Funding homelessness prevention

Defining the parameters of a funding programme to advance local level homelessness prevention in England

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Acknowledgements

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Disclaimer: All views and any errors contained in this report are the responsibility of the authors. The views expressed should not be assumed to be those of Homeless Link or any of the research participants who assisted with this work.

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Introduction

This report aims to define the parameters of an ideal voluntary and community sector funding programme to advance homelessness prevention in England. The report is the second of two outputs resulting from a project led by Homeless Link, in collaboration with Cardiff and Heriot-Watt universities, and funded by The National Lottery Community Fund: 'Prevention into action: a route map to local solutions'.

The first project output is a research report that explores current homelessness prevention activity across England and identifies gaps and opportunities. The initial findings of the report, alongside new analysis of funding awarded to homelessness projects by The National Lottery Community Fund and grantmaking organisations, were presented to a wide range of homelessness sector partners and funders at a workshop, and participants were then asked questions that helped meet a project objective to 'collaboratively define the parameters of an ideal programme of sector support to radically advance the prevention of homelessness at local level across England'. This second report describes the findings of the funding analysis and workshop discussions.

Analytical underpinning for this project was provided by a five-stage typology of homelessness prevention comprising universal, upstream, crisis-stage, emergency-stage and repeat prevention levels¹. There are five core 'stages' in this temporally-driven prevention typology, as summarised below:

Universal prevention

population-wide interventions to tackle poverty and increase 'protective factors' in the whole population (e.g. decent income, secure home, positive relationships, good health, empowering education and skills).

Upstream prevention

early-stage homelessness prevention focused on high-risk groups, such as vulnerable young people, and risky transitions, including leaving local authority care, prison, or mental health in-patient treatment.

Crisis-stage prevention

preventing homelessness likely to occur within a foreseeable period, such as following an eviction notice.

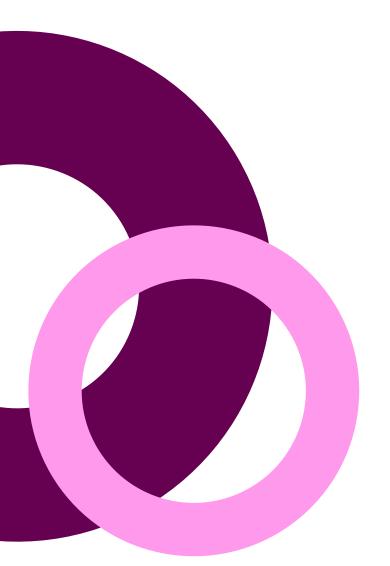
Emergency-stage prevention

support for those who are not yet homeless but may imminently be so, or who are already homeless and at risk of sleeping rough. Interventions include providing temporary accommodation and assistance with essential needs.

Repeat prevention

preventing a reoccurrence of homelessness for people who are currently or recently homeless, for example through Housing First or tenancy support. At repeat prevention stage people may be resettled (so no longer homeless) or they may still be homeless and require a sustainable solution.

The report is structured as follows. The methods underpinning this stage of the project are described, before we move on to discuss our analysis of funding awarded to homelessness projects by National Lottery distributors and grantmaking organisations. Two further sections then discuss the workshop discussion findings on the potential prioritisation of upstream homelessness prevention, and the actions required to ensure any future prevention grant-making process is accessible, fair and impactful in preventing homelessness. The report concludes by identifying the parameters of an ideal programme of sector support to radically advance homelessness prevention at local level across England.



^{1.} Fitzpatrick, S., Mackie, P. and Wood, J. (2021) Advancing a five-stage typology of homelessness prevention. International Journal on Homelessness, 1(1), pp.79-97.

Methods

This brief report is informed by two methods:

- i. Searches of an open data platform that included funding awarded to homelessness projects by National Lottery distributors and grantmaking organisations.
- ii. An in-person workshop (with voluntary, community and frontline services and funders) to discuss the parameters of an ideal programme of sector grant support.

i. Desk-based analysis of funding awarded to homelessness projects by National Lottery distributors and grantmaking organisations

The research used project-level data relating to funding awarded to homelessness projects by National Lottery distributors and grantmaking organisations, mainly from those on the 360 Giving open data platform.² Major homelessness funders that were not on the platform were invited to submit data in a format that allowed comparisons with the open data.

A search of the 360 Giving platform in January 2024 retrieved every project that met the following criteria:

- Funded by a "Grantmaking organisation" or "Lottery distributor"
- Project titles and/or descriptions included "homeless", "homelessness" and related terms.
- Funding was awarded during calendar years 2021, 2022 or 2023.
- Project operates in regions and localities in England; across all of England; or is funded UK/GB-wide where it could be reasonably expected that the bulk of funding awarded was for England.

This analysis captured data pertaining to £82million of grant awards to more than 1,500 individual voluntary and community sector homelessness projects across England.

The research team used descriptive statistical analysis for measures of sufficiency/insufficiency and prevention interventions in place, and undertook thematic analysis of open text responses.

Using the individual project descriptions, and information about the recipient organisations, the research team allocated each project to one (or more) of the five prevention stages within the typology, but also introduced two additional classificatory categories:

 Unknown: a project that seemed likely to contribute to homelessness prevention but could not be assigned to the prevention typology. This includes projects funded for core costs or support staff development where target recipients are affected by homelessness but the exact purpose and context of the project and/or the interventions delivered were unclear. This category also includes, for example, projects for arts and creative projects where the stated outcomes did not fit a typology stage but could be beneficial, such as building people's confidence and advocacy skills. These projects are

^{2. 360} Giving open data platform: <u>https://www.threesixtygiving.org/</u>

included in the analysis and represent around £10m, which is 12.2% of the £82m total.³

- Ineligible: a project excluded from analysis as it either had no apparent preventative function⁴ and projects where people at risk of or experiencing homelessness only seemed to be incidental beneficiaries.⁵ These projects represented around £4m (4.9% of the £82m total).⁶
- Note that projects could be assigned to up to three prevention stages if they appeared to work across more than one, with the funding split evenly across the relevant stages.

The research team performed pilot analyses of around 40 randomly selected projects to finalise the criteria for assignment within the typology. Note that this assignment relied upon project descriptions provided to funders by potential recipient organisations, and funding allocations were of funds awarded rather than those disbursed. This means that analysis was based on recipients' and funders' intentions for the funding awards and not necessarily on the realised impact of the funding.

ii. In-person workshop

Fifty five participants, as well as presenters, discussion facilitators and notetakers from Homeless Link and Cardiff and Heriot-Watt universities, attended a workshop in London on Thursday 22nd February 2024. Attendees included local authorities (47% of participants), voluntary/community services (31% of participants), and funders (22% of participants). Following a presentation of research findings, participants were split into small groups and asked to respond to the following two main questions:

> The research suggests there is a gap in upstream prevention funding by voluntary and community funders. To what extent do you agree or disagree that a potential future funding programme should focus on upstream prevention?

2.

How can we ensure any future prevention grant-making process is accessible, fair and impactful in preventing homelessness?

Each group had a facilitator and most also had a notetaker on their table. Notes from each group were compiled to produce a single record of the discussions.

6. £4,066,061

^{3. £10,243,333}

^{4.} For example, diversionary physical activities for people affected by homelessness that are delivered by organisations specialising in physical activity and with no apparent links to further homelessness support. Note that project funding awarded for diversionary activities was assigned to the typology on a case-by-case basis so that some diversionary intervention funding has been assigned into different typology stages depending on the context, the organisation delivering the intervention and any partners mentioned, and the circumstances of the intervention's beneficiaries.

^{5.} For example, a social enterprise that provides music therapy "to people affected by injury, illness or disability to support their psychological, cognitive, communicative and social needs" and where "beneficiaries are comprised of: disabled people, those suffering from mental health issues, people affected by Alzheimer's and Dementia, homeless people, victims of domestic abuse, children who have been adopted, new mothers and pre-school children".

Voluntary and community sector funding landscape

This section provides an analysis of funding awarded to homelessness projects by grantmaking organisations (including National Lottery distributors and other grantmaking organisations). It examines the distribution and scale of funding across the five typology stages, variations in funding across the English government office regions, and the duration of funded projects. Our interpretation of the data is also informed by discussions at the in-person workshop. The section offers rich new insights to help shape the future direction of Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) homelessness service funding.

It is important to note that there is a complex funding landscape for VCS-led homelessness services in England and the analysis in this section represents only a subset of all funding awarded. Our analysis does not include funding from local and national government, such as the Homelessness Prevention Grant, the Local Government Settlement, or the Rough Sleeping Initiative.

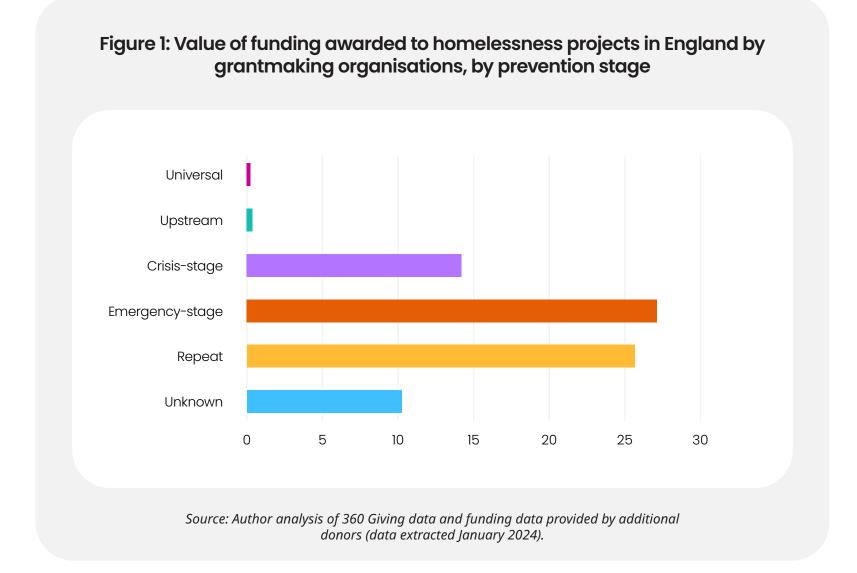
Funding distribution across the prevention typology

Almost £78m⁷ of funding was allocated by grantmaking organisations to homelessness prevention activities across England during calendar years 2021-2023 inclusive. Table 1 and Figure 1 show how this was distributed across each of the five prevention stages;⁸ Table 1 describes the percentages of funding allocation and Figure 1 captures total funding amounts.

Table 1: Percentage of funding awarded to homelessness projects in England by	Prevention stage	% of total spend
grantmaking organisations, by	Universal	0.1
prevention stage	Upstream	0.7
	Crisis-stage	18.2
	Emergency-stage	34.8
	Repeat	33.0
Source: Author analysis of 360 Giving data and funding data provided by additional donors (data extracted January 2024).	Unknown	13.2

^{7.} Exact total funding is £77,825,422 which omits projects categorised as 'ineligible'.

^{8.} Table 1 and Figure 1 also include an 'unknown' category where it was not possible to assign the funding to a particular prevention stage.



The overwhelming message is that funding is concentrated downstream, and a very low proportion is oriented towards universal and upstream prevention. More than £27m was spent on emergency-stage projects, equivalent to nearly 35% of all spend. By contrast, upstream prevention accounted for only 0.7% of all funding – approximately £530,000.

This downstream focus reflects a context whereby funders and VCS providers are targeting those in most immediate need of assistance, often filling service gaps that statutory homelessness services ought to be meeting:

"VCS are fighting for their survival and to deliver services that statutory services are meant to deliver."

(Workshop participant)

"We're pulled into crisis mode, moving into where local authorities can't fund... we'd rather not be in this space but have been pulled into this state."

(Workshop participant)

Notably, one workshop participant explained how the VCS demand for downstream funding then reinforces funder activity at this stage, therefore driving the type of funding distribution described in Table 1 and Figure 1.

"People tend to apply for crisis intervention... However, this communicates that there is a need to do more crisis intervention, which only reinforces the demand in crisis interventions."

(Workshop participant)

The geography of homelessness prevention funding

This analysis also considers the geographical variation in funding awarded to homelessness projects by grantmaking organisations.⁹ It initially examines the broad distribution of these funding awards across the English regions, as recorded against each project in the 360 Giving platform data, before concentrating on geographical differences in awards at different stages of the prevention typology.

Table 2 shows the distribution of this funding across the English regions and to aid interpretation of this data, it also includes percentages of the total homeless population located in each region on a given night.¹⁰ The table shows a broad pattern whereby higher percentages of funding are awarded to projects in regions where the highest proportions of people experiencing homelessness are located. This would suggest funding is being distributed to areas where the need is greatest. London is notable because it receives the greatest proportion of all grant funding (27%), yet it might have been anticipated that an even greater proportion would be allocated to projects in the city given the very high percentage of people experiencing homelessness who are located there (60%).

Figure 2 examines the distribution of funding by government office region and prevention stage. Two important findings emerge. First, funding in all regions largely reflects England-wide trends whereby the focus lies overwhelmingly on emergency-stage and repeat prevention, with the exception of the South West where crisis-stage funding is most common. Second, the limited amount of upstream prevention funding awarded to the VCS appears to be focused almost entirely on London and the South East. These findings demonstrate that most English regions share the same starting point in relation to funding for upstream prevention and will therefore need similar levels of support if this agenda is to be advanced.

^{9.} In this section the research omits funding for projects that operated on an all-England basis, which represented £6,726,245. Note that this funding for all-England projects is included in the analyses elsewhere in this report.

^{10.} Estimates are sourced from <u>Shelter</u> (2023) and include people in temporary accommodation arranged by the council or by themselves (e.g., homeless at home) and people sleeping on the streets.

Table 2: Funding awarded to homelessness projects in England by grantmaking organisations, by region

Region	Funding awards assigned (£)	% of total funding assigned	Estimated % share of total number of people homeless on a given night
East Midlands	5,177,293	7.3%	2.3%
East of England	6,244,426	8.8%	6.8%
London	19,003,675	26.7%	59.7%
North East	2,347,370	3.3%	0.5%
North West	7,756,172	10.9%	5.8%
South East	8,944,185	12.6%	10.6%
South West	4,721,118	6.6%	4.1%
West Midlands	10,133,420	14.3%	8.1%
Yorkshire & The Humber	6,771,518	9.5%	2.0%
Total	71,099,177		

Sources: Author analysis of 360 Giving data and funding data provided by additional donors, data extracted January 2024 ('Funding assigned' and '% of funding assigned') <u>Shelter</u>, 2023 ('Estimated % of homeless population') Note: Table omits awards made to all-England projects (£6,726,245). Funding awards assigned are rounded to the nearest £1.



Figure 2: Funding awarded to homelessness projects in England by grantmaking organisations, by region and typology stage

Source: Author analysis of 360 Giving data and funding data provided by additional donors (data extracted January 2024). Note: Table omits awards made to all-England projects (£6,726,245).

Funding duration

The final stage of funding data analysis explored the duration of funded projects.¹¹ Figure 3 shows the results of this analysis, illustrating that nearly three quarters (73%) of all projects are funded for twelve months or fewer. This tendency towards short-term funding was also an issue frequently highlighted by workshop participants and respondents to the survey conducted as part of the initial phase of this project¹², albeit they were often also referring to funding from government sources:

"Funding is often... short term with limitations on spending. We often receive funding that we need to commit to spending in short timeframes, which impacts good, quality procurement of provision to support people."

Whilst most projects are relatively short-term, there are a number of projects clustered at longer, annual intervals (24, 36, 48 and 60 months), showing that longer-term funding is not uncommon and some funders are clearly supportive of this approach.

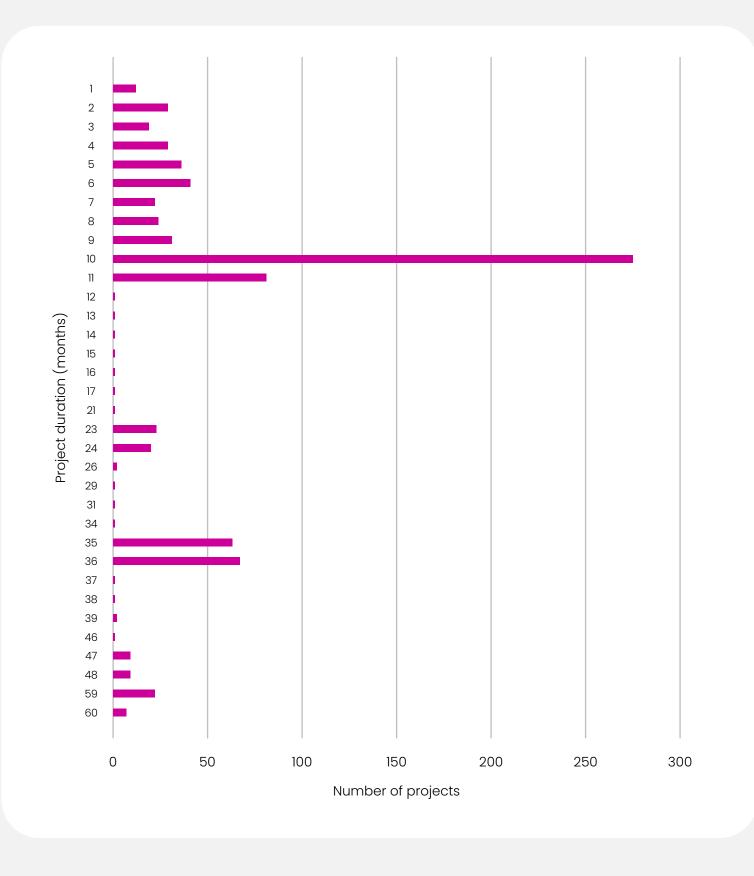
Workshop participants explained that short-term funding often creates challenges, for example in relation to staff recruitment and retention, but it is likely to be even more challenging if any future funding is targeted at more upstream interventions, where entirely new services might need to be developed, embedded and sustained.

"[We need] Longer term funding to allow for longer term planning."

^{11.} Data on project duration was available for 57% of funded projects.

^{12.} Mackie, P., Fitzpatrick S., Morris, N. (2024) Prevention into action: Gaps and opportunities for locally-led homelessness prevention in England. Homeless Link.

Homeless Link





Source: Author analysis of 360 Giving data and funding data provided by additional donors (data extracted January 2024)

Focusing on upstream prevention

Having described the current landscape of funding awarded to homelessness projects by grantmaking organisations for VCS homelessness prevention activities in England, the focus of the report now shifts to examine workshop participant perspectives on the ideal parameters of a potential future programme of sector grant support. This section reports on the first of two funding-related questions posed to workshop participants; 'To what extent do you agree or disagree that a potential future funding programme should focus on upstream prevention?'.

The broad conclusion to this question is that participants support an upstream focus but only if it is additional to funding for existing emergency-stage provision. Moreover, careful consideration would need to be given to the scope of upstream interventions. We elaborate on these key perspectives in the remainder of this section.

Moving upstream

Workshop participants agreed that any potential future funding programme should focus on upstream prevention. Participants particularly felt this is a gap where voluntary and community sector services (VCS) have a key role to play as statutory homelessness duties tend to focus on crisis and emergency intervention stages.

"We would like to see a shift back to more early intervention and funding to support this. RSI funding is fantastic and much needed, but is focused on crisis and recovery need to get upstream".

"We would like to particularly focus and improve on upstream prevention, where we stop people from being homeless in the first place. To do this, we need to increase resource and investment into this area. The system is particularly focused on crisis intervention, due to demand for housing and increase in homelessness."

Interestingly, it was also suggested that any future funding should also address universal prevention, partly due to the existing gaps in provision but also because the absence of universal measures, such as suitable affordable homes, may undermine the effectiveness of the prevention interventions that are downstream from this stage.

In their support for an upstream focus, participants cautioned that this may be a challenging shift for many funders and implementation partners, whose remit is crisis-oriented, or they require immediate short-term impacts, whereas impacts of upstream prevention are likely to be observed over the longer term. "...prevention isn't our mission – we're a homelessness organisation by definition and we would mission drift if we changed – the money would be taken away if we deviated – more collaborative working [with non-homelessness organisations] needed."

Protecting emergency- and crisis-stage funding

There was an exceptionally strong steer from participants that any future upstream-oriented funding must not be implemented to the detriment of emergency- and crisis-stage spending. Local authority and VCS partners are facing considerable challenges and they were very clear that upstream funding should be additional to any existing support.

"We need to fund upstream but we don't want to take it away from the person on the street. We can't take anything away from emergency provision at the moment – so it has to be additional."

Defining the scope of upstream prevention

Having established support for an upstream focus, much of the discussion then centred on the potential scope and definition of upstream activities, with the goal of avoiding an over-inclusive approach (i.e. where homelessness prevention is defined so broadly as to encapsulate the entirety of social policy).

Workshop participants recognised that there will be geographical differences in groups at risk of homelessness and the types of services that might be effective. Therefore, it was suggested that upstream prevention priorities should be **evidence-based but locally-determined**.

Participants also emphasised the importance of any newly funded activities providing **additionality and complementarity**. There was concern that funding should not be used to enable service providers to duplicate or encroach on existing work. Related to this point on additionality, there was a question whether new VCS funding should be used for activities that could or should be funded by statutory homelessness prevention funds. Participants could not offer a clear steer on this point but pointed to the tensions between meeting clear service gaps and propping up services that should be funded locally and/ or through central government programmes.

Inevitably some of the discussion about support for, and the scope of, an upstream prevention focus led to the **identification of groups** and risk factors that any newly funded services might prioritise. These included: under 25s (because this will have a lifelong impact), relationship breakdown, people with No Recourse to Public Funds, people fleeing domestic violence, people in the criminal justice system, homelessness among disabled people, women, and populations from minoritised ethnic groups.

An accessible, fair and impactful grant-making process

The majority of the workshop discussion focused on the second funding-related question; 'How can we ensure any future prevention grant-making process is accessible, fair and impactful in preventing homelessness?'. A wide range of themes emerged and are discussed here.

Partnership working and the voluntary and community sector

One of the most prominent themes to emerge was the desire to see effective and impactful partnership working from the outset and at the heart of any future funding programme. More specifically, several participants called for any future programme to support whole-systems coordination.

Workshop participants identified a wide range of actors that should potentially be engaged, including: local authorities, other public services beyond housing (e.g. criminal justice, health, education), but also employers in the private sector, and landlords. There was a strong steer that the VCS will need to be a key partner and they should play a pivotal role in the design and delivery of upstream prevention programmes because of their flexibility, values, and expertise in supporting specific populations at heightened risk of homelessness.

It was noted that some pre-existing partnerships will be able to support the implementation of upstream prevention, perhaps with some additional partners. In contexts where this is not the case because partnerships do not exist, or they are ineffective, it was suggested that Homeless Link may have a role to support and broker the development of these partnerships.

Despite the overwhelming support for partnership working to be at the centre, participants insisted that the challenges of collaborative working must be considered, including but not limited to: the time required to work together effectively, the costs of coordination, issues of trust and power imbalances between organisations, and data sharing. Whilst it was a minority perspective, the question was raised as to whether there might be cases where collaboration is not expected, to enable greater agility and to reduce time and resource implications of the 'transaction costs' of inter-organisational collaboration.

Lived experience

Many participants highlighted the need for lived experience to be central to any funding programme. It was suggested that people with lived experience of homelessness should be involved at all stages, from the development of funding criteria, to planning, delivery and evaluation:

"[It is vital to ensure] that those with experience of all forms of homelessness have a say and stake in what provision is needed and how it is delivered, including relating to how to prevent homelessness occurring."

Innovation and flexibility

Another theme that attracted widespread support is the need for funding to enable flexibility and innovation across the life of a project. Participants were keen to impress that focusing on the evolving needs of people being supported very often requires changes in project direction and this flexibility should be designed in from the outset. Of course, participants recognised the need for accountability within this broad flexibility.

Under this theme of innovation, it was also proposed that funding should embrace 'non-traditional' approaches, potentially learning from international models where there is perhaps a higher risk of interventions not working as intended. Both capital and revenue funding should also be considered.

One commonly cited mechanism that has proven to enable innovation and flexibility has been core/ unrestricted funding. Many participants highlighted the value of this type of funding to enable them to meet their goals, with organisational impacts often extending beyond project funding periods. In this model, there was an expectation that funders would be more engaged and connected with the upstream efforts being pursued by the funded organisations.

Funding duration and timing

There were wide ranging discussions about the duration and timing of potential future funding. An unambiguous message was delivered that short-term and small-scale funding would be unlikely to deliver on the aspirations of an upstream homelessness prevention programme. Longer-term funding would reportedly enable partnerships to develop, capacity to build, services to embed, and eventually impacts to be realised. Participants generally converged around a suggestion that funding should be for a 3-5 year duration, although several participants pointed out that much longer, generational commitments would be necessary to see the impacts of some upstream interventions, particularly those with young children.

"Consistent long-term funding that enables us to implement strategic operations rather than the one off funding arrangements that arrive with little time to prepare and hamper our ability to deliver long term/innovative solutions as the lead in time to prepare is not available." On the issue of timing, there was some discussion about making development grants available at an early stage to support the identification of local priorities, develop proposals, and potentially even pilot projects. At the other end of the temporal scale, it was suggested that careful consideration needs to be given to the sustainability and legacy of projects once funding ends; sustainability should be considered from the outset.

Evaluating impacts and sharing learning

A lot of time was spent discussing the processes of evaluating upstream homelessness prevention project impacts. There was a desire for evaluations to focus on longer-term impacts rather than short-term outputs and activities. This was partly in response to the current focus within homelessness services of measuring case closures as a success, without fully understanding longer term impacts. It was also due to the fact that impacts of upstream prevention efforts may not materialise for many years given the early stage at which they are intended to intervene.

Participants also wished to see a greater focus on qualitative feedback and lived experiences in the evaluation of projects and this should be captured iteratively throughout the life of the project to help shape improvements across the funding period.

There was also some discussion of the challenges associated with evaluating the broader impacts of upstream prevention interventions beyond homelessness outcomes, given that early action can prevent such a wide range of adverse events occurring for the individual and society. The steer from participants was that these should be captured, not least because they may help the case for future funding.

It was proposed that reasonable funding would need to be allocated to evaluation and monitoring, and expertise would need to be available and embedded from the outset.

The final point within this theme centres on sharing learning from funded projects. It was proposed that learning should be shared, potentially through some form of nationally-led, programme-wide forum, possibly delivered by Homeless Link. Importantly, one participant called for a greater openness and willing to share learning from what has not worked, not just what has worked.

Geography

Building on earlier comments that upstream prevention priorities should be evidence-based but locally determined, there was some discussion about future funding adopting a place-based based approach, where projects clearly complement existing provision and are shaped by evidence of local need. Importantly, there was a recognition that the geography of intervention may not be at the local authority scale, it might equally be at community or regional level.

Funding administration

Two important points were raised under this theme. First, the funding application process must be accessible to all sizes of organisations, avoiding overly bureaucratic and burdensome processes. Second, having a lead organisation such as Homeless Link managing the distribution of funds has previously made them more accessible and flexible and this should be a model considered in any future funding programme.

Conclusion: towards an ideal programme of sector support

In this brief conclusion we respond to the challenge of collaboratively defining the parameters of an ideal programme of sector support to radically advance the prevention of homelessness at local level across England. Reflecting on the findings of our analysis of funding data, and the perspectives of local authorities, VCS, and funders, the following parameters emerge:

1. Act on universal prevention

Support local actions to promote more universal measures that reduce homelessness risks at a community-wide level by addressing poverty and bolstering key protective factors in the housing, work, welfare, education and relationship spheres.

2. Focus on upstream prevention

The focus should be on upstream prevention but only if funding is additional to support for existing emergency-stage provision and careful consideration is given to the scope of upstream interventions.

3. Support collaborative working, with the VCS and people with lived experience at the centre

There should be support for effective and impactful collaborative approaches, involving a wide range of potential actors from the outset. The VCS and people with lived experience of homelessness will need to play a pivotal role in this approach.

4. Enable innovation and flexibility

Funding should enable flexibility, innovation and a degree of risk across the life of a project, including through core/unrestricted funding where appropriate.

5. Provide longer-term funding

Providing longer-term funding of at least 3-5 years would enable partnerships to develop, capacity to build, services to embed, and eventually impacts to be realised. Funding may include development grants and project sustainability should be considered from the outset.

6. Support longer-term, impact-focused, evaluations and share the learning nationally

Evaluation expertise should be funded to enable assessment of longer-term project impacts and lessons should be shared, potentially through some form of nationally-led, programme-wide forum.

7. Consider place-based approaches

Consider including place-based approaches, where projects clearly complement existing provision and are shaped by evidence of local need.

8. Make funding accessible to a wide range of organisations across England

Ensure funding application process are accessible to all sizes of organisations, avoiding overly bureaucratic and burdensome processes. Moreover, organisations across all English regions should be encouraged to access the funding.

What We Do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for frontline homelessness services. We work to improve services through research, guidance and learning, and campaign for policy change that will ensure everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.

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