focus groups asked about the causes and impact of eviction and abandonment; their views on the hostel rules and decisions; and what could be improved. The local authority interviews examined their views on evictions and abandonments and the degree to which they were preventable; actions taken to reduce evictions and abandonments and their effectiveness; and what they thought still needed to happen.

We carried out a desk-based review of hostel policies and procedures relating to eviction, abandonment, house rules, behaviour and drugs. All participating hostels were asked to provide these. Ten services provided at least one of their policies.

Finally, two consultative groups were held with a wider group of clients and with outreach workers to present our interim findings and ask for feedback. These were attended by 6 clients and 5 outreach workers.

All participants signed a consent form. The consent form covered topics such as anonymity, confidentiality and informed participants of their right to withdraw from the research at any point. Clients were given a £5 gift card as an incentive.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

**Although the body of research into the causes and incidence of evictions and abandonment from hostels is limited, it is useful for providing a wider context around exclusion. There are five frameworks that can be used to explore eviction and abandonment:**

- social exclusion and the impact of eviction and abandonment
- individual risk factors for eviction and abandonment
- rent arrears and economic structural factors
- rules, boundaries and challenging behaviour
- staff approaches and hostel cultures.

## **SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND THE IMPACT OF EVICTION AND ABANDONMENT**

One way of understanding not only some of the causes, but also the potential impact of eviction and abandonment, is to see it in terms of a deepening of the exclusion of an already socially excluded group. Social exclusion has been defined as *“the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas”* and the Bristol Social Exclusion Matrix identifies three overall domains of exclusion: participation, access to resources and quality of life.<sup>21</sup>

Homelessness has been strongly associated with social exclusion. The literature demonstrates that a range of health, education, economic, employment and social disadvantages can be both causes and consequences of homelessness.<sup>22</sup> People who are evicted or abandon hostel places may already be socially excluded. Their eviction or abandonment may be caused by the challenging behaviour that they present, and the impact is likely to be felt across the three domains of quality of life, access to resources and services, and participation.

The Making Every Adult Matter Coalition of charities<sup>23</sup> has identified a group of people who have multiple and complex needs and are highly represented across the boundaries of services for homelessness, drugs, offenders and mental health.<sup>24</sup> This group is particularly likely to be excluded from services, not least because of challenging or aggressive behaviour or because management of their support tends to revolve around sanctions, including prison.<sup>25</sup> Although this group falls between a range of service types, their homelessness can be a factor that particularly exacerbates exclusion from services:

***“Housing is often regarded as the cornerstone for the most excluded: many services are linked to where people live, but those with complex needs are often on the street or living in insecure or poor accommodation”.***<sup>26</sup>

This perspective indicates that exclusion should be looked at not as an isolated one-off incident, but as a wider context, with eviction and abandonment as evidence of how effectively homelessness services are able to work with these groups. Carter’s report on exclusion in Birmingham<sup>27</sup> in 1999 looked at eviction alongside people who are refused access or themselves refuse hostel services. Carter recommended that

21 Fahmy E., Levitas R., Gordon D., and Patsios D. (2009) Understanding the risks of social exclusion across the life course: working age adults without dependent children. London, Cabinet Office and University of Bristol

22 Rice, B. et al (2007) Reaching out: a consultation with street homeless people 10 years after the launch of the rough sleepers unit. London: Shelter Publications

23 Making Every Adult Matter is a coalition of the four national charities Clinks, Drugscope, Homeless Link, and Mind, formed to influence policy and services for adults with multiple needs and exclusions.

24 Making Every Adult Matter Coalition (2008) In From the Margins: Making Every Adult Matter. London, MEAM

25 HM Government (2006) cited in Making Every Adult Matter (2008)

26 Making Every Adult Matter Coalition (2008)

27 Carter M. (1999) Falling off the first rung: evictions from Birmingham’s direct access hostels Birmingham, Birmingham’s Homeless and Roofless Partnership and Crisis

policies and monitoring frameworks should look at exclusion in its entirety, rather than focusing solely on eviction. A report on exclusion from day centres also highlighted variations in the longevity of ongoing exclusion after eviction through bans from services, finding that this varied greatly between providers, but in some cases was permanent.<sup>28</sup>

Studies highlighted the risk of unintended consequences that could deepen wider exclusion from services if there is a focus on eviction and abandonment in isolation. For instance, reducing the number of evictions or abandonments through denying access to those with the highest needs or a history of tenancy failure would increase the number of people who are even more thoroughly excluded from services.<sup>29</sup>

A wider understanding of exclusion helps us understand what inclusion might look like and how we could measure success in a more nuanced way than simply counting evictions and abandonments. Discussing exclusion from school, Ainscow argues that inclusion should be measured not just in terms of 'presence', attendance and non-exclusion, but also participation and achievement.<sup>30</sup> It also stated that the presence or the removal, through exclusion, of certain groups may impact on other users of a service, for instance where a disruptive or abusive person impacts on the ability of others to participate and achieve in activities and support. This can result in dilemmas and contradictions for services that are attempting to raise standards of achievement for the majority whilst subscribing to an ethos of inclusion.

Clients may 'self exclude' from services; research shows that not all moves considered by services to be 'unplanned' have been unplanned from a client's perspective or experienced negatively.<sup>31</sup> One study indicated that clients fully planned their abandonment and viewed entering a hostel as a temporary respite from which they always intended to return to the street.<sup>32</sup> However, whether or not clients planned their moves, the limited information available indicates that such moves were associated with negative outcomes. One study indicated that 41% slept rough the night they were evicted, and more than half described negative changes to their behaviour subsequent to eviction, such as increased substance misuse, violence or aggression, or involvement with the criminal justice system.<sup>33</sup>

## INDIVIDUAL RISK FACTORS FOR EVICTION AND ABANDONMENT

### Demographic factors

Studies have found a strong association between ethnicity, eviction and, in particular, tenancy abandonment.<sup>34</sup> Research into CHAIN data found that rough sleepers from a white ethnic background were most likely to abandon, whereas rough sleepers of black, and to a lesser extent Asian or mixed ethnic background, were most likely to have a planned move.<sup>35</sup> The report also found that poorer outcomes were not the result of having more *types* of support need, but that *levels* of support need were higher.

Novas research into evictions from their own hostels identified a correlation between age, gender and different causes of eviction.<sup>36</sup> People aged 18-24 and women were both disproportionately represented in evictions for rent arrears, whilst violence was

28 Ball L. and Griffin S. (2000) Breaking and entering: tackling the cycle of exclusion London, Homeless Network

29 Crane M. and Warnes A. (2000) Evictions and Prolonged Homelessness. *Housing Studies*, 15 (5), 757-773.

30 Ainscow M. (2005) Developing inclusive education systems; what are the levers for change? in *Journal of Educational Change* vol 6 no2 2005, p109-124

31 Dane K. (1998) Making it last: a report into tenancy outcomes for rough sleepers. London, Housing Services Agency and Crane M. and Warnes A. (2000) Evictions and Prolonged Homelessness. *Housing Studies*, 15 (5), 757-773.

32 Butchinsky C. (2007) Identities of homeless people in Oxford in Seal M. (Ed) (2007) Understanding and responding to homeless experiences, identities and cultures. Lyme Regis, Russell House Publishing

33 Novas (2000) Back on the streets: a study into eviction from direct access hostels London, Novas Ouvertures Group

34 Cebulla A., Rice B., Tomaszewski W., and Hough J. (2009) Profiling London's rough sleepers. London, Broadway and Natcen; and Dane K. (1998) Making it last: a report into tenancy outcomes for rough sleepers. London, Housing Services Agency

35 Cebulla A. et al (2009)

36 Novas (2000) p11

disproportionately a male cause of eviction at 36% of total male evictions compared to 4% of female evictions. The Broadway/Natcen research found that, amongst rough sleepers, younger people were more likely to abandon accommodation, and the likelihood of a planned move was found to increase in line with age.<sup>37</sup>

### Support needs

Overall there seems to be a strong link between substance misuse, rough sleeping, and eviction and abandonment. The CHAIN research found that *“the higher the number of bedded-down rough sleeping encounters recorded for an individual, the lower the likelihood of their partaking in a planned move and the greater the risk of their abandoning or being evicted.”* The ‘most prevalent’ finding from Broadway’s interviews with service users was the difficulty service users experienced in moving inside and adjusting to the new environment.<sup>38</sup>

The Broadway/Natcen research found that rough sleepers have a higher level of eviction and a lower likelihood of planned move-on where alcohol, drug or mental health support needs were recorded, although there was little impact on the likelihood of abandonment.<sup>39</sup>

Supporting People compared the needs and outcomes for people with planned and unplanned moves, including eviction and abandonment.<sup>40</sup> Individuals defined as ‘rough sleepers’ are at highest risk of unplanned move, at 53% of moves for this group, followed by drug users at 50%, offenders at 48%, alcohol users at 44% and single homeless people at 43%.

### Resilience and attachment

One framework for understanding the difficulties that people experience in adapting to the hostel environment is provided by the concepts of resilience and attachment.

In a 2007 study that explored resilience and strengths amongst homeless people, Smith identified that resilience is *“an individual’s ability to rely on their own core self-belief and stability, enabling him or her to withstand adverse life events that would damage another person”*.<sup>41</sup> Such life events could include the kinds of issues that can derail a tenancy, such as rent or interpersonal problems. In studying tenancy outcomes in the early years of the Rough Sleeping Initiative, Dane<sup>42</sup> found that the majority of those who remained housed had considered abandoning their tenancies, but *“the fundamental differences between successful tenants and ex-tenants were their motivation and their ability to draw on coping strategies that allowed them to remain in their tenancies”*. This resilience was associated with the ability to ‘settle.’

The literature reflects the ambivalence that many service users may feel towards being housed.<sup>43</sup> Clients described returning to the streets as a way of avoiding practical, emotional and relational issues.

***“On the streets there is no need to take responsibility, pay bills, manage relationships or confront problems. In a hostel, by contrast, you are expected to live in close proximity with others, address drug and alcohol use, and talk about other difficult issues.”***<sup>44</sup>

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37 Cebulla et al (2009)

38 Cebulla et al (2009)

39 Cebulla et al (2009)

40 Supporting People (2008) Planned and unplanned moves: the link with successful outcomes. Supporting People and St Andrews Centre for Housing Research Available at: <http://www.spclientrecord.org.uk/pubs.cfm>

41 Smith J. (2007) Valuable lives: capabilities and resilience amongst single homeless people. London, Crisis

42 Dane K. (1998)

43 Dane K. (1998); Cebulla et al. (2009); Seal M. (2007) Homelessness and its impact on our personal and societal identities in Seal M. (Ed) (2007) Understanding and responding to homeless experiences, identities and cultures. Lyme Regis, Russell House Publishing

44 Cebulla et al. (2009) p54

Seal<sup>45</sup> describes how both service users and staff buy into a myth or fantasy of home which, when disappointed, leads to homeless people blaming themselves, others, or, in some cases, building a fatalistic homeless identity that includes a rejection of services.

Attachment theory provides a model for understanding ambivalence in the context of clients' previous experiences of 'home' and supportive relationships. Longitudinal studies of homelessness have demonstrated the association between 'difficult' childhoods and other experiences of relationship loss, and unstable lifestyles as adults<sup>46</sup>. Tait<sup>47</sup> finds that a homeless person entering a hostel may bring a set of experiences and expectations in which "*home has been somewhere to escape from: an intolerable place perhaps characterised by neglect, non-communication, mis-communication, violence, bullying, or a variety of forms of personal intrusion*". It goes on to explore how individuals with poor experiences of home can become caught between a 'deep longing to be cared for' and the fear of disappointment or of having to think about their problems.

Hostel staff may be able to help service users build resilience through supporting service users to gain a positive social network. Providing this support can be challenging and requires adequate training and supervision for staff.<sup>48</sup> Clients interviewed by Broadway emphasised the importance of supportive, welcoming, and respectful staff who display a genuine care for their service users, and also suggested that new clients should be able to maintain contact with outreach workers in order to ensure some continuity during the transition to hostel life.<sup>49</sup> Providing ways for clients to take time out from stressful environments may also be helpful. Dane found that the availability of respite transfer was a key factor in whether people successfully maintained their tenancies.<sup>50</sup>

## RENT ARREARS AND ECONOMIC STRUCTURAL FACTORS

Literature on the causes and management of rent arrears in social housing provides context around evictions from hostels. Between 1993 and 2003, possession actions, of which 93% are related to rent arrears, almost doubled.<sup>51</sup> This increase is attributed to issues with the housing benefit system, increases in debt, and economic factors. In the late 1990s benefit claimants had more opportunity to enter the labour market, but for those where jobs were low-paid or insecure, they proved unsustainable due to disruption to housing benefit claims. Poverty and debt are also associated with rent arrears, with the majority of people with serious rent arrears having multiple debts.<sup>52</sup> Research indicated that, although peoples' sense of responsibility for benefit-related arrears varies, many people 'can't' rather than 'won't' pay arrears, with most social housing tenants having a preference for good financial planning, but being forced to pay strategically to keep different creditors at bay.<sup>53</sup>

Over the last decade, housing management functions have increasingly moved away from generic housing officers. Standard practice that has developed includes identifying problems and making first contact far earlier and usually in person, as well as issuing Notices of Seeking Possession at an earlier stage, usually after four to eight weeks of arrears have accrued. Only 1 in 20 Notices of Seeking Possession result in court action and these are used primarily as a tool or threat to bring tenants to negotiation.<sup>54</sup>

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45 Seal M. (2007) in Seal M. (Ed) (2007)

46 Smith J. (2007)

47 Tait M.(1996) Thinking about internal space with homeless young people in Sherlock J., and Harding C., Getting it Together. London, GPMH Publications.

48 Tait M. (1996); Scanlon C. (2006) 'Housing 'unhoused minds': inter-personality disorder in the organisation?' in Housing, care and support (1996)9.3. 3 Dec 2006 p9-14

49 Cebulla et al (2009)

50 Dane K. (1998)

51 ODPM (2005) Possession actions and evictions: housing research summary no. 219. London, ODPM

52 Neuberger P. (2003) Housekeeping: preventing homelessness through tackling rent arrears in social housing. London, Shelter Publications

53 Ford J. and Seager J. (1998) Housing associations and rent arrears: attitudes, beliefs and behaviour. London, Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Chartered Institute of Housing

54 ODPM (2005)

Good practice in reducing evictions for rent arrears includes the provision of independent and impartial arrears resolution services that can provide debt advice to tenants, and mediate to prevent possession actions.<sup>55</sup> Many tenants need to address multiple debts to prevent their eviction and, whilst housing providers may be skilled and supportive, their advice cannot be fully impartial. Social landlords can develop incentive schemes to encourage repayment in return for part of the debt being written off. One housing association agreed to write off one third of eligible tenants' debt, the local credit union loaned another third, and a third was paid by the local authority on condition that the individual engaged with tenancy support and debt advice.<sup>56</sup>

## **RULES, BOUNDARIES AND CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR**

Evictions from hostels can occur as a result of a range of behaviours related to aggression or breaking rules. There are often complaints about violence and unsafe conditions, but also about the restrictiveness of hostel rules. The perception that rules are unclear, poorly communicated, and enforced inconsistently or unfairly tends to be of greater concern than the rules themselves.<sup>57</sup>

Writing about school exclusions, Munn describes how rules set out what kind of behaviour is considered as acceptable and normal within a community, and the extent to which dissent will be tolerated.<sup>58</sup> Munn argues that the punitive enforcement of rules to exclude the 'mad or bad' can embody an exclusive and inward-looking form of community, and that "*outside of paramount safety issues we need to reconsider the notion of community that schools invoke*". Broadway found that some clients believed the threats of eviction could be used to 'control or frighten clients by demonstrating staff power'.<sup>59</sup> Butchinsky's study found that some homeless people '*mitigated the power of the institutions by routinely breaking the rules and thus appropriating for themselves a measure of self-sufficiency within a structure designed to take control over their care*'.<sup>60</sup> Tait describes how behaviour that tests boundaries may be an important part of establishing identity and that clear, non-punitive boundaries can provide clients with a valuable experience.<sup>61</sup>

Client involvement offers an approach to ensuring that clients contribute to the formulation and review of rules, and the response when rules are broken. Novas reported that evictions dropped by 26% over 6 months when they instituted an appeals panel including a client to hear all eviction appeals.<sup>62</sup>

Aggressive behaviour may be particularly challenging for staff. Ravenhill, in her study of homeless street culture, identified that violence was a normalised way of 'clearing the air' and reinforcing social bonds amongst some street populations.<sup>63</sup> Service users consulted on how to reduce evictions and abandonments suggested training for staff on conflict resolution and for clients on behavioural issues, bullying and taking personal responsibility for behaviour.<sup>64</sup> There have also been positive results from programmes in schools that help pupils develop strategies to manage conflict through anger management and emotional literacy.<sup>65</sup>

## **STAFF APPROACHES AND HOSTEL CULTURE**

Some studies indicate that staff teams' approach to challenging behaviour is rooted in organisational and team culture and that social learning in the workplace "*hold the*

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55 Neuberger P. (2003); ODPM (2005)

56 ODPM (2005)

57 Cebulla et al (2009); Carter M. (1999); Ham J. (1996) Steps from the street: a report on direct access hostel provision. London, Homeless Link and Crisis

58 Munn P, Lloyd G. and Cullen M.A. (2000) Alternatives to exclusion from school. London, P. Chapman Publishing (Sage)

59 Cebulla et al (2009)

60 Butchinsky C. (2007) in Seal M. (Ed) (2007)

61 Tait M. (1996)

62 Novas (2000)

63 Ravenhill M. (2008) The culture of homelessness. Aldershot: Ashgate

64 Cebulla et al (2009)

65 Munn et al (2000)

*key to real transformation- the kind that has a real effect on peoples' lives".*<sup>66</sup> Van Doorn and McKain<sup>67</sup> described how the culture within the homelessness sector has been influenced by its historical roots in volunteer-run, practical responses to homelessness. In comparison to other fields, the homelessness sector is traditionally action-focused with a lack of investment in "*spaces for reflection, study and learning*" to aid effectively working with challenging behaviour. The authors describe how staff responses to the unrecognised stresses of the work can result in staff teams becoming split between advocacy for the client and authoritarian approaches.

At managerial level a structural approach, focusing on monitoring, has become a 'cultural anchor' for the sector, but Van Doorn and McKain argue that it may fail to address the underlying difficulty of working with chaotic and traumatised behaviour. The result may be a loss of creative and professional flexibility.<sup>68</sup> In the school context, Munn identified links between structural approaches that were associated with high and low exclusion rates, some of which may be transferable. Escalatory systems, where a series of minor offences could result in exclusion, increased exclusion compared to systems where each offence was addressed individually. Exclusions were low where the decision making structure was wide and incorporated the views of a number of staff.<sup>69</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The literature suggests that people who are subject to eviction and abandonment from hostels are likely to be amongst the most socially excluded, even within the homeless population. They are particularly likely to have drug and alcohol issues, mental health difficulties, multiple needs, and experiences of the criminal justice system. Their difficulties in adjusting to hostel life and maintaining tenancies can be linked to patterns of social exclusion, which may be articulated, at least in part, through difficulties in relating to others and responding constructively to difficulty.

The review finds that improving outcomes for this client group is possible through improving team culture, involving clients in the formation of rules and boundaries and training staff in dealing with challenging behaviour, so that hostels can provide a positive experience of inclusion.

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<sup>66</sup> Ainscow M. (2005)

<sup>67</sup> Van Doorn A., and Kain M. (2007) Homeless sector culture in Seal M. (Ed) (2007) Understanding and responding to homeless experiences, identities and cultures. Lyme Regis, Russell House Publishing

<sup>68</sup> Van Doorn et al (2007)

<sup>69</sup> Munn et al. (2000)

# EVICTION AND ABANDONMENT LEVELS

## PREVALENCE

The 2009 CHAIN research on London's rough sleeper population<sup>70</sup> demonstrates change in the incidence of evictions and abandonments over time. Between 2001/02 and 2007/08 the proportion of planned moves has grown from 28.6% to 42%. The level of abandonment has halved and this change may relate to improved physical environments, privacy, assessment and keywork.<sup>71</sup> The CHAIN data indicates a slight increase in eviction levels over this period; changes to hostel environments appear not to have had the same impact on lowering eviction levels as they have on abandonment. The CHAIN report suggests that there has been an increase in substance misuse needs and resulting chaotic behaviour over this time which may have impacted on eviction rates.

Supporting People data on clients receiving 'short term' support demonstrates that, across England, 53% of clients whose primary need is recorded as rough sleeping have an 'unplanned' rather than a 'planned' move, including eviction and abandonment.<sup>72</sup> This is the highest level of unplanned moves for any Supporting People client group and compares to 43% of clients who are primarily defined as 'single homeless' and an average of 36% across all client groups. Similarly, former rough sleepers recorded on the CHAIN database in London were found to have a 58% unplanned move rate in a period spanning 2006/07 to 2007/08.<sup>73</sup> Eviction was found to be responsible for 21% and abandonment for 22% of these unplanned moves.

## EVICTIONS RELATING TO RENT ARREARS AND TO BEHAVIOURAL ISSUES

In breaking down the reasons for eviction, the literature reflects the very different practice across projects. Cebulla et al.'s longitudinal analysis of CHAIN data provides us with a London overview in which 14% of unplanned moves were evictions for behavioural issues, double the 7% for arrears. This 2:1 ratio of behavioural to arrears evictions has been relatively stable since 2001.<sup>74</sup>

## THE POINT AT WHICH EVICTION AND ABANDONMENT TAKES PLACE

CHAIN data demonstrates that the overall length of time spent in accommodation before a move of any sort, planned or unplanned, has doubled since 2001/02.<sup>75</sup> It also demonstrates that abandonments usually occur earlier than eviction, with about half occurring within the first two months of a tenancy compared to half of evictions occurring during the first four months. Novas' report also found that evictions for arrears peaked between months 2 and 6. 27% of evictions for violence occurred during the first month, with 80% occurring during the first six months.<sup>76</sup> This is supported by service users' descriptions of the difficulty of the initial transition to hostel life.<sup>77</sup>

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70 Cebulla et al (2009)

71 Cebulla A., Rice B., Tomaszewski W., and Hough J. (2009) Profiling London's rough sleepers. London, Broadway and Natcen

72 Supporting People (2008)

73 Cebulla et al (2009)

74 Cebulla et al (2009)

75 Cebulla et al (2009)

76 Novas (2000)

77 Cebulla et al (2009)

# ANALYSIS OF EVICTION & ABANDONMENT AMONGST ROUGH SLEEPERS

The researchers looked at all clients on the London CHAIN database<sup>78</sup> who were evicted or abandoned during 2007/08: a total of 283 clients and 313 evictions during the period, and 277 people who abandoned with a total of 310 abandonments.<sup>79</sup> The researchers looked at this group's history over the preceding 10 years.

## IMPACT OF EVICTION AND ABANDONMENT

Analysis was conducted to see what happens directly after people are evicted. This was based on looking at the actions recorded for this group after eviction or abandonment, including rough sleeping, arrivals at hostels, reconnections, and death.

48% of people who were evicted and 46% of people who abandoned, were identified as rough sleeping as their next action on CHAIN. This was the most frequent first event.

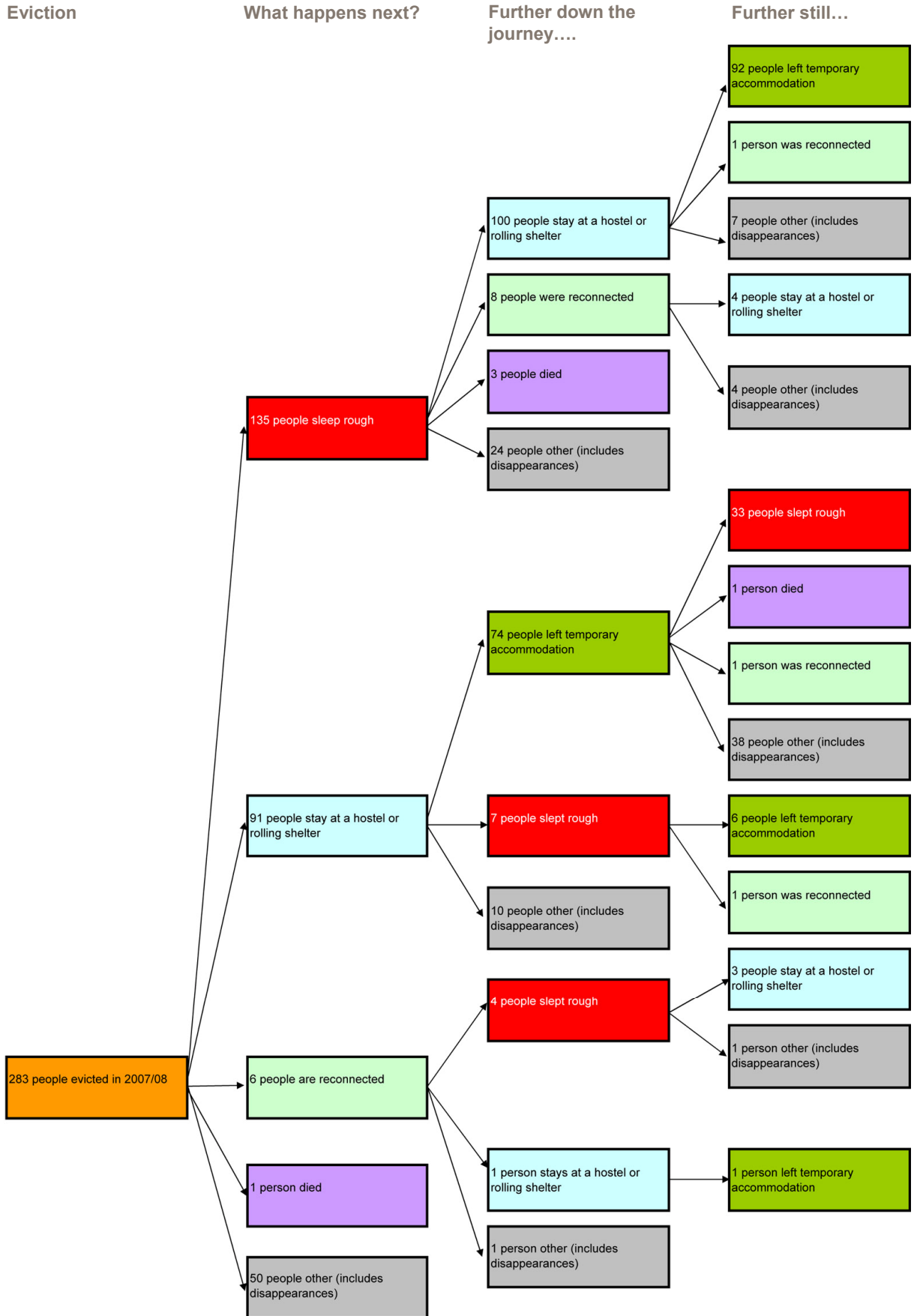
For 28% of those who abandon, and 32% of those who are evicted, the next event is an arrival at short term accommodation. Furthermore, for a third of people in both groups, the next two actions after eviction or abandonment are to sleep rough *then* go into short term accommodation. However, there is often a significant period of time between being evicted or abandoning and arriving at a short term accommodation project. For example, 36% of people who abandoned and 27% of evictees the gap before accessing accommodation is six months or more.

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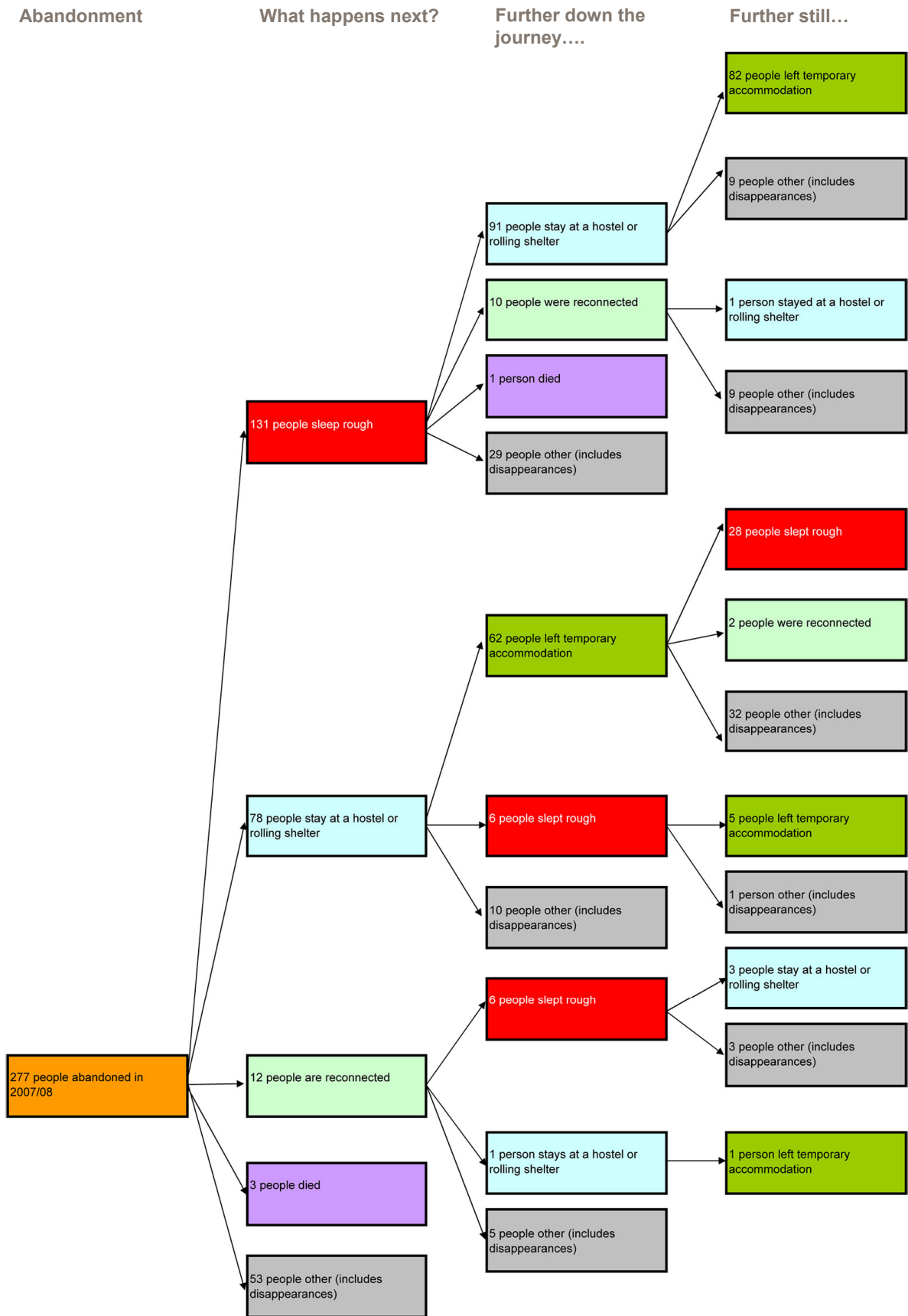
<sup>78</sup> CHAIN is London's most comprehensive and widely used database on homelessness, rough sleeping and the street population and is run by Broadway. Over 80 projects contribute information to CHAIN, recording actions and support needs of clients. The database records all contact with rough sleepers in London and their subsequent moves through hostel accommodation.

<sup>79</sup> The findings relate to a total of 531 people throughout – where the figures add up to more than 531 it is because individuals will have been included in the evictions and abandonment figures.

# People evicted from hostels during 2007/08 – what happens to them?



# People abandon from hostels during 2007/08 – what happens to them?



The table below looks more closely at those who were evicted or who abandoned and went into temporary accommodation up to September 2009. The whereabouts of these people between being evicted or abandoning and accessing short term accommodation varies.

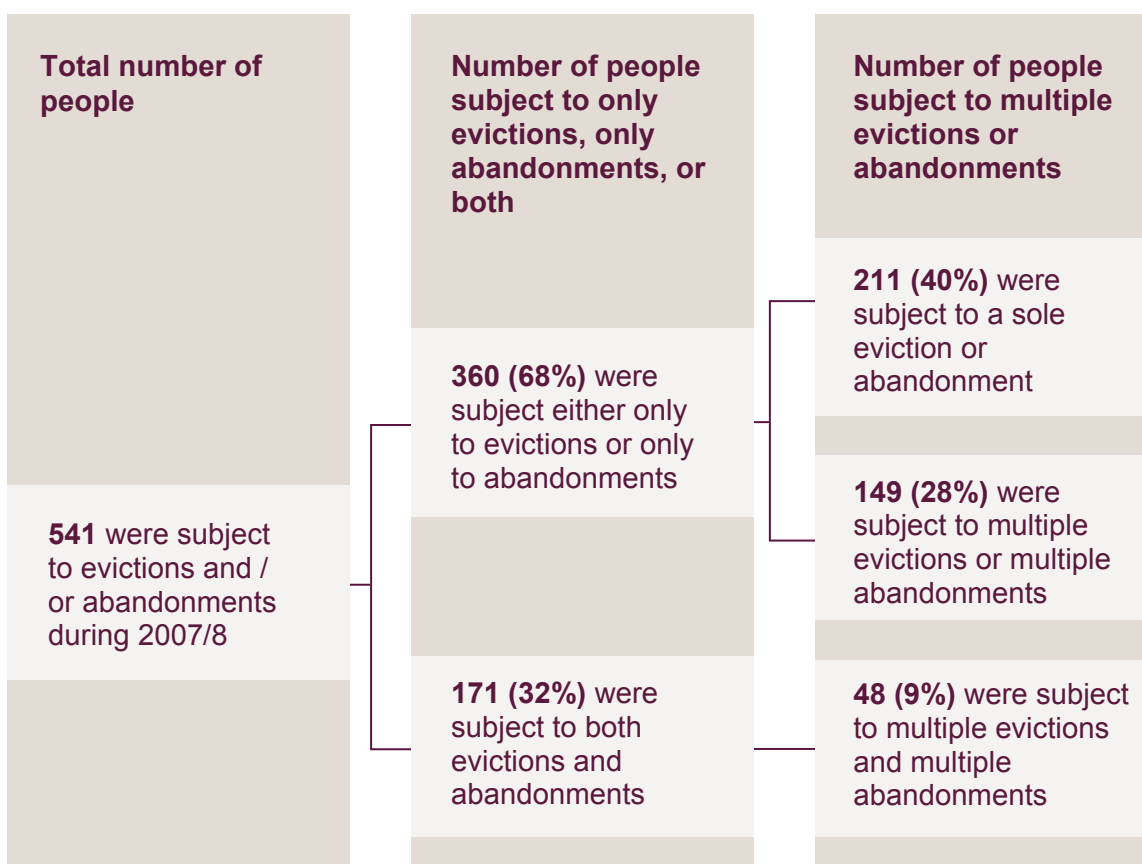
### Time between abandonment/eviction and arrival at short term accommodation

Time from eviction/abandonment to arrival	People who had abandoned		People who were evicted	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Under 1 week	20	11%	11	6%
1 - 2 weeks	7	4%	16	8%
2 - 3 weeks	4	2%	8	4%
3 - 4 weeks	8	5%	14	7%
1 - 2 months	22	13%	30	15%
2 - 4 months	33	19%	35	18%
4 - 6 months	20	11%	32	16%
6 months - 1 year	38	22%	20	10%
1 year+	24	14%	33	17%
<b>Total</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base: All those who had an arrival after their eviction or abandonment in 2007/08

### IS IT THE SAME PEOPLE WHO GET EVICTED AND ABANDON?

The study cross referred all the known abandonments and evictions since 1999. Across the total of 531 people, it was found that:



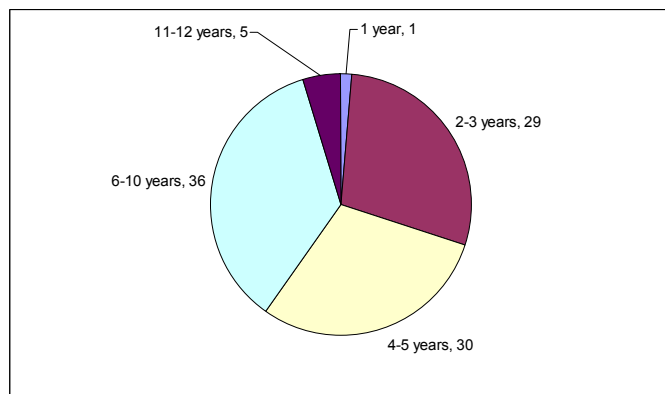
## PREVIOUS HISTORY OF ROUGH SLEEPING, EVICTION AND ABANDONMENT

The findings below suggest that there are substantial statistical similarities between eviction and abandonment in terms of individual histories.

### Eviction

People who are evicted tend to be people who had been in the CHAIN population for some time; 71% had been seen in 4 or more years. The number of times they were observed rough sleeping varies; 1 in 3 were only seen rough sleeping once or twice, whilst 1 in 10 people were seen more than 20 times. Most of those evicted had been seen sleeping rough recently; three quarters (77%) within 2 years

### Length of time people who ere evicted were active on CHAIN (in %)

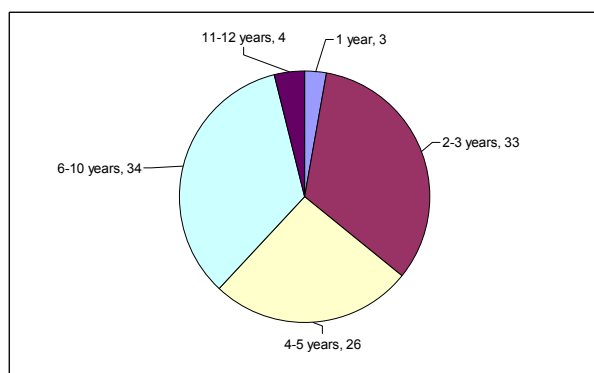


For the 283 CHAIN clients who were evicted in 2007/08, there were 313 evictions recorded in that period. Over 10 years (1999-2009) this group accounted for 546 evictions. The number of evictions increased with the length of time on CHAIN; 73% of people on CHAIN for 2 to 3 years had just 1 eviction. Amongst the group on CHAIN for 4 to 5 years, just over half (56%) had just 1 eviction, 27% had 2, and 18% had 3 or more. Amongst people on CHAIN for between 6 and 10 years, 39% had just 1 eviction, 24% 2 evictions, and 46% 3 or more.

### Abandonment

Clients who abandon also tend to be people who had been in the CHAIN population for some time; half had been in the CHAIN population for 5 years or more. Three quarters (74%) had been seen sleeping rough within the past year, and 90% within 2 years. The numbers of times they were recorded as sleeping rough varies; just under one third (31%) of people in the cohort were seen rough sleeping only once or twice before their abandonment, however a third of people were seen doing so more than 10 times.

### Length of time people who abandoned were active on CHAIN (in %)



In a 10 year period (1999 - 2009) these 277 clients had 567 abandonments.

Despite the tendency towards long histories on CHAIN, for just under half of the cohort this was their first recorded abandonment. The number of abandonments increased sharply for the group with the longest CHAIN history. Between 7 and 8 in 10 clients, who were recorded on CHAIN for up to 5 years, had abandoned only once during this time; whereas amongst people on CHAIN for 6 to 10 years, 25% had 1 abandonment, 28% 2 abandonments, and 47% three or more.

### **SUPPORT NEEDS OF THOSE WHO ARE EVICTED OR ABANDON**

Support needs amongst both those who have been evicted or have abandoned is high, but is higher amongst evictees.

- 6 in 10 evictees and 6 in 10 abandoners had an alcohol support need
- 6 in 10 evictees and 1 in 2 abandoners had a drug related support need
- 4 in 10 evictees and 1 in 3 abandoners had recorded mental health problems

It is important to note that hostels are often only available to people with a support need which means that the overall profile of hostel clients would show a higher level of support need than CHAIN clients overall.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Support needs data on CHAIN is top line information and a recent exercise to review this data found that drugs and alcohol supports needs information is likely to be more accurate than data on mental health from the system. Information about how likely people with support needs are to be evicted compared to others is also available in the CHAIN research report - Profiling rough sleepers: <http://www.broadwaylondon.org/ResearchInformation/Research/ProfilingLondonsRoughSleepers>

## Support needs of 07/08 evictees with all CHAIN figures for comparison

Combination of support needs*	Count of evictee cohort	% of evictee cohort	Count of abandonment cohort	% of abandonment cohort	%All 08/09 contacts for comparison**
Alcohol and drugs	59	21%	45	17%	10%
Alcohol and mental health	28	10%	35	13%	8%
Alcohol only	44	16%	47	18%	16%
Alcohol, drugs and mental health	41	15%	24	9%	7%
All 3 no	13	5%	26	10%	14%
All 3 no, not known or not assessed	2	1%	-	-	16%
All 3 not known or not assessed	4	1%	7	3%	3%
Drugs and mental health	27	10%	17	6%	5%
Drugs only	49	18%	46	17%	12%
Mental health only	12	4%	17	6%	9%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>279</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Alcohol sub total</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>41%</b>
<b>Drugs sub total</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>34%</b>
<b>Mental health sub total</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>29%</b>
<b>One or more support need sub total</b>	<b>260</b>	<b>94%</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>67%</b>

\* based on more recent support needs assessment completed for the client

\*\* base 4,676

# ANALYSIS OF UNPLANNED MOVES FROM SUPPORTED HOUSING

The research examined the hostel characteristics associated with unplanned moves and the client characteristics associated with unplanned moves data. The KPI data was combined with the characteristics in the SPLS database and SP Outcomes dataset to see how the characteristics of schemes and clients relate to different levels of unplanned moves.

Analysis was limited to those hostels identifying single homeless people with support needs or rough sleepers as their primary client groups. 76 hostels were identified. Of the 76 hostels identified, KPI unplanned moves data was successfully obtained for 44 of them providing information on a total of 648 unplanned moves in 2008/09.

Evictions and abandonments each account for one third of all unplanned moves.

## Reasons for unplanned moves in hostels 2008/09

	Total	Mean average per hostel	Minimum	Maximum
Total unplanned moves	648	15	1	59
Evictions	232	6	0	28
Abandonments	219	5	0	27
Other reasons	142	4	0	17

**NB: Sum of reasons does not equal the total due to incomplete data**

## HOSTEL CHARACTERISTICS AND UNPLANNED MOVES

To assist with the analysis, hostels were split into two equal sized groups and identified as having *higher* or *lower* rates of unplanned moves, so any differences between the two categories could be examined. The findings are as follows:

- Hostels with lower rates of unplanned moves operate more exclusion policies than hostels with higher rates of unplanned moves. Only 36 per cent of hostels with lower rates of unplanned moves have no blanket exclusion policies compared to 68 per cent of hostels with higher rates of unplanned moves.
- There is variation between the source of referrals accepted by hostels with higher and lower rates of unplanned moves. Hostels with lower rates of unplanned moves are less likely to accept referrals from housing departments, health, Citizen's Advice, non-statutory agencies and probation.

## CLIENT CHARACTERISTICS AND UNPLANNED MOVES

Of the 76 hostels identified on the SPLS database, 60 submitted data to the SP Outcomes database.<sup>81</sup> Clients with unplanned moves were younger than clients with planned moves; were less likely to have a support plan in place; and, on average, their move took place in the eighth month of their stay.

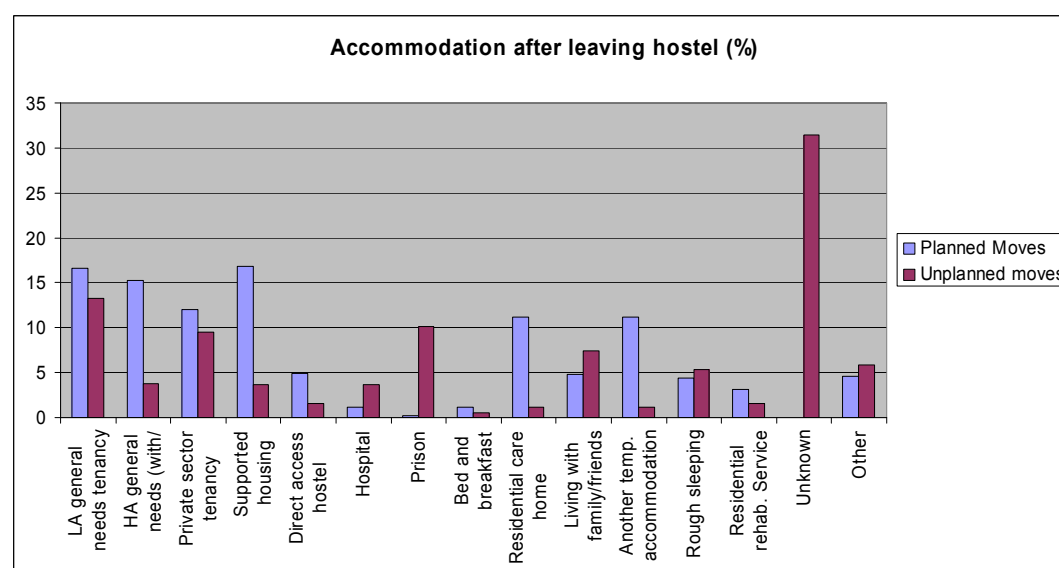
<sup>81</sup> These hostels provided a total of 1326 outcomes forms that include details of whether the move was planned or unplanned. Of these, 3 people died, so there are 1323 clients with details of exit circumstances from the hostels. Of these, 188 people, or 14 per cent, experienced an unplanned move from the hostel. This proportion is unexpectedly low and may indicate that outcomes forms are not being standardly completed for clients when a move is unplanned. This limitation should also be borne in mind when considering the results. This suggests that the following findings offer a picture of some of the clients who have experienced an unplanned move, but may not be representative of all clients who experience this.

## Characteristics of clients by nature of move

	Planned Moves	Unplanned Moves
Average age	35	28
Proportion of clients with support plan	100	86
Average length of stay (days)	363	224
Female clients	84 (% of clients)	16 (% of clients)
Male clients	87 (% of clients)	13 (% of clients)

With regard to the economic status of clients at the time of their departure from the hostel, those with an unplanned move were more likely to be a job seeker, not seeking work or a full time student.

Regarding the type of accommodation which clients with an unplanned move went to when they left the hostel, one third of moving destinations were unknown. The next most frequent destination for a client whose move was unplanned was into local authority accommodation (13 per cent), prison (10 per cent) or the private rented sector (9.5 per cent). Clients who had unplanned moves were more likely to end up in prison, or move in with family or friends, than those whose moves were planned. Unplanned movers were significantly less likely to end up in a housing association tenancy, and less likely to move on to other forms of secure accommodation.



## Support needs

Support needs around drugs and alcohol, physical and mental health are more frequently identified amongst clients in hostels with higher rates of unplanned moves. More than half of clients in hostels with high rates of unplanned moves have support needs around drugs and alcohol (58 per cent), compared to hostels with lower levels where only 32 per cent of clients have these needs.

Clients whose move was unplanned are less likely to have had their support needs met. This is less significant for those seeking support around paid work or maximising benefits, but is particularly acute in other areas. For example, 60 per cent of clients who had unplanned moves did not have their support around training and education met, compared to only 34 per cent of those clients who had a planned move.

Those requiring support around drug and alcohol misuse are statistically more likely to experience an unplanned move.

### Support needs of clients by nature of move

	N	% of clients with each need whose need had not been met	
		Planned move	Unplanned
Maximising benefits	951	4	20
Managing debt	526	23	55
Support into paid work	413	74	90
Training and education	592	34	60
Drug or alcohol	561	22	66
Mental health	401	16	57
Physical health	551	11	32
Maintain accommodation	725	14	78

### CONCLUSION

The CHAIN data illustrates the impact of eviction and abandonment on London's rough sleepers, with 48% of clients who are evicted and 47% of abandoners subsequently seen rough sleeping. The research highlights that 9% of people have multiple evictions and abandonments, whilst most people either only ever abandon or get evicted.

The SP and KPI data shows that the major differences between hostels with lower rates of unplanned moves and those with higher rates is the extent to which they accommodate clients with lower support needs. Clients that experience unplanned moves are less likely to have their support needs met. This is supported by the CHAIN data which shows that people who are evicted or abandon generally have high support needs.

The data sources are subject to a number of limitations which are indicative of limitations in current monitoring of eviction and abandonment.

# THE KEY FACTORS IN MAINTAINING TENANCIES

The interview findings show that eviction and abandonment takes place as the result of a complex combination of factors. The main findings are grouped into three main categories:

- Eviction related to rent arrears
- Eviction related to behaviour
- Abandonment

However, there are some key factors that cut across all types of evictions and abandonment which are discussed in this chapter. Interviewees were clear that wider factors about their experience of the hostel impacted on how motivated they felt to maintain their tenancy and, therefore, on the likelihood of either eviction or abandonment.

## WHETHER EVICTIONS AND ABANDONMENTS ARE SEEN AS PREVENTABLE

There were different views about whether eviction and abandonment could or should be prevented. Managers and commissioners represented the group most committed to a preventative approach. Amongst hostels with medium or high rates of unplanned moves, some managers believed they were already doing well. Others identified that evictions were too high and that there was a need to be more persistent in managing arrears and behaviour and to build better staff relationships with clients. No manager ruled out the option of evicting someone, but there were differences of emphasis with some managers focusing on preventing eviction wherever risk allowed, and others believing that eviction could be an appropriate consequence of certain behaviours. In one case it was recognised that if a client was evicted.

*“he would sleep rough and it would remove any benefit of the hostel. It wouldn’t solve the neighbourhood problem because he is still in the area. if you can’t contain the behaviour then someone is going to have to contain it. The solution is never that they leave to go on the street. Do we want to continue that cycle?”*

*Manager, large hostel*

For others, fairness was the main concern, rather than the impact on the individual. Across all those interviewed, a minority felt that behaviour needed to have consequences and that could be beneficial for the individual and others. One client stated that time on the streets could be useful in working out what they wanted.

*“sometimes some people should be evicted, there’s an impact on that person’s expectations, they just do the same in their next project”*

*Street outreach worker*

Interviewees stated that there was an impact on other clients when evictions were not carried out, especially around drug and alcohol use, dealing and bullying.

*“I remember experiencing a client who bullied clients, took money, abused others. Eventually he went into a different hostel and a guy ended up dead in his room. I think we allowed the bullying to go on and I think there was sexual abuse as well. I know it can be hard to prove... but I don’t think we did enough.”*

*Staff, small hostel*

Some interviewees were also clear that working with chaotic clients at risk of eviction could deny quieter clients (in some cases those who were at risk of abandonment) time with staff. One interviewee described how less assertive clients could get lost in the system.

### **AVAILABILITY OF MOVE-ON**

The availability of move-on was cited as a key factor that motivated clients to modify their behaviour and to maintain their tenancies. For instance, one couple, who were doing well in their new hostel and had plans to move on, described how the lack of move-on options had contributed to their behaviour before a previous eviction.

*“...they are always swapping your keyworker, so you have to start all over again... We didn’t participate. I couldn’t see how we’d get out of there, people had been there six years, and there wasn’t any point”*  
*Client, medium hostel*

Many clients expressed greater concern about being ‘abandoned’ in a hostel with little hope of move-on and becoming institutionalised, than about the risk of eviction or abandonment. Witnessing poor move-on outcomes amongst other clients had an impact on whether clients felt the hostel could help them if they stayed.

*“There has been people in here for eight years. I am cracking up after four months, imagine eight years. That’s not life”*  
*Client, small hostel*

A number of clients were remaining in their hostels in order to access move-on and were concerned about eviction and abandonment for that reason.

*“you lose all your points, you’re back to square one. I’ve got nearly 400 points now”*  
*Client, medium sized hostel*

### **CULTURE, ETHOS AND RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN STAFF AND CLIENTS**

Relationships with staff were a key area highlighted by clients. Clients wanted staff who visibly respected and cared about them and had the skills to offer the level of support they needed.

*“I like the hostel, I don’t want to be thrown out, it’s the best hostel I’ve been in. You’ve got a keyworker who cares about you. You’ve got people to help you.”*  
*Client, medium sized hostel*

Local authority representatives agreed that the skills and abilities of frontline staff are crucial; *“attitude – is the bottom line.”* Areas they highlighted included recruitment and retention; the size of caseloads when clients have significant support needs; the right pay; experience, training and workforce development; and managers dealing with burnout so that staff aren’t *“beleaguered.”* One Local Authority representative felt strongly that the way to prevent unnecessary evictions or abandonments was to *“start employing people with heart...people who are exhilarated by working with people.”*

At a number of hostels, clients were dissatisfied with staff, citing patronising attitudes, rudeness, and lack of basic communication skills. A small number of clients alleged that they had been assaulted by staff in previous accommodation and, whilst these incidents had been addressed, they still affected their perception of staff.

*“They tell you off and it’s like being back at school. You want staff to be polite and pleasant and the majority are. But [name] is abrupt and arrogant with people. I’ve seen them literally stamp their feet. You have to say ‘let’s sit down and discuss.’”*

*Client, large hostel*

*“the damage gets done with the first impression when the client walks through the door. I’ve had a staff member who addressed me not the client. English wasn’t his first language but he was so intent on spelling the form right that he was stopping him when the guy was talking about how he was depressed, his brother had died. My client was so angry.”*

*Street outreach worker*

Managers at two hostels expressed concerns about staff members’ ability to build relationships with clients. They described how longer term staff members, in particular, struggled with the loss of authority and maintained the belief that clients should show gratitude.

*“I have some staff that still stand around chatting with their arms crossed. We still need to break down the division between them and us. Some people are frightened of letting their guard down.”*

*Manager, small hostel*

Informal opportunities to spend time with staff, in particular time outside the hostel on trips, were highly valued by clients and staff. One hostel included a walk around the local area and lunch in a café as part of the first week induction, for clients to build a relationship with staff. The value of informal engagement is reinforced by the sense of segregation described by some interviewees.

*“They get on with what they’re getting on with. We get on with what we’re getting on with. There’s no help structure at all. People get fed up with the apathy coming out of the office”*

*Client, small hostel*

## **THE HOSTEL ENVIRONMENT**

The quality of the physical environment and availability of activities impacted on how motivated clients felt to maintain their tenancies.

*“it’s clean, spotless, that’s major. Every other hostel I’ve ever visited or stayed in has been a complete toilet”*

*Client, medium sized hostel*

When asked about the role of the building in preventing eviction or abandonment, one manager from a large hostel stated that.

*“You need to sort the basics first, so the doors lock, toilets are secure, security on the main door is tight and the hostel is clean and hygienic. People then feel safe and respect the hostel. If it’s already cared for then they are more likely to care for it.”*

A number of projects had communal space for clients that was visible from where staff worked and or office space that was visible or open to clients.

*“Staff are very visible to residents- residents can see where you are and come and find you. There’s no sense of staff ‘hiding out the back.”*

*Manager, very small hostel*

Many clients described hostels as tense environments where *“people rub up against each other and sometimes you can cut the atmosphere with a knife”* (Client, large hostel). Often, clients described their lives as boring and full of frustration and dissatisfaction which could boil over into ‘taking it out’ on staff or other clients.

Mealtimes and nighttimes were identified by both staff and clients at some hostels as a particular flashpoint for incidents between clients, as well as between clients and canteen or night staff.

*“There are loads of incidents in here, it kicks off all the time. Over a lighter, a drink, too much talking. The staff, they look at you like shit. The breakfast, it’s tiny.”*

*Client, small hostel*

Staff and clients identified the main causes of incidents between clients as arguments over debts, and drugs and alcohol. At some projects, relationship or friendship breakdown were also significant causes of conflict. Where the client group was more mixed, there was widespread dissatisfaction amongst non-users or people who identified primarily or solely as drinkers about being housed with drug users, which some staff and clients said could lead to arguments. A number of staff described the relationships between clients as ‘unhealthy’ with high levels of conflict and abuse. This was particularly the case at services working with high need groups, where relationships could involve antisocial behaviour.

The majority of clients, staff and managers believed that it was important for staff to assertively maintain a safe environment, let clients ‘know where they stand’ and give them an opportunity to modify their behaviour with one stating that *“If you didn’t get warned you’d have chaos”* (Client, small hostel).

Responding quickly and consistently to behaviour was widely seen as important in preventing issues from escalating. Some managers expressed that the response of those on duty at the time was really important. Staff needed to have the time and the skills to challenge appropriately whilst on shift; using a less skilled team of night staff or agency staff could result in ineffective immediate responses with a lasting impact.

*“how well its dealt with will depend on who’s on shift- how its followed up, how its challenged. The manager will take action but the damage is done, its how its dealt with at the time of the incident”*

*Staff, small hostel*

### **GOOD PRACTICE: King Georges Hostel, ECHG**

King Georges has a very low eviction rate, even though they work with chaotic drug users with complex needs. They have achieved this by adopting a client centred intensive keyworking approach. The staff team work on the premise that behavioural issues and drug related incidents should be addressed as a support need for that individual and not viewed as a reason to evict. The hostel is committed to giving people a second chance and is willing to take back residents even after threats of violence, or inappropriate behavior towards staff.

Kings Georges has designed a 6 week initial assessment. Clients are required to attend workshops during this time on blood borne viruses, safer injecting, treatment planning and overdose prevention. They are given a Notice to Quit if they don't attend. The aim is to get people engaged before giving them a longer tenancy. King Georges has a clear ethos that clients entering the hostel acknowledge they have a problem with drugs and want to deal with it. This intensive approach is believed to reduce risk, improve motivation, and prevent eviction and abandonment.

King Georges is also committed to making services as appealing as possible, for example providing a range of activities. One of the most successful activities that King Georges has provided is sport. There is some gym equipment and an arrangement with British Military Fitness army training instructors. Making the hostel an active place full of opportunities and potential gives clients something to be motivated about, it 'gives them something to lose'.

### **EXTERNAL CHECKING AND MONITORING**

Some managers stated that having to report evictions, abandonments and serious incidents to their commissioner or another external person was important in enabling a discussion about approach. Whilst the local authorities' representatives all focused on the target to increase the proportion of planned moves, they also stated that monitoring needs to look in detail at the service being provided and that some client groups were "so complex that they may not fit the targets" (Local authority representative).

*"The biggest drop has been evictions for arrears, because we ask... why? Who was responsible? Show us where it was in the support plan? And this will be addressed in re-tendering."*  
*Local authority representative*

One manager commented that direct advice from commissioners and involvement in case conferences are important steps in 'making housing providers accountable' (Manager, small hostel). At another hostel there was a sense that a reduction in evictions, that was primarily driven by commissioner targets, had led to the project avoiding evictions, without finding more constructive ways of working with behaviour. Insight into the challenges of the client group from commissioners, and a sense of being part of a larger local authority response to rough sleeping, meant that projects felt supported to take clients with a history of unplanned moves.

**GOOD PRACTICE: Citywide protocols, Nottingham City Council**

The council has developed a citywide evictions protocol to address the number of evictions from short-term services with licence agreements. As a result, evictions have reduced by more than half. The protocol demands that providers take a more holistic approach to eviction, working together and avoiding the easy option of evicting on the principle of 'out of sight, out of mind'. Increased scrutiny provided by the new homelessness prevention gateway means all allocation access is centralised. Providers must inform the gateway the day notice is served, including an explanation as to why the eviction has occurred. This also gives the opportunity for appropriate alternatives, such as hostel transfers, to be explored and rough sleeping to be avoided. Nottingham City council has also included National Indicator 141: Percentage of vulnerable people achieving independent living within their Local Area Agreement, which has also had an impact on reducing evictions.

**GOOD PRACTICE: Pathways/ transfers, Camden Council**

Camden Council has developed a pathways approach for homeless people, which has reduced evictions and rough sleeping in the Borough. Providers work together with other local providers to prevent clients who present challenging behaviour from being evicted on to the street by always looking for alternatives within the pathway. These sideways moves or transfers allow clients to access another opportunity and potentially more appropriate levels of support. The pathway is a progressive model towards independent living, so it can act as an incentive to modify behaviour.

# EVICTED FOR BEHAVIOURAL ISSUES

All the hostels experienced challenges in managing clients' behaviour. There were significant differences between hostels over what kinds of behaviour trigger sanctions, including eviction. Preventing eviction was both about preventing incidents from occurring and of finding ways to respond to incidents without evicting.

## DIFFERENT TYPES OF BEHAVIOURS LEADING TO EVICTION

The research identified a number of behaviours leading to sanctions or eviction as identified by staff and clients across the 14 hostels.

### Alcohol and drug use

Staff and clients identified that drugs and alcohol fuelled many of the incidents between clients. The hostels have varied responses to alcohol use, drug use and drug dealing; some did not allow use on site, whereas many had a harm minimisation approach. Many identified drug dealers by their high volume of visitors and would put visitor bans or behaviour contracts in place which, when breached, could result in evictions. Overall, alcohol users seemed to be a much more visibly disruptive group. Drug users were more likely not to engage with the service and to be involved in harassment of other clients. Staff at one hostel expressed concern that dealing and harassment by drug users was more difficult to evict clients for, even though the impact could be greater:

*"We don't always have enough evidence to evict. We need more CCTV cameras to catch drug dealing. It's very rare for eviction to happen on a drug basis. We pass it onto the safer neighbourhood team, but again it is hard to arrest..."*

*Staff, small hostel*

### Self harm

Managers, staff and clients identified mental health issues as a potential underlying cause of evictions alongside drug and alcohol use. A number of hostels identified self harm as a significant behavioural issue amongst a small number of clients, as well as a support need. They reported clients threatening to self harm in front of staff, self harming in communal areas and even threatening to harm others as well as themselves. Responses varied depending on the individual, with some clients needing time spent with them to prevent harm, whereas other clients were likely to stop if they were 'ignored.' One client whom we interviewed returned from hospital to find that he had been evicted after he self harmed and smashed his room in a distressed state. He was refused his belongings because they were covered in blood, and subsequently he slept rough.

### Neighbourhood issues

Some projects had specific challenges with managing antisocial behaviour in the neighbourhood, such as groups congregating, drinking and begging outside and noise. These behaviours would result in complaints from neighbours. Hostel managers stated that their policy towards street activity was influenced by the need to maintain good relations with neighbours and the local authority. This was a particular problem where projects were situated in high income residential areas, and where there was a lack of communal outdoor space away from public view.

At most of the hostels, behaviour directly outside the service could impact on a client's licence. At some hostels the relationship to wider community enforcement was even closer, including clients being threatened with eviction from their hostel place if they breached conditions of an Antisocial Behaviour Order resulting from behaviour elsewhere in the borough.

## Visitors and incidents

Most of the hostels allow accompanied visitors into the building during set daytime hours, but not overnight. One hostel did not allow visitors at all; another limited the areas they could access, and some had individualised approaches.

Contravening visitor rules is itself the cause of some evictions. At one hostel, where members of the opposite gender, were not allowed access, clients reported that a woman was evicted after she was assaulted in her room by her partner. An outreach worker also identified strict visitors' rules as a significant cause of both evictions and abandonment amongst people in relationships. At one hostel, visitors were unofficially staying overnight and were implicated in a number of violent incidents resulting in eviction:

*“It was his sons. He kept letting in people who were banned. He comes from a bad family around here. In the end a visitor pulled a knife on another resident, so we had to evict him”*  
*Manager, small hostel*

**GOOD PRACTICE: Flexible visitor policies developed with client involvement**  
Visitors' policies can often be a cause of incidents that escalate into warnings and lead to eviction. It is crucial to ensure that the visitor policies reflect the level of support need at the hostel. It must ensure safety for clients, whilst being flexible in promoting positive social relationships for clients. One very small hostel dedicated to working with clients who are multiply excluded has individualised visitors' arrangements. Clients are also expected to introduce visitors to staff.

At another high support hostel, clients can have overnight visitors as long as they have received no warnings during the previous month; the visitors' policy, therefore, acts as a behavioural incentive and ensures that clients who have visitors are those whose behaviour is not presenting current concern.

## Challenging authority

At a number of services, staff described particular clients who either directly challenged their authority or who influenced other clients. For instance, one client who was dissatisfied about the food began to take a bin into the dining room and dumping his entire dinner into it. Although such behaviour was not necessarily directly against the rules, staff expressed relief when certain individuals were evicted. At a few projects there was an implicit suggestion that challenges to authority may have influenced the decision to evict on other grounds. For instance, at one service, a staff member described an approach that resulted in a vulnerable client being evicted.

*“There was a chaotic resident who was managing to recruit other clients. I wanted to get her to engage by putting lots of boundaries around her, linking her into mental health services. She was evicted on the grounds of non-engagement. Other clients weren't engaging, staff were stressed. She stopped people engaging with the residents' meetings, made them think in certain ways, she was quite powerful. She wasn't being nasty, she had other issues.”*  
*Staff, medium sized hostel*

Some clients expressed the feeling that they needed to 'keep their head down' or felt that they were 'treading on eggshells' to avoid eviction.

## CLIENT ATTITUDES AND PATTERNS OF BEHAVIOUR

Clients who had experienced eviction for behavioural issues displayed resistance to considering the causes of their eviction, especially around whether there was anything they could have done differently. This contrasted with people who were evicted for arrears, or who abandoned, who were frequently very reflective about their experience. It appears that a lack of insight and ability to reflect amongst this group contributes to the likelihood of eviction.

Most clients expressed that they had 'no regrets' about the incidents that had led to their eviction, or that nothing could have prevented it from happening; even though this was frequently combined with a stated desire to maintain their current tenancy. One client with a history of being evicted for violent incidents stated,

*"I don't care if I get kicked out, it's not worrying. I do appreciate their help, in the end I do want things to change, but I've got no regrets."*

Staff identified that clients with an inability or unwillingness to reflect on and modify their behaviour were a particularly challenging group. These clients were most frequently heavy alcohol users with long histories of rough sleeping and eviction. Some staff believed that they may have cognitive impairments. With these clients there appears to be a culture in which violence is seen as both inevitable and necessary to maintain a sense of pride.

*"It's misdirected violence, they use anger to express themselves. There's a culture of violence from the street, not the culture of talking things through"*

*Staff, very small hostel*

*"Do you expect me to take s\*\*t from other people, I deal with stuff with my fists. I would love to stay here but it's the other residents... I have been evicted from twelve hostels, mainly for fighting, sticking up for myself."*

*Client, medium hostel*

One manager identified a similar pattern for chaotic drug users who were at high risk of eviction for drug dealing and antisocial behaviour and had *"no sense of consequence (Manager, large hostel)."*

## HOSTEL APPROACHES TO BEHAVIOURAL ISSUES

This section outlines the different approaches that hostels take to dealing with behavioural issues. It looks at the sanctions, systems and policies in place.

### Warnings-based policies

All the hostels had escalatory systems of warnings and other sanctions that could be triggered in response to behaviour contravening hostel rules. These systems were constructed around a fixed number of verbal and written warnings which, when breached, would usually be followed by behaviour agreements or contracts. One organisation had an additional stage of applying for an Antisocial Behaviour Order through the courts, and another of issuing a conditional notice to quit. The final stage of the process was a Notice to Quit (NTQ) which, at some services, was usually a 7 day notice and at others a twenty-eight day notice. These stepped processes were detailed in written policies and procedures at the majority of hostels. Hostels would also issue NTQs with no notice for serious incidents.

Staff and managers described the purpose of escalatory warnings-based systems as a means of promoting individual responsibility for behaviour, awareness of consequences and opportunities to change. Clients accepted the principle of warnings and in most cases saw them as offering another chance.

Stepped processes are seen as offering an audit trail to demonstrate that the client's behaviour had been managed appropriately prior to eviction and that they had received sufficient offers of support. A number of managers stated that they would review this before deciding whether to evict or review the decision after an appeal. One manager commented that as a result escalatory systems were not so much preventative as *“more about enforcement - a paper trail before you evict someone” (manager, very small hostel).*

### **Rewards and alternative sanctions**

Most sanctions rely on the threat of eviction to dissuade clients from inappropriate behaviour. However, some services have developed alternative approaches such as de-escalatory techniques, rewards and the withdrawal of privileges. One service has identified that denying access to communal space was effective because it provided a more immediate and proportional disincentive than eviction, as well as employing peer pressure.

*“barring people from using the communal space really works. They get a letter stating they can't use the room for three days and they can appeal. We also close it fully for 24 hours if there is smoking. The TV room is the hub of the hostel. Other residents don't like to see difficulty, they want a quiet area so peer pressure works”*  
*Manager, small hostel*

Another organisation has adopted the idea of 'rewards' alongside sanctions. At present these rewards consist of congratulatory letters when clients successfully complete warnings and contract periods without infringing them. One project that avoided using escalatory warnings uses an approach incorporating a meeting, discussion and written record similar to some warnings and contracts, but without including any threat of exclusion.

### **Appeals**

At some services appeals are strongly encouraged to the extent that receiving a NTQ is in practice more of a conditional threat than an actual eviction. Opinions varied on how useful this practice is, with one interviewee stating that it provides an opportunity for people to learn to negotiate, whilst another stated that it was stressful for clients.

At other services appeals are only accepted if there were indications that staff were at fault, and staff seemed to find low levels of appeals a positive sign that *“people know why they've been evicted” (manager, large hostel).*

### **Temporary exclusion**

Some services use temporary exclusion to manage the risk that clients' behaviour presents. In many cases exclusion is for a few hours or nights only, but a minority of hostels exclude clients for longer periods. Views on this practice varied greatly.

*“If someone's behaviour is uncontrollable you need to work with them. It's a form of discharge of responsibility, irresponsible. Getting them to leave the building may be unsafe to them and the community. You need to call the police.”*  
*Manager, medium sized hostel*

At some hostels staff described how temporary exclusion is an alternative to immediate eviction. This enables the risk to be managed in the short term whilst a decision could be made about longer term housing. It also enables staff to take a more assertive approach to *“take control of the situation...once someone's out that front door you've got a lot of power” (staff, medium sized hostel).* At one

project with a chaotic client group, short term exclusion is sometimes used in the face of “*persistently annoying behaviour.*”

*“Someone gets drunk on your shift and you put them outside the front door until you go home. They get fixed on people on shift. You do it so you can get on with your job.”*

*Staff, medium sized hostel*

*“They will exclude people, but it works and I think that is right...you know you can come back”*

*Client, medium sized hostel*

### **Transfers to other provision and finding alternatives**

A number of local authority representatives stated that having a pathways approach is crucial in order to allow a more seamless movement across the different services they commission. This ranged from an informal approach to a formalised set of protocols to enable ‘sideways moves’. One commissioner described how in one of their successful projects the staff contact them prior to the tenancy breaking down so that the commissioner could work with them to suggest an alternative.

In some areas, this system is formalised. As well as a multi-agency meeting, there are separate case conferences to discuss the route for people before an eviction takes place. This may include contingency plans for clients likely to encounter difficulties. It was also seen as important that hostels should notify outreach teams.

Many of the hostels that we visited cited transfers to other hostels as a way of preventing eviction onto the street. Such transfers usually happen at quite a late stage in the process of behaviour management when other options have been exhausted. However some services either did not use transfers at all or did not see it as their responsibility to actively arrange transfers.

*“They have to come to you for help to move, you don’t have to follow them”*

*Staff, medium hostel*

Transfers are widely accepted by interviewees as a better outcome than eviction, but some clients we spoke to were dissatisfied about the impact of the transfer system “*pushing a person’s life up and down*” (*Client, medium sized hostel*). This was especially the case when the move was seen as a ‘move backwards’ to less desirable accommodation and when the client was not fully consulted about the move. Outreach workers shared these concerns.

*“They mostly don’t evict, they push you onto another hostel. It’s passing the problem on, going round hostels five or ten times.”*

*Client, small hostel*

### **Working with the police**

Many services emphasised the importance of involving the police when they believed an offence had been committed. The main benefit is the opportunity to demonstrate that the law applies within the hostel. Interviewees stated that the criminal justice system offers a more appropriate means of investigating offences and provides safe alternative accommodation in custody. Clients hold mixed views. Some dislike seeing police in their home environment. However, one client who is currently suspected of drug dealing at his hostel commented that.

*“they should phone the police, give the police the information. You have to let the police deal with it. They would knock the door in, search the room, it would have been over and done with”*

*Client, day centre*

*“Don’t always leave it down to internal investigation when things go pear-shaped. Lots of people don’t want to see police on the premises. But if it’s your property that’s gone then you want [the police] to make the decision about what happens.”*

*Client, small hostel*

Some hostels reported difficulties in getting the police to engage with them, and one hostel did not seem to use police even in serious incidents.

*“there was a fight in a resident’s room, the resident had a knife in his hand, there was a visitor with a head wound. We gave the resident half an hour to pack his belongings and leave. We told him. ‘Leave or we’ll call the police.’ We knew the room was full of drugs so he wouldn’t want the police there.”*

*Staff, small hostel*

## **FACTORS INFLUENCING THE APPROACH HOSTELS TAKE TO BEHAVIOUR**

Regarding approaches to managing behaviour, the clearest distinction between hostels lay in *how* they used sanctions, based on their underlying ethos, rather than the types of sanctions they used.

We have identified three main categories to help us classify the approaches taken by different hostels. They are:

- **Proactive tolerance** where behaviour triggers responses, but these responses are primarily supportive, rather than punitive. Whilst action was taken to minimise behaviour, many hostels adopting this approach prioritise keeping clients in the service, and are willing to tolerate significant levels of challenging behaviour.
- **Proactive intolerance** where the response is assertive, but primarily orientated around preventing behaviour, through sanctions and ultimately exclusion, rather than keeping people in.
- **Passive tolerance** where behaviour triggers minimal supportive or punitive responses from staff.

### **Different approaches to using sanctions**

Despite similarity in policies across services, the way sanctions are used differs. Projects that adopt ‘tolerant’ approaches might successfully manage, or choose to tolerate, lower levels of problematic behaviour and therefore only behaviour that presents a very great risk results in eviction. Those hostels with an ‘active intolerance’ approach might evict for behaviour that would result only in a warning at other services. The research found that services that take a ‘proactive intolerant’ approach tend to use formal sanctions the most. Hostels that take a ‘proactive tolerant’ approach tend to have the lowest level of evictions.

The type of approach taken varies according to incidents with most projects appearing to have implicit thresholds beyond which problematic behaviour would not be tolerated. For instance, some projects that are characterised by a ‘passive tolerant’ approach are more likely to evict and take a ‘proactive intolerance’ approach once a certain level of behaviour had been reached. Projects that primarily took a ‘proactive intolerant’ approach are generally supportive of clients around initial incidents, but have a lower ‘threshold’ for escalating into punitive approaches.

*“You can be evicted for repeat smoking. But we can be confident that people who reach the end of the policy have taken no responsibility. People that would get evicted at the end of the procedure shouldn’t be in the service.”*

*Manager, large hostel*

Other projects with a 'proactive tolerant' approach avoid using stepped sanctions and getting 'trapped' into an escalatory response. Managers argued that sanctions are ineffective with the most challenging clients, especially those who do not have the insight or capacity to modify their behaviour:

*“a stepped structured process doesn't work for this client group. If a warning system was used then 3 warnings would be used up in a weekend. If you start a process then they may disengage. Most residents here have been through the warnings process in other projects and it hasn't worked for them. We don't use a final warning, we might as well give up”*  
*Manager, very small hostel*

Some staff and managers expressed concern that warnings and contracts could lose their impact if over-used and at a few projects there seemed to be a form of 'sanctions inflation' occurring as a result. Some staff reported the challenges of administering sanctions systems where there might be different types of behaviour over time. Most policies did not suggest a time limit to sanctions such as warnings.

There was also a very strong emphasis among many clients and staff on the negative impact of receiving warnings in the form of a 'letter under the door' which was experienced as 'antagonistic' and 'threatening' in comparison to a face-to-face interaction. Some projects adopt a more contract-based approach emphasising two-way discussion, an increased offer of support, and an individualised and mutually agreed warning or contract, with one client stating that *“the contract system is good, it makes you think they want to keep hold of you”* (Client, small hostel).

*“It's a two way contract but it's clear about what's acceptable or not. We ask what would work for the person. For instance one client has asked to be told to go to his room when he's intoxicated”*  
*Manager, small hostel*

Most hostels link their level of tolerance to the size of the project. There was agreement amongst managers of hostels of all sizes that tolerant approaches were more difficult to operate in large hostels because of the impact on other clients.

### **GOOD PRACTICE: London Road, Framework Housing Association**

The hostel previously had a problem with large numbers of evictions resulting from incidents involving confrontation between clients and staff. Recognising that evictions were too high and that evictions from emergency access accommodation left people street homeless, new management brought about a change in staff culture to tackle the problem. Rules that had previously led to temporary exclusions and bans, which would often escalate to eviction,, such as smoking, waking people up for cleaners to access rooms and issues with drug use, were reviewed and a more tolerant and realistic staff approach was adopted.

Staff are encouraged to respect clients' individual needs and informal keywork from the outset is promoted so people feel supported straight away. Staff are encouraged to use warnings sparingly and tighten monitoring and recording systems to ensure staff reflect on their decisions. Warnings are discussed in weekly support plan sessions and within team meetings. The manager stated that there was "initial resistance" from staff and clients around the culture change. However, over time clients and staff have seen an increase in positive moves, more effective keywork, and less incidents leading to eviction.

### **Defined client group and ethos**

Some of the most tolerant projects are those that self-identified as specialist projects working with the multiply excluded or with the most entrenched rough sleepers. In these projects even clients who had committed arson or violence towards staff might be tolerated, subject to conditions.

*'A client attacked a member of staff with her zimmer frame. She was arrested but allowed back in. She then premeditatedly punched a worker giving her a black eye. She was temporarily excluded and it was agreed that she needed to show remorse and to apologise. She could come back if she engaged'*

*Manager, small hostel*

However, some projects that take an approach of 'active intolerance' also work with high need groups. There appears to be a mismatch at some projects between expectations of behaviour and the client group that the hostel works with. One hostel was identified by managers as 'the last place' for clients in the borough, yet also operates a 'zero tolerance' approach to violent incidents and uses sanctions for most behaviour. At another hostel drug and alcohol use is banned anywhere inside the hostel leading to a high proportion of evictions, despite the project accepting referrals of people who have current drug and alcohol needs.

At some projects, an ethos of recovery and change seems to be more significant than the support needs of their client group in influencing the level of tolerance towards behaviour. Most of the hostels we visited that have tougher attitudes towards behaviour are those that define their role in this way. The extent to which this approach results in higher evictions may depend on how successful they are in ensuring that potential clients are genuinely motivated and ready to change, and the extent to which this aspiration of promoting recovery is backed up by support.

*"there is a tremendous amount of expectation here. We use the recovery approach: you're in control, where do you want to get to?...for some the expectation is too much and that's where you get abandonments. But it's important to have high expectations, you can have a better life, staff need to believe that. We've seen a lot of success- it's the minority who aren't ready for change..."*

*Manager, small hostel*

### **GOOD PRACTICE: Rowan Alba, Edinburgh**

Rowan Alba, a charity for vulnerable people in Scotland provides individual permanent tenures at Thorntree Street for individuals facing multiple exclusion. Rowan Alba involves clients in the projects' development right from the start and has seen excellent results with individuals with long term histories of rough sleeping, eviction and abandonment. The main ethos of Thorntree Street is to provide sustainable long-term secure accommodation to tenants within their current lifestyles, choices and support needs, remembering not to under-estimate the importance of security of tenure.

In Edinburgh it was identified that there are a number of people who have been excluded from all support available to them. They have been evicted from all or are unable to sustain all forms of local provision and have exhausted all options. Rowan Alba responded by developing a project that gave excluded rough sleepers the opportunity to have individual tenancies with on-site support attached. Since opening they have had just one eviction in five years. The project has 24-hour staffing and there is high ratio of support worker to client. Having individual tenancies ensures that individuals must take a level of responsibility in order to keep their property. The key to the success of this project is that clients feel they have ownership and something worth holding on to, along with an excellent supportive staff team, with a person centred approach.

### **Consistency or individualised approaches**

Managers, staff and clients described how the approach to managing behaviour ranges from trying to apply sanctions equally through to taking individualised responses depending on circumstances.

*"I sometimes struggle with inconsistency...everyone's watching you and if you are seen to be giving preferential treatment to people it can create challenging behaviour and it can create problems for staff and performance."*

*Manager, medium sized hostel*

Clients sometimes complained that *"there's one rule for one and not for another"* (client, small hostel) while managers described how some clients are more likely to be given additional chances. Consistency often seems to be associated with a strict, rules-led approach. One hostel has instituted a comprehensive policy-orientated approach to maintain consistency.

*"the policy makes the decisions. We look at what the staff have done... where they've got it wrong, the procedure sorts it out."*

*Manager, large hostel*

Other managers argued that personal circumstances should be taken into consideration. Many clients also wanted circumstances, such as any difficulties the client was facing, to be considered. Their use of the word 'consistency' often referred to the need for a united front across staff teams, and for proportionate 'common sense' responses.

*"Sometimes it's too consistent, like a witch hunt. Sometimes it's not consistent enough. Good staff will deal with an incident well, some staff are more willing to chuck you out. It's common sense, you have to deal with an incident on it's own merits. But it has to be fair. You need a middle ground."*

*Client, large hostel*

There was no particular correlation between hostels that emphasized consistency and strict rules, and whether their clients were satisfied that the approach was consistent. If anything there was perhaps an indication that at more tolerant hostels, clients trusted staff to make fair decisions. The manager at one hostel described how staff *“needed to be seen to do something”* and would *“present back”* examples of how their own behaviour had been worked with if clients were concerned about decisions. Another hostel working with high need clients also used client meetings to discuss incidents and build clients’ understanding of acceptable behaviour.

#### **GOOD PRACTICE: The Old Theatre, Broadway**

The Old Theatre is a specialised project that works with entrenched rough sleepers in London, who have experienced multiple exclusion and present complex needs. The Old Theatre adopts a flexible, creative and personalised approach to support. The focus is on building rapport in order to support, challenge and enable clients to take responsibility for their actions and their home. House rules and visitors policies are written with clients to meet their individual needs and the team works collectively to address the behavioural issues that contributed to previous exclusions. This intensive work is driven by highly skilled team consensus approach to ensure safety and flexibility for clients. Each worker has in-depth knowledge of the clients with a lead key worker to coordinate support and provide consistency.

This project is tolerant to associated behavioural problems linked to long term alcohol use and seeks to stabilise individuals by offering them a home from which they will not be rejected. Client involvement from the start is crucial to the success of this project, for example clients are involved in choosing room furnishings and how the service would be run. This project has been operating for less than 12 months so the long term outcomes are yet to be seen. However, staff have recorded positive changes, including clients maintaining their tenancies for longer than ever before and engaging with support. Many have stabilised their drinking and registered with external services, such as the GP and drug and alcohol agencies.

#### **Understanding and working with behaviour**

One of the strongest messages from clients is the need for approaches to behaviour to begin with a conversation about why the behaviour had occurred.

*“They weren’t very cooperative when I wanted help. They should have listened and stopped making judgements about everything I do. Once you’re badly behaved they think you’re always badly behaved, they think you’re trouble. They use my behaviour against me. They need to work out why I’m losing it.”*

*Client, medium sized hostel*

Most local authority representatives made the point that hostels are working with the most socially excluded people with a proportion of clients who are particularly chaotic. Staff and managers in hostels where evictions are low saw problematic behaviour as a support need and emphasised the need for discussion with clients.

*“Previously we were dealing with the manifestation of the issue, now we are dealing with the causes”*

*Staff, small hostel*

Responses do not always need to be punitive or even educative. Staff at one hostel prioritise keeping a multiply excluded client group housed and focus, therefore, on de-escalating incidents and even distracting clients.

*“It’s amazing what a game of cards or a sandwich can do. It distracts and diffuses. We accept them as whole human beings; we have to dissociate the behaviour.”*

*Staff, very small hostel*

#### **GOOD PRACTICE: Bedford Borough Council**

Bedford Borough Council has adopted a strategic multi-agency approach to reduce rough sleeping in its area. One of the key targets is to reduce evictions related to anti social behaviour (ASB). Through their Homelessness Grant, the council paid for frontline hostel staff to have training in dealing with ASB. The training helped staff to learn methods that de-escalates incidents, allows clients to cool off and to keep people calm. The training also demanded that staff ensure there is time to discuss incidents with clients after the event, thus giving people time to reflect and an opportunity to explore the reasons for their behaviour. A number of agencies have reported a decrease in the number of incidents and evictions because of ASB in the last 12 months.

## EVICTION AND ARREARS

**Clients are usually entitled to claim housing benefit towards their rent, which is paid directly to the housing provider. At all the hostels we visited, clients are also required to pay a weekly ‘service charge’ from their own income. Arrears may be accrued when either the housing benefit or service charge payments are missing.**

### PREVALENCE

This section looks at the prevalence of evictions for arrears across the 14 hostels. It also looks in more detail at housing benefit and service charge arrears.

The levels of eviction for arrears vary widely across the projects; some hostels had had no evictions for arrears over the last two years, whereas at other projects evictions on the basis of arrears, or abandonments after clients had received a Notice to Quit, were the main cause of unplanned moves. There is no clear association between size of hostel or client group and the prevalence of eviction for arrears. Where there were higher levels of evictions for arrears, there was more emphasis on distinguishing between clients who were having difficulties paying through no fault of their own, and those clients who refused to pay. There was often a feeling that non-payment should have consequences.

*“The aim is to be fair but to take individual needs into consideration. Identifying people who have no intention of paying... It’s an important part of preparing for move-on so they don’t lose their tenancy and learn to take responsibility.”*

*Manager, medium sized hostel*

Hostels with the lowest evictions for arrears were those where the manager has a personal policy of not evicting for arrears. In some cases managers maintain their position in the face of organisational pressure, with one manager even charging his clients less than the official service charge because he felt it was unreasonable.

*“No, I don’t evict for rent arrears, [the LA] and [the organisation] do and say I should”*

*Manager, medium sized hostel*

*‘...we are running at a deficit because of arrears, but I am not going to chuck anyone out for arrears.’*

*Manager, small sized hostel*

Some projects actively take steps to prevent evictions for arrears and are willing to wait for arrears to be paid, including recognising the financial benefits of doing so.

*‘We have an organisational mantra that to evict for arrears would be failing. It puts someone back to square one. Also there would be a negative financial impact on the organisation: it’s usually unrecoverable if you evict.’*

*Manager, large hostel*

### Housing benefit as a cause of arrears

Successfully establishing and maintaining housing benefit claims presents challenges in many cases and could lead to arrears accruing quickly. Services described particular groups who have particular difficulty setting up claims, including chaotic clients, young people and sex workers.

*“You can’t drag them to the jobcentre, their housing benefit breaks down. I served him notice in the end, he was only seventeen and it was his first time claiming benefits. I don’t know if he understood.”*

*Staff, small hostel*

A small proportion of entrenched rough sleepers and people with mental health problems refuse to sign housing benefit forms. One hostel has specifically created additional accommodation with no rent or service charge in order to build a relationship with clients with these needs before moving them into the main accommodation.

*“because most people do pay we can have flexibility with those who won’t. We’ve created a room that residents don’t need to pay for. You don’t need to fill out housing benefit forms. To encourage them to stay longer you would have to persuade them and show them you have something to offer. You wait till the penny drops.”*

*Staff, medium sized hostel*

Clients reported that limited support from hostel staff to complete and follow-up housing benefit forms was a significant issue. A few clients also reported that staff had failed to send housing benefit forms or to complete them correctly. Outreach staff complained that some hostels required clients to attend housing benefit offices by themselves who were not realistically able to do so.

### **Service charges as a cause of arrears**

Service charges at the hostels vary between £9 and £33 per week. Self-catering projects are the cheapest. There is no association between cost and facilities other than food, with some of the most expensive hostels having the poorest facilities for service users in terms of general upkeep or shared bathrooms. There is also little association between the provision of food and the profile of the client group, with some projects housing high need clients offering self-catering.

*“The main reason for eviction is rent arrears. It’s a bit of a cheek to have to pay £55 per fortnight, it baffles me when the council pays £145. It sounds like a fiddle.”*

*Client, large hostel*

Whilst there are projects with high service charges that had low numbers of unplanned moves, others are notable for particularly high levels of eviction and abandonment associated with arrears. The two projects with the lowest service charges have particularly low rent arrears evictions.

Managers expressed concern about the level of service charge as a potential cause of evictions and abandonments and have aspirations to convert more accommodation to self-catering in order to reduce service charges. There was often a sense that the quality of accommodation or service does not justify the service charge:

*“Its hard to get people to pay their service charge when its so high and the building is such a mess”*

*Staff, small hostel*

### **CASE STUDY: O, an Asian British man in his late twenties.**

O built up significant arrears and was dissatisfied at the level of service charge and the service that he was receiving. "The service charge was too much - £45 every two weeks, and I was paying back crisis loans. I was left with £10. All the workers want you to do is to pay the service charge, there was pressure every day. When I asked for things I wasn't getting them, like extra portions at dinner. I asked myself, is it worth staying here?" O asked the staff whether there was any way to opt out of food and not pay the service charge, but this was not possible. O believes that they should stop paying so much service charge and described the environment as "a half bent pool table, a table tennis with a metal net, a TV with no wires. There's a lot of food left over but staff take the food for themselves, that really pissed you off. There's not even a plug socket in your room." O believes that he might not have abandoned if there were "more stuff to do, day outings.. courses, something to build up your life."

O started to plan his abandonment a couple of days before. "I was weighing up but there were more benefits to getting out than to stay." He made his final decision after receiving a letter about his arrears: "when I got something under the door that was the biggest shock. A few days before I thought I owed £300 but it said I owed £900."

## **CAUSES OF ARREARS**

### **Financial hardship and debt**

It was apparent that clients often struggle to budget and pay service charges due to other debts, in particular Social Security Crisis Loans. As one member of staff from a small hostel stated, "*They all have crisis loans, they are often in negative equity before they start.*" Young people were identified as having particular financial problems due to the lower level of benefits they received; one young person was expected to pay more service charge than she received in benefit money once her Crisis Loan was deducted.

Staff and clients described how complex relationships of financial interdependence between clients are endemic. This varies from voluntary loans to financial exploitation, and is both a cause of financial difficulty and a strategy for managing finances. Staff and clients described how clients with drug and alcohol needs prioritise their habit over their rent and are at particular risk. Two clients interviewed had gambling issues, including one who had been evicted six times for arrears.

There appears to be an issue with clients keeping track of the level of arrears, which could be both confusing and demotivating. Clients referred to receiving letters stating that they had high arrears when they hadn't been aware of any problem. This is made worse by the set up time for housing benefit, direct deductions, and the fact that both are paid in arrears.

*"My payments weren't recorded properly and I got into arrears, even though I had filled in the forms...it was sorted in the end, but by then I had found another hostel."*

*Client, medium sized hostel*

### **Clients entering employment**

A number of services identified clients entering employment as a particularly high risk group for arrears. Managers are concerned that more people are likely to be evicted as more clients are supported to access employment, and clients are concerned that returning to work is 'non-viable.'

Staff and clients reported that the work that former homeless people could take on is usually low paid, part time or insecure. Clients find themselves ineligible for housing benefit; have repeat and lengthy stoppages of their benefits claims as a result of multiple changes of circumstances; or are unable to meet rent payments.

*“They found me a job, low pay... they did the calculator thing and I thought yeah ok, I get working tax credit and a bit of Housing Benefit on top, it should be ok. Anyway, five months later I got refused working tax credit, not enough info. I sent them everything. I liked the job, I was doing ok. I got the letter under the door after 5 months saying I was in £1000 rent arrears. I couldn't catch up, so I packed my bags.”*

*Client, consultative focus group*

These issues are exacerbated by the difficulties staff face in meeting with this client group to discuss arrears and to support them with benefit claims. A manager from a large hostel stated, *“they're harder to work with, unengaged with staff, keep their head down.”* The lack of engagement with staff is attributed either to their being at work during the day, or to lower support needs and no longer needing the service. At one hostel the manager described how entering employment could lead to some clients being evicted:

*‘Often working full time leads to eviction as people no longer have support needs. Housing benefit won't pay. They can pay it in the private rented sector; they no longer fit the criteria. They would be blocking a space. They're given a 28 day notice’*

*Manager, medium hostel*

### **CASE STUDY: P, living in a hostel when he started a job at a hairdressers shop for 7 hours per week**

Despite the low hours, his housing benefits were reduced and he found himself owing hundreds of pounds. One year after he started the job, P was evicted after failing to meet a deadline to pay £200. He couldn't find full time work, or pay the rent. He also described feeling that the staff were unfriendly and wanted him out; they were “used to troublesome people”, whereas he “kept quiet.” The client was supported to join the LA housing list, but received no support in liaising with housing benefit or in accessing more realistic move-on accommodation. After the eviction, he slept rough in west London for four months before being re-referred into a hostel for rough sleepers.

One local authority interviewee talked about a trial of “Working Beds” where, for a select number of individuals, the Local Authority will underwrite the financial loss as a way of addressing the issue. The end point is to assist people into an affordable private tenancy with routes back to support.

### **APPROACHES TO MANAGING ARREARS**

Staff identified the importance of a well-managed, consistent and assertive response to arrears to prevent eviction and abandonment. Some managers described raising the profile of arrears management within the staff team as important, although the

structures chosen to achieve this varied: in one case having a single administrator and others making it the responsibility of the whole team.

Most hostels use payment plans often alongside warnings and conditional notices to quit. However, there are challenges with this approach, including the difficulty of how to respond to erratic payment. At the stricter end of the spectrum, some hostels would evict if the client missed a payment once the plan was in place. Many clients and staff identified an issue with clients not keeping to payment plans because they didn't believe they would actually be evicted:

*“as a result of a tougher attitude towards arrears...there is a spike in evictions. People don't believe they will be evicted, they see the level of arrears that other people have accrued. About half of current residents have received a notice to quit”*

*Manager, medium sized hostel*

*“...I wasn't aware until the day that I was going to be evicted. I knew I signed a contract but I didn't read the small print. I was paying most weeks. It was being lazy, it was my fault for not paying, I saw people with £800 arrears and didn't think I would be evicted. My keyworker set up the agreement and then he left the next day.”*

*Client, medium sized hostel*

A minority of hostels successfully used temporary exclusions as a last resort to encourage payment. Some staff recalled other punitive approaches that, in the past, had enabled them to wield the threat of eviction more effectively.

*“I would like to see a return to the old system where you only allow them to stay the night if they've paid their rent. 24 hour charging would keep them on their toes. If they don't have access to their room they would need to keep that contact. You can't do that because of human rights, the only thing you can do is support them to devise a payment plan.”*

*Staff, large hostel*

While most hostels use the threat of eviction to encourage payment, two hostels highlight to clients that their move-on could be impacted in order to motivate clients to make payments:

*“If people have rent arrears of over six weeks, then they can't work with the resettlement team about their move-on.”*

*Manager, medium hostel*

Some projects have approaches to help service users maximise income and manage money more effectively, which they feel contributes to lower arrears and evictions, with one manager stating that this approach means people are happier to pay service charges.

Most projects working with the highest need clients hold money for them in order to ensure that they pay rent and other bills before buying alcohol or drugs. Such arrangements are voluntary, but could form the basis at some hostels of whether or not the client is allowed to return after a temporary exclusion. Clients see the benefits of the approach in particular individual circumstances, but were often resistant to having their money controlled. In some cases clients demanding their money could be a cause of aggressive incidents, but staff at these projects, all of which have low unplanned moves despite working with the highest need clients, see this approach as essential to preventing evictions for arrears.

*“We wouldn’t have anyone who could keep their tenancies if staff didn’t hold their money. They pay their bills first then there’s an allowance negotiated day by day”*  
*Manager, very small hostel*

A number of services reported encouraging clients to set up direct service charge and arrears payments from their benefits. The majority of managers and clients are extremely positive about using direct payments and some have excellent working relationships with welfare benefit agencies.

*“Rent should be paid automatically, none of this you choose, opt in or opt out. If you’re on the gear you’re not going to do it”*  
*Client, large hostel*

# ABANDONMENT

For most clients who abandoned their hostel place, a combination of factors or concerns, both inside and outside the hostel, had built up to provoke their premeditated decision to abandon. As a street outreach worker commented, “there’s probably half a dozen things pushing them towards abandonment”. A common theme amongst staff and managers is that people who abandon ‘fail to settle’ and adapt to hostel life. This could apply to a variety of groups including people who were ‘quieter’ and socially vulnerable, entrenched rough sleepers, and people with chaotic lifestyles. As one manager summarised:

*“When the hostel doesn’t meet their needs, they don’t know how to make it meet their needs. They tend not to be the most antisocial. They tend to be off the staff radar or on the radar because they’re particularly vulnerable.”*  
Manager, large hostel

## ABANDONMENT AND CHAOTIC LIFESTYLES

### **CASE STUDY: S, a white British man in his twenties**

S was reasonably satisfied with his hostel, but had little contact with keyworkers. S stayed away from the hostel because there was a warrant out for his arrest, and he was also suffering from drug withdrawal. He only found out that he had lost his place when he tried to return after going to court. S commented that, “I should have told them what the situation was. I was in a haze, out of my head. But the keyworker could have come and looked for me - my friend told him where I was, we could have sorted something out between us. It’s nice someone’s thinking about you at least.” After the abandonment, S spent a year moving between rough sleeping, squatting and prison.

For many people who abandon, the immediate trigger lies in changes to their personal lives, rather than issues relating to the service they were receiving. Most of the clients interviewed have chaotic lifestyles, often associated with drug use and offending. Hostel managers reported that a number of perceived ‘abandonments’ were later discovered to be as a result of clients being taken into custody. Other clients abandoned in order to avoid being found when there was a warrant out for their arrest or when they were due in court. Escaping debts to other clients or to drug dealers and subsequent threats or arguments are also common factors contributing to abandonment.

*“someone you owe money finds out where you live... you just pack your bags”*  
Client, consultative focus group

## ENTRENCHED ROUGH SLEEPERS

A particular group of repeat abandoners are entrenched rough sleepers who describe themselves, and are described by others, as ‘wanderers’ who find it difficult or even undesirable to adjust to coming off the streets.

*“an elderly guy lived next to me and he absolutely hated the fact that he lived in a hostel and he wanted to rough sleep. He fought with the staff to live outside, he used to abandon and the police would bring him back. Now he finally lives outside.”*  
Client, medium sized hostel

This pattern of repeat abandonments and returns was identified across many hostels. Local authority representatives stated that “*specialist high support projects*” are needed for this group, a view that is shared by hostel managers..

*“there’s a gap in the middle for people who can’t sustain this type of tenancy. We need spaces for this group of chronically excluded people: smaller, higher, very high behaviour tolerance, personalised, and to create a barrier between them and the neighbourhood”*

*Manager, large hostel*

Some projects have successful approaches to engage with this client group, indicating that, with specialist provision, abandonment could be prevented. Two projects working with this group offered clients opportunities to visit the project before moving in. At one hostel clients are encouraged to attend for food and could even sleep in communal areas before they felt ready to move in properly.

*“people hook in slowly. They view themselves as someone who lives outdoors and comes in for a meal every so often. Their abandonment is leaving the area they’re used to”*

*Manager, medium hostel*

#### **CASE STUDY: D, living in a low support cluster flat associated with a very small hostel**

D was street homeless for ten years. D describes how he “found it difficult to stay anywhere, got itchy feet.” D identified that he settled down because of problems with his health as he got older. “I do go wandering sometimes in the summer, it’s the freedom, you can find money. But it gets harder when you’re older, the cold.” The hostel manager identified that income maximisation, combating isolation and providing a routine of activities was key to reducing D’s abandonments. After receiving Disability Living Allowance, D could pay for a cleaner twice a week who comes and eats lunch with him, combating isolation as well as helping him to manage cleanliness in the flat. “On Tuesdays and Thursdays he has a cleaner and on Saturday the football on TV: it’s a routine with things to look forward to that stops him wandering off.”

At another very small hostel designed for this client group, clients are involved in the design and given a small budget to personalise rooms. This approach has had a very positive impact with extremely low levels of ongoing rough sleeping or abandonment.

Putting too much pressure on this client group to engage formally with staff or other services was identified by staff as a key cause of abandonment, and at some projects formal keywork was optional for this group. Pressure from other clients was problematic and small-scale provision was valued by this client group.

*“I was once in a good hostel. It had only eight rooms, really small, nice staff and residents. I don’t like hostels. I’ve been on the streets for fifteen years. I’m not used to it, I don’t like it, it’s not me. I sleep on the floor.. I would love to stay here but it’s the other residents. I spend most of my time in my room or I go to the quiet room. Just leave me alone and keep people away from me.”*

*Client, medium sized hostel*

Once clients with this profile became settled they may become highly resistant to rehousing. At a couple of projects there was a pattern of older, former rough sleepers abandoning days before they were due to view a move-on tenancy.

#### **GOOD PRACTICE: Graham House, Thames Reach**

Graham House targets long term rough sleepers aged over 30 who have alcohol and or mental health and or physical health support needs. They get excellent results at keeping long-term rough sleepers in accommodation. They achieve this through some controversial methods, such as alcohol harm reduction implemented through intensive money management and using temporary exclusions to manage behaviour, rather than eviction. Graham House has a low eviction rate.

One entrenched rough sleeper who had repeatedly refused accommodation now has permanent tenancy agreement with Graham house as a 'no pressure' flexible approach was adopted. The hostel initially allowed the client access to the dining room at Graham House so he could get a meal. Slowly, he became familiar with the surroundings. The client began occasionally sleeping in the dining room and eventually, after a lot of patience and reassurance from workers, went into a room. Many clients do not want to impose and have very low expectations about what they deserve; this approach can help individuals overcome this.

#### **THE IMPACT OF ENGAGEMENT ON ABANDONMENT**

Many interviewees who had abandoned a hostel place disengaged with support before they lost their tenancy. They described spending much of their time away from the hostel and having poor or minimal contact with staff. There are varying views on the causes of poor engagement amongst staff and clients, with some attributing blame either to staff or clients.

There is a tendency at some projects for non-engagement to be equated with clients not needing the service. Staff at some hostels believe that clients who were not engaging had low needs and/or alternative housing available to them. They often felt that clients keep their hostel place as long as they can in order to access social housing or as a 'fallback' option. Most of the hostels have rules requiring attendance at formal keywork sessions and limiting the time that clients can spend away from the hostel without informing staff.

Some clients reported abandoning when an opportunity became available to stay elsewhere with a friend or partner and one client summed up this view by saying that *"if you had anywhere better to go, of course you would"* (Client, small hostel). However, where clients had alternative places to stay, they were usually insecure or unsuitable for their needs. Non-engagement did not always signify an absence of needs. For instance, one interviewee stated that he was housed in a large chaotic hostel. He kept his hostel place open in order to have an address to receive his giro cheque, but meanwhile was sleeping in an electricity cupboard in an office block to escape the hostel environment.

Engagement is a two-way process and service users and some staff highlighted the non-engagement of staff with service users as a cause of abandonment, rather than the other way around.

*“It’s very important to engage with people during their first 28 days, but sometimes staff shortages mean we don’t get round to the quietest and most vulnerable.”*

*Staff, large hostel*

Positive relationships with staff were identified by many interviewees as the most important factor in preventing abandonment. In interviews a number of clients responded to the word ‘abandonment’ by stressing that they or their friends felt ‘abandoned’ by staff, who didn’t care or notice when they didn’t leave their rooms.

There are differences across hostels about what ‘engagement’ means, for instance at one hostel clients are issued with a warning after missing three appointments, whilst some hostels are actively replacing keywork sessions with less formal engagement methods and reported a positive impact.

*“Supporting People want more evictions for people who don’t engage because of the cost of the service...But what is engagement? People might want coffee and a chat but not be happy to engage more formally”*

*Manager, very small hostel*

## **ABANDONMENT AND ARREARS**

At a number of hostels there is a strong association between arrears and abandonment.

*“Arrears more often lead to abandonments than evictions. They usually abandon in the end because they’ve breached it [their payment plan] too many times.”*

*Manager, medium sized hostel*

At one hostel most abandonment occurs shortly after clients had received a Notice To Quit. Clients described how the impact of receiving ‘letters under the door’ about their arrears could trigger the decision to abandon. However, there are indications that failure to pay rent might result in the client already disengaging from the service because they intended to abandon.

*“abandoning before arrears action is not very frequent- it’s more that people accumulate arrears when they’re going to abandon”*

*Manager, large hostel*

## **HOSTEL APPROACHES TO ABANDONMENT**

The way in which hostels work to prevent abandonment and how they respond when it occurs varies greatly. Awareness of the causes is generally lower than eviction, with several staff members or managers not having any preventative approaches in place or believing that abandonments cannot be prevented. However, hostels that had identified the issue and took steps to spend more time with clients at risk of abandonment, reported reductions in abandonment.

Once abandonment has occurred, hostel responses are very variable. At one specialist hostel clients are given two months in which to return before their room is re-let; whereas in contrast, at two hostels staff ‘booked out’ after two or three days absence. Some, but not all, hostels inform street outreach teams and initial referrers. A few hostels have positive outcomes from actively pursuing abandoned clients themselves.

***“people storm out and won’t come back themselves because of pride. But people want to be found, it’s like they’re saying ‘please persuade me to stay,’ and they’re generally happy to come back.”***  
***Manager, very small hostel***

Abandonments are seen as an area of concern by all commissioners. One stated that they felt *“left in the dark”* regarding why they happen.

***“A lot of effort goes into placing people, they take a huge risk moving away from the streets, but abandonment means not learning any lessons.”***

One interviewee felt that abandonments are often connected to the eviction of another resident and also identified the links to the drugs market. It was pointed out that regarding evictions there was a ***“need for a more joined-up process... hostels should check with the street population coordinator and the outreach team. There needs to be better communication (local authority representative).”***

# CONCLUSION

## KEY FINDINGS

**Overall the findings were that improvement has been made but that evictions and abandonment are still taking place that could be prevented.**

Rough sleepers have a lower proportion of unplanned moves than other client groups, but that this proportion having planned moves has increased over time.

The level of abandonment has halved whilst evictions have remained constant. Clients are twice as likely to have an eviction for behaviour than arrears.

**Analysis of London's CHAIN data tells us that evictions and abandonment contribute to the levels of rough sleeping amongst those with the highest levels of need.**

- 48% of clients who are evicted and 47% of abandoners are subsequently seen rough sleeping
- People who are evicted or abandon have usually been on CHAIN for some time
- 9% of people had multiple evictions and abandonments, but most people either only ever abandon or get evicted
- People who are evicted or abandon generally have high support needs, particularly high those getting evicted

**Additionally, analysis of hostel data and Supporting People data found that:**

- Hostels with lower rates of unplanned moves have more exclusion policies
- Clients with unplanned moves were less likely to have had their support needs met

**We spoke to clients, staff and managers across 14 hostels as well as 4 local authorities**

We found that it is possible to prevent many of the evictions and abandonments that take place and there was considerable good practice in doing so. There was considerable variation in approach across the services we visited.

**There were some key motivating factors that cut across all eviction and abandonments:**

- The availability and communication of move on options for clients was seen as a motivating factor
- The relationship between staff and clients was a key area, with clients wanting skilled, supportive workers. At a number of hostels clients were dissatisfied with staff describing *“division between them and us”* and *“apathy.”* Informal engagement was seen as particularly important.
- The hostel environment impacted on evictions and abandonments, both in terms of physical space and the extent to which it felt safe. Staff teams responding to incidents quickly and consistently was vital.
- How well a hostel is held accountable, through external monitoring of evictions and abandonments made a difference, because target setting and the investigation and discussion of practice.

## **Evictions for behaviour happened in most hostels but there was a great deal of variety in terms of cause and response**

Projects that evict least are those that regard problematic behaviour to be a support need and limit their use of escalatory sanctions. Staff teams at these services focus on the causes of problematic behaviour and look for individualised solutions. Issues are addressed face to face and with a level of mutual agreement from clients.

Clients who were evicted for behavioural reasons showed a greater resistance to reflecting on the causes than those who were evicted for arrears or abandoned.

## **There was a great deal of variety in the types of behaviour leading to sanctions**

- Drugs and alcohol fuelled many of the incidents leading to eviction; alcohol often led to disruptive behaviour, whereas drug users would often not engage
- Self harm was sometimes identified as an issue that could lead to eviction
- Neighbourhood issues and anti-social behaviour was a particular challenge for some projects
- Clients having visitors was identified as problematic, both in terms of clients contravening visitor rules and visitors causing disturbances.
- Some hostels described instances of clients challenging rules leading to evictions

## **Hostels took different approaches to dealing with behavioural issues.**

All had some system of escalatory warnings, usually accompanied with behaviour contracts, some had developed alternatives to these that included rewarding good behaviour. Appeals were more strongly encouraged at some services than others and some services used temporary exclusion as an alternative to eviction. Transferring clients to another project as a 'sideways move' was largely seen as a better outcome than an eviction, as long as it was undertaken with caution

There was very different practice in the ways projects involved the police, with some ensuring that the law applies with the hostel and other evidence indicating that hostels were not involving the police even when serious incidents had occurred.

## **Regarding approaches to managing behaviour, the clearest distinction between hostels lay in how they used sanctions, based on their underlying ethos:**

- Hostels that were proactive in dealing with behaviour, but were not punitive had the lowest levels of evictions
- There appeared to be a mismatch at some projects between expectations of behaviour and the client group that the hostel works with
- The approach to managing behaviour ranges from trying to apply sanctions equally through to taking individualised responses depending on circumstances
- One of the strongest messages from clients is the need for approaches to behaviour to begin with a conversation about why the behaviour had occurred.

## **The levels of eviction for arrears vary widely across the projects; some hostels had had no evictions for arrears over the last two years, whereas at others arrears were the main cause of unplanned moves.**

There was no clear association between the client group and the prevalence of eviction for arrears. Establishing and maintaining housing benefit claims and the collection of services charges (especially where they are high) presented challenges for hostels.

### **There were some key reasons for arrears:**

- Clients often struggle with financial hardship and debt and often can't pay their service charge due to other debts, which include complex relationships of financial interdependence with other clients
- Some projects with high service charges were notable for particularly high levels of eviction and abandonment associated with arrears and some of the most expensive hostels having the poorest facilities for service users.
- A number of services identified clients entering employment as a particularly high risk group for arrears

### **Staff and clients identified the importance of a well-managed, consistent and assertive response to arrears**

- Some projects have approaches to help service users maximise income and manage money more effectively.
- Most projects working with the highest need clients hold money for them in order to ensure that they pay rent and other bills.
- A number of services encourage clients to set up direct service charge and arrears payments from their benefits and this was seen as positive by many.

### **A combination of factors, both inside and outside the hostel, led to a client's decision to abandon.**

- For many people who abandon, the immediate trigger lay in changes external to the hostel, which included escaping debts or being taken into custody
- Across the hostels, a particular group of repeat abandoners were identified as entrenched rough sleepers. Some projects had successful approaches to engage with this client group, indicating that such abandonment could be prevented.
- Positive relationships with staff were identified by many interviewees as the most important factor in preventing abandonment.
- At a number of hostels there is a strong association between arrears and abandonment.
- Responses to abandonment varied, both in terms of how long a client had to return before their tenancy ended and the extent to which clients would be followed up. It was good practice to inform street teams and in some cases to actively pursue clients.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Evictions and abandonments can and should be reduced to as close to zero as possible. This research shows that with dedication and combined effort it is possible. Homeless Link will work with both Local Authorities and hostels to support the development of new approaches and evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions.

In order to make this happen, we would like to recommend the following actions:

### At a National Level

- Communities and Local Government (CLG) and the Tenants Services Authority (TSA) should publish data on outcomes for planned and unplanned moves from hostels using NI141 data collected from Supporting People funded projects and CORE data.
- The TSA needs to revise and improve its data collection on evictions and abandonments from hostels.
- National Indicator (NI) 141, the percentage of vulnerable people who achieve independent living, should be a priority in all areas.
- The investment by the Homes and Communities Agency in the Places of Change Programme should continue with its emphasis on positive outcomes for homeless people; the report clearly shows that the commitment to quality accommodation helps to achieve reductions in people returning to the streets.
- The CLG and TSA have a role to play in promoting and encouraging practice that contributes to reductions in evictions and abandonments from hostels.

### At a Regional Level

- Government Offices and the London Delivery Board, in order to best monitor and support improvements in performance around NI141 should focus on the role that Local Authorities can play in reducing evictions and abandonments, addressing issues from the quality of provision through to staff culture.
- Homeless Link, CLG and the TSA regional advisers should support Local Authorities, Housing Associations and homelessness providers to promote and challenge poor practice and highlight the key findings from this report.

### At a Local Authority Level

- The Audit Commission through the Comprehensive Area Assessment should ensure that their monitoring of performance around NI141 takes into account the full range of factors leading to evictions and abandonments.
- Local Authorities should monitor the levels of evictions for behaviour or arrears and abandonment in their commissioned services as standard practice.
- Local Authorities should lead a proactive local area approach to identifying alternatives to evictions, including case conferencing and sideways moves.
- Local Authorities should consider, and if appropriate commission, specialist longer term projects for those with multiple needs.

### At a Hostel Level

- Hostel managers need to make the reduction of evictions for arrears or behaviour, and abandonment a priority across their staff teams.
- Hostel managers should performance manage staff to make informal engagement and a focus on the causes of behaviour commonplace.
- Hostels should put in place policies to eliminate all evictions for arrears involving welfare benefits agencies and through proactive payment plans.
- Hostel policies should ensure that the expectations around behaviour reflect the client group in the hostel.
- Hostels should ensure that individuals are at the centre of a personalised support plan based on discussion and individual contracts.

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