

# Learning from the Manchester Homeless Partnership

Guidance for grassroots responses to  
homelessness

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## Guidance for places building grassroots responses to homelessness

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**FEEDBACK, CORRECTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS:** We welcome your feedback on our publications. Please email [peter.smith@homelesslink.org.uk](mailto:peter.smith@homelesslink.org.uk)

# Introduction

Research on homelessness in the UK shows that homelessness, in all its forms, is on the rise. The increase of people rough sleeping and the visibility of homelessness in cities has contributed to a surge in the number of people, community groups and organisations seeking to end homelessness. Manchester has been in the top-10 lists for numbers of people sleeping rough for many years, and since 2015 has been building a grassroots movement to address it. The Manchester Homelessness Partnership was inspired by global initiatives, and the model and experiences can become a guide for other places where community groups have started coming together around efforts to end homelessness.

## Purpose of this guidance

The impact of the Manchester Homelessness Partnership on the city has been huge. It wouldn't have been able to achieve all that it has done without collaboration between people with experience of homelessness and the statutory, private, and third sectors. This guide does not intend to simply highlight the successes, but introduce the model, approach, and values of the Manchester Homelessness Partnership so that other organisations can apply the lessons in their own areas.

A central element of the Manchester Homelessness Partnership is that it is bottom-up, flexible, and responsive to local context. We hope that the information provided will assist cities in developing their own collaborative, co-produced approach to ending homelessness.

## Who is this guidance for?

This guidance is for anyone interested in establishing a grassroots partnership to address homelessness in their local area. The power of a grassroots initiative is that it can be led by anyone. Whether you are a person experiencing homelessness, support worker at a charity, commissioner at a Local Authority, leader in a faith organisation or interested member of the public, this guidance will hopefully provide ideas and principles to help you.

There is no right way to co-ordinate partnership efforts to ending homelessness, so this guidance will not provide you with a decisive answer or even an exhaustive description of what is going on within the constantly evolving Manchester Partnership. For every achievement, individual or organisation mentioned, there are numerous others who aren't and whose example would serve just as well.

Those reading this guidance are encouraged to reach out to the actors involved, go to Manchester and see first-hand what is happening or use it as a starting point for discussions with others in your area on how you can work together to end homelessness.

# What is the Manchester Homelessness Partnership?

The Manchester Homelessness Partnership (MHP) is an umbrella term for the connected, co-produced, grassroots efforts to bring together people who are homeless with the people who are dedicated to ending homelessness. It is based on the premise that **what is being done** is not enough to address homelessness, but also the **way in which it is done**.

The Partnership is made up of a number of associated initiatives, groups and individuals united by a shared vision to tackle key challenges and ultimately end homelessness. These come together in several key places where the conversations, relationships and rebalancing of power dynamics is able to take place and achieve the longer lasting systemic changes desired.

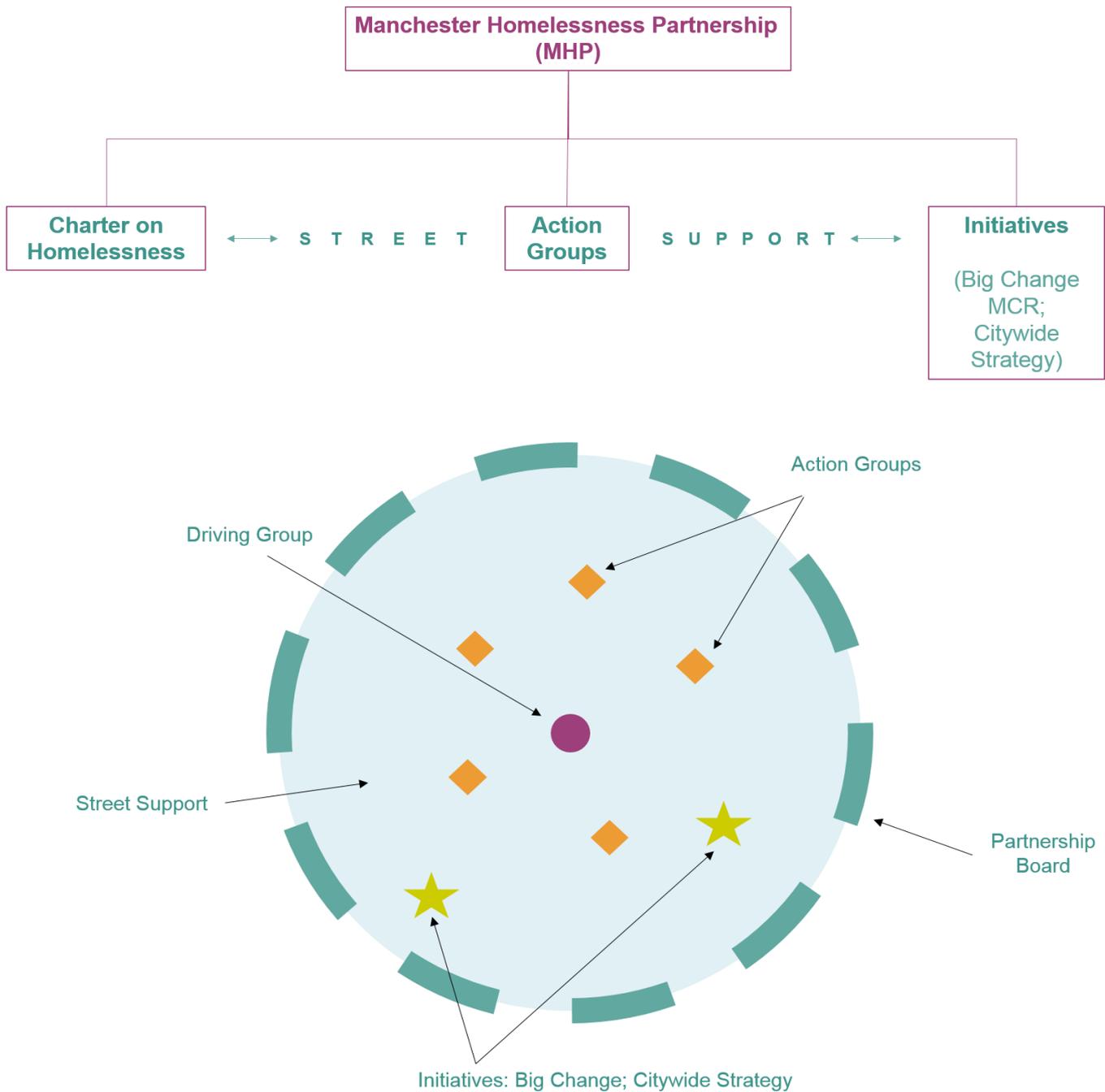
## Context

In 2015, the number of visible rough sleepers in Manchester city centre was increasing significantly and indicators showed that all forms of homelessness were on the rise across Greater Manchester at a rate which was higher than the national average. There was concern from the general public, pressure on the local councils, and a growing charitable movement – made up of both formal organisations and street-based outreach groups.

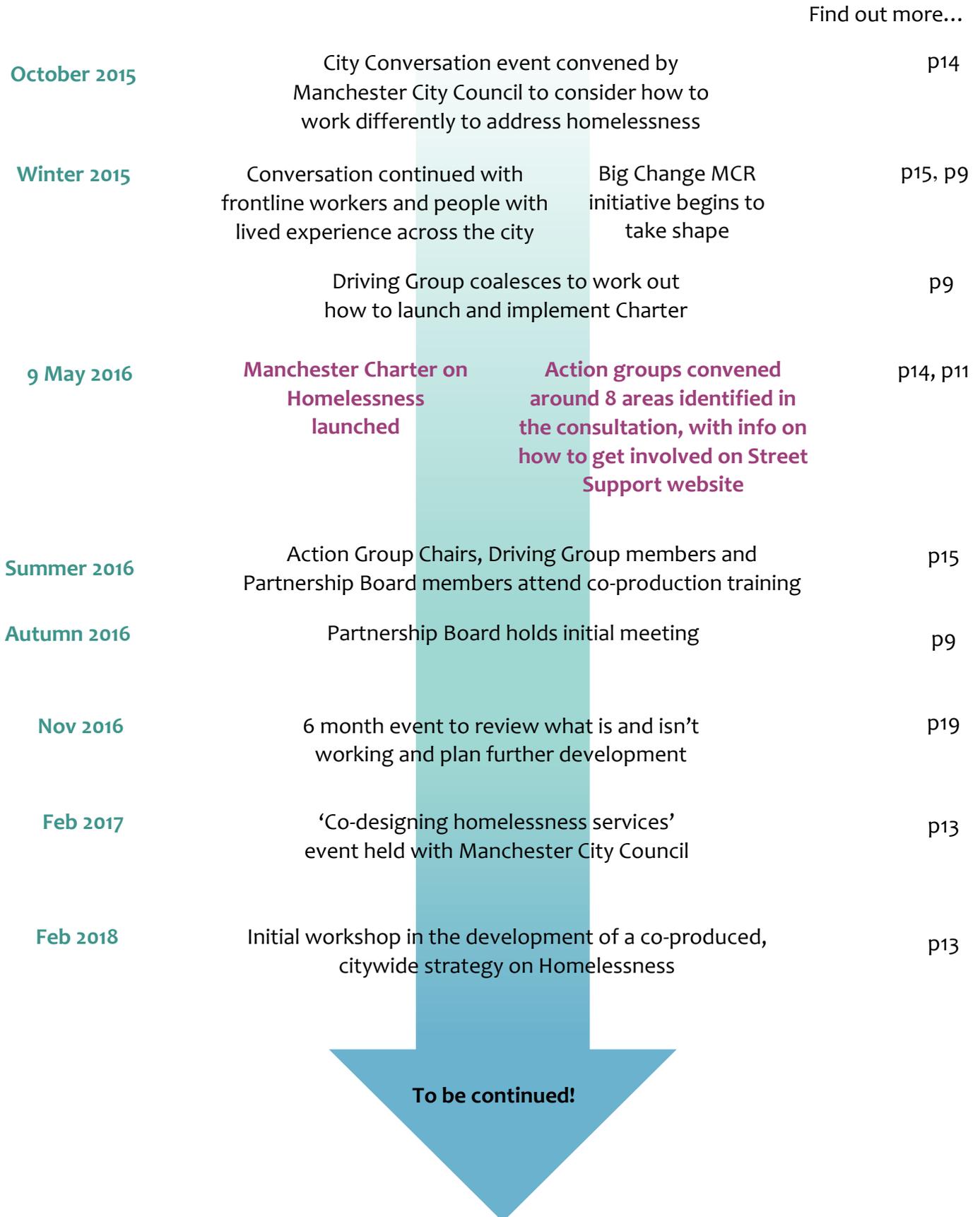
The Manchester Homelessness Partnership was born out of a conversation which reacted to the situation, and the coming together of a communicative City Council and charity lead who could dedicate time to making it happen.

The MHP, and its various initiatives and Action Groups (detailed below), rely heavily on people's voluntary time and their willingness to be part of something which is trying to make a difference through collaboration.

Figure 1: How the partnership fits together



## Figure 2. Timeline of key events



## Principles of the Partnership

From the start, the Partnership has been a values-led initiative. This is partly because it is as focused on changing *how* homelessness is addressed as much as *what* action is required to address it, but also because values act as the glue for holding together an initiative without formal structure, power or money.

The values of the Partnership are enshrined in the Charter (reproduced below), and emerged from an extended conversation carried out over several months across Manchester. People connected to homelessness through experience, work, study, politics, faith and interest were all involved in its production, and it is that which makes the Charter meaningful.

**Figure 3: The Manchester Homelessness Charter**

### **VISION: To end homelessness in Manchester**

The Manchester Homelessness Partnership calls on the citizens of Manchester, the city council, healthcare and other public sector services, charities, faith groups, businesses, institutions and other organisations to adopt the values of this charter; and to implement it through improved working practices, specific pledges and by working together in new ways.

We believe that everyone who is homeless should have a right to:

- A safe, secure home along with an appropriate level of support to create a good quality of life
- Safety from violence, abuse, theft and discrimination, and the full protection of the law
- Respect and a good standard of service everywhere
- Equality of access to information and services
- Equality of opportunity to employment, training, volunteering, leisure and creative activities

We believe that those who work with homeless people have a collective responsibility to ensure that:

- Good communication, coordination and a consistent approach is delivered across all services
- People with experience of homelessness have a voice and involvement in determining the solutions to their own issues, to homelessness, and in wider society

**Watch the co-produced video about the Charter at**  
[youtu.be/ZLH4KrtvFw](https://youtu.be/ZLH4KrtvFw)

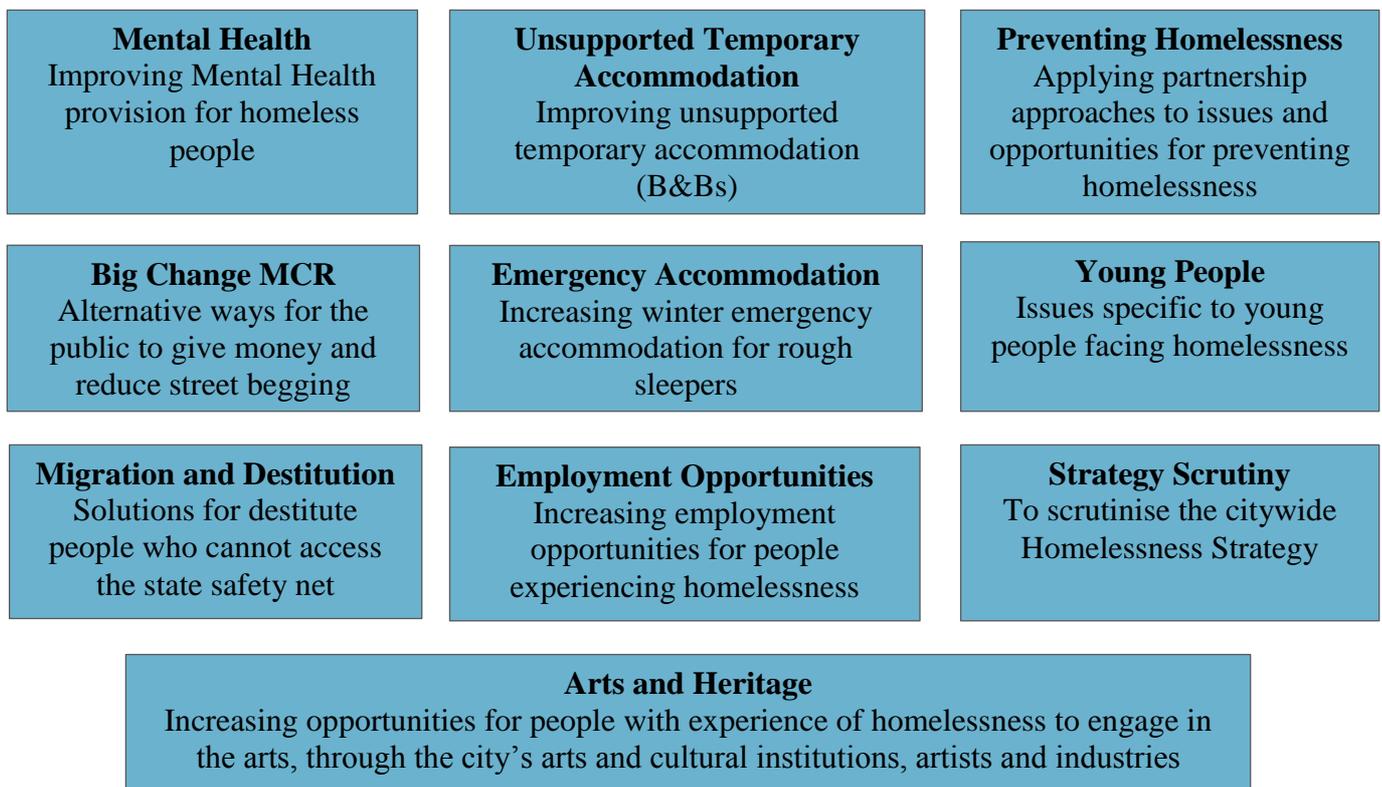
## Components of the Partnership

The MHP is an evolving body without a formal constitution so changes regularly. At time of publication, these are the major active components and the role that they play:

### Action Groups

The Action Groups are the engine of the Partnership, drawing together people with lived experience, public and voluntary sector agencies, alongside interested members of the public to address the major causes of homelessness in the city. All Action Groups are asked to include a co-chair with lived experience in keeping with the principles of the Charter.

8 Action Groups were established initially to address the areas identified in the Charter conversation, and have evolved over time. At the point of publication Action Groups exist for the following areas:



### Manchester Homelessness Charter

The Charter was co-produced by people with lived experience of homelessness, and sets out the shared mission of the Partnership to end homelessness in the city by working to a common set of values.

The Charter is supported by calls to action and pledges from statutory agencies, local businesses, voluntary organisations and individuals outlining how they will help achieve the Charter's vision and values. 300 pledges have been made and published on the Street Support website.

## **Driving Group**

The Driving Group provides interested, non-directional oversight for the diverse activities of the Partnership. The Driving Group also serves to safeguard the values underpinning the partnership and protect the Action Groups from issues which might prevent them addressing the key problems. It seeks to be a 'lubricant not a brake', encouraging good ideas rather than granting permission for action.

The Driving Group members at point of publication included representatives and people with lived experience from five charities, Manchester City Council, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, an academic researcher and City Co & the Heart of Manchester Business Improvement District.

## **Partnership Board**

The Partnership Board draws together key decision-makers and influencers alongside people with lived experience to connect frontline actions to strategic decision making, and harness the connections of influential people in the city. By doing so, it is hoped the principles and power-rebalancing embodied by the Partnership will permeate outwards and upwards into the broader service and policy environment which affects homelessness.

You can find out who the Partnership Board members are at:

<https://charter.streetsupport.net/partnership-board/board-members/>

## **Business Support Group**

The Business Support Group continues the work of the Charter in garnering pledges from businesses in Manchester and by encouraging the engagement of business in the efforts of the Partnership to reduce homelessness. This group meets monthly and anyone is welcome to join.

Manchester's City Centre Partnership CityCo also delivers bespoke, co-produced workshops for businesses about homelessness. For more information please contact [dee@streetsupport.net](mailto:dee@streetsupport.net).

## **Big Change MCR Initiative**

The Big Change MCR initiative is a highly successful, co-produced alternative giving campaign. Big Change MCR pays for practical items individuals need to build independent lives away from the streets. So far, it has already raised over £160,000 and helped over 800 individuals.

## **Street Support**

Street Support is a digital platform to connect people affected by homelessness to those who are able to provide support. Put simply, it 'helps the helpers'. It is the central location for information on homelessness and the Charter, and acts as a point of co-ordination and communication for everything connected to the Manchester Homelessness Partnership. For more information on Street Support, see the section below or contact [gary@streetsupport.net](mailto:gary@streetsupport.net).

## **The key component: people who are or have been homeless**

A vital part of the MHP is the central role played by people with experience of homelessness. There was a decision made at the beginning of the process to ensure that a wide range of people were supported to take an active and meaningful role in the Partnership and to do this through getting all services/agencies/groups to actively work to support people to get involved.

This approach aimed to encourage co-production in all services and made it the responsibility of every service to be actively involving people, rather than giving the responsibility to involve people with experience of homelessness to one worker or to one specific service. Most meetings will include a request for workers to come with someone from their service.

This has worked very well with some services, but is also a work in progress, with Manchester moving towards a culture where it is standard practice for all organisations to involve people in their services both internally and externally and with strategic work such as the MHP.

### **Case Study: Booth Centre**

One example of where this has worked well is with the **Booth Centre**. The Booth Centre allocated different staff members to attend different Action Groups, the Driver Group and the Board and each staff member was tasked with finding at least 2 people from the Centre with relevant experience, to volunteer to take an active role. The staff were all trained in co-production and strengths-based working to give them the skills to ensure that they were supporting the volunteers to be fully involved. Staff are given the time to attend meetings and do follow up actions but also additional time to prepare the volunteers before meetings and de-brief with them afterwards to ensure that their involvement isn't just tokenistic.

During the first 2 years of the MHP this has enabled 60 volunteers from the Booth Centre to be involved in 301 strategic meetings or events. Some of these have been one off consultations but there has also been significant regular involvement in, for example, assisting with the design and commissioning of new services.

Co-production is a constant theme running throughout the Partnership and a central component of its values and elements. There are references to the role of co-production throughout this toolkit, but for more information on what it is and how to co-produce effectively, please see Homeless Link's [Co-production Toolkit](#) drawing on many of the findings from the MHP.

## How does it work?

### Key Learning

Throughout this section are the key points for those looking to develop something similar to the Partnership. These are collated in Appendix B.

Although the above components are all integral parts of the Partnership which are replicable in other areas, it is important to note that the Partnership has no formal structure. A significant degree of goodwill along with a lot of energy from a few individuals partly funded to work on it from within their separately constituted organisations were the only official resource for the first two years. More has recently been put in place, but there remains no official structure underpinning the Partnership.

This has the effect of sustaining a bottom-up culture and mitigating the risk of it developing its own institutional agenda (that might override the efforts of participating people and partners. Permission to enact an idea is neither granted nor desired, with all involved encouraged to act on solutions that they identify with those the Partnership can connect them too or resources that can help.

A further important aspect of this approach is the ‘agile’ approach adopted by the Partnership, similar to that used in software development. Solutions are not developed and fine-tuned behind the scenes and unveiled as finished products. They are created and tested in the open so that all can contribute to them and influence the direction of travel. In this way the Partnership remains organic, accountable and able to learn from mistakes that are made. The components described below are structures and elements which have been important in the Partnerships evolution, but none are fixed or as significant as the values and dynamics which drive them.

## Doing: the role of the Action Groups

### Key Learning

- Appoint Co-Chairs, one of which is someone with lived experience, to embed co-production into the fabric of the Action Groups
- Provide training on co-production for all Co-Chairs to help get off to the right start
- Provide a flexible brief within the area of focus so there is autonomy to set their own schedule of activity and evolve their focus
- Bring the Groups together on a regular basis so those involved can seek help on particular items, but not feel required to ‘report back’

The Action Groups are the ‘engine’ of the Partnership, and where the tangible activity toward specific outcomes takes place. The initial topics for the action groups emerged from the research into the Charter, and have evolved since according to issues identified by those involved.

Three of the major functions played by the Action Groups are:

### 1. Providing a central place where people can go to get involved

- Enables critical mass of people to move on an issue but also a variety of opinions to be heard
- Offers a time and place people who want to solve problems can physically go to
- Makes it quicker to address issues which crop up via pre-existing group of people already connected to each other.

#### **Case Study: Unsupported Temporary Accommodation Action Group**

Manchester is fortunate to be a base for Justlife, a charity explicitly focusing on people living in unsupported temporary accommodation (UTA), typically privately run B&Bs, guest houses, and HMOs. With significant overlap between Justlife’s mission and the Partnership Action Group, it made sense for Justlife to be heavily involved and harness the energy the Partnership could bring. This saved time and resource all round while allowing all to achieve better outcomes.

The UTA Action Group aims to collaboratively develop practical solutions for those living in and managing UTA, specifically raising standards, more support for landlords and increasing collaboration and co-operation. The convening of the UTA Action Group enabled the engagement of different groups who may not have otherwise been able to get around the same table. For the UTA Action Group this meant not only charity groups and current or former residents of UTA, but also the City Council, the National Probation Service, the Fire Service and vitally landlords as well.

The UTA Action Group has also trialled a slightly different structure of co-production to allow a broader set of people to get involved. Prior to the Action Group two Justlife staff members facilitate informal meetings to engage current and past residents of UTA. This provides residents with a safe space to discuss matters around UTA and directly feeds into and shapes the UTA Action Group meetings. These informal meetings are also used to feedback key points from the UTA Action Group meetings to residents of UTA, who may not feel comfortable attending a formal meeting. Two representatives from these informal meetings attend the quarterly UTA Action Group to represent UTA residents.

### 2. Focusing energy and resource on key areas

- Allows focus on specific areas rather than trying to deal with all the things all the time
- Sets the agenda for the Partnership and increasingly for the city as a whole

- Identifies barriers which can be flagged up to the Driving Group and Partnership Board, such as engaging specific organisations or services integral to the issue but not presently involved.

### **Case Study: Migrant Destitution Group and Migrant Destitution Fund**

Destitute migrants are typically faced by a unique and complex mix of challenges: insecure immigration status, the ‘hostile environment’ in public services, cultural and language barriers and no recourse to public funds (i.e. legal employment rights, welfare benefits or housing benefit).

With so many issues to work on, it was a challenge to know where to start. With the involvement of people with lived experience co-chairing and co-producing the Action Group however, it was clear in early discussions that the financial barriers faced by destitute migrants was an immediate practical problem which the group could do something about. Putting broader structural changes to one side to start, the Group focused on launching and rolling out a specific Migrant Destitution Fund which could provide up to £80 in a one-off, no strings attached payment to destitute migrants to use as they needed.

### **3. Creating an environment where co-production and systems change can happen**

- Safe place to engage and share ideas (especially for those with lived experience)
- Chance to step out of the day job for frontline workers and reflect on their own roles not be a delegate for their organisation
- Unlocks achievements ‘not looked or asked for’ but emerging out of conversations, which include some of the best outcomes most illustrative of the constructive environment created.

### **Case Study: Development of the Strategy Scrutiny Group to lead on a city-wide, co-produced strategy**

The Scrutiny Group was established to review, feed into and scrutinise the Council’s strategy on homelessness. Setting out on that course, it built up a rapport with engaged members of the City Council Homelessness Team who were able to use the feedback constructively and take the points on board.

Indeed, so many suggestions were being taken forward that the decision was made to review the strategy overall. This itself led to the eventual decision to create a brand new strategy which would be co-produced from start to finish and be led by the Scrutiny Group.

The ability of the group to create a constructive, learning environment where challenge was welcomed also resulted in the strategy being expanded to go beyond the City Council itself, becoming a strategy for the City as a whole and all the services connected to ending and preventing homelessness.

## Guiding: the role of the Charter

### Key Learning

- Develop a Charter in conversation rather than writing in isolation to make it meaningful
- Give true influence to people with lived experience so that the power dynamic is addressed from the beginning
- Use ‘pledges’ as a hook for securing buy-in and commitment for diverse groups within your area such as businesses and public services

The role of the values included in the Charter has been described above, but the broader function played by the Charter goes beyond this. It embodies an acceptance on behalf of all those in the city – including Manchester City Council – that doing things differently was required to address homelessness. The conversations which led to its formation, and above all the level weighting and real decision-making power given to people with lived experience, is why what comes after has been able to work.

The context in which the Charter was developed illustrates this. The predominant mode of operation for statutory agencies including Local Authorities remains *doing to* rather than *doing with* across the UK, and examples of genuine collaboration remain rare. This was true in Manchester also, and the factors which prompted the decision to change are not unique to the city either: increasing public attention of homelessness, growing political will to address it and determination from an under-resourced voluntary sector to do things differently.

As other local areas can testify, the presence of these factors is no guarantee that an approach which changes the underlying dynamics will be taken. A key factor identified by those connected to the Partnership was the appointment of Jenny Osbourne by the City Council in 2015 with a broad mandate to address homelessness and take an entirely new approach. In this post she was able to convene the initial ‘City Conversation’ event which prompted the research and encouraged the development of the Charter.

Three particular strengths of the Charter are:

### 1. Rallying

By the time of the Charter’s launch in May 2016 (facilitated by Jez Green of homelessness and anti-poverty charity Mustard Tree) those involved had been in regular contact with each other for some time. The roots of partnership were in place but the charter acted as a banner around which people could rally and various initiatives could coalesce. The Charter provided a statement of intent, a point for people already involved to flock to as well as somewhere to return to when they get bogged down. It is also a visible sign for new groups or individuals who would like to get involved.

Additionally, the Charter captured the public imagination and generated ‘pledges’ from Council teams, public services, individuals and businesses. These were announced in the media alongside the Charter and made it visible, as well as involving groups not normally connected to homelessness. Some of the pledges presented clear actions - such as that of Manchester City Council to involve people with lived experience - while others such as reviewing practices, prompted a broader process of change.

## 2. Evolving

The process of developing the charter also gave a focal point to the ideas which were circulating in Manchester during the initial discussions and subsequent research. The process of research and formation involved Council Staff and Elected Members, homelessness organisations operating locally and nationally and a variety of individuals with lived experience.

In the course of its development representatives from these groups spoke with and visited projects around the world including the Movimento População de Rua in Brazil via the With One Voice exchange, and the Poverty Truth Movement in Leeds. This provided not just an influx of new ideas, but also time for some of those involved to build trust, get around the same table and create the foundations for the Partnership which followed.

## 3. Inspiring

From the start, the consultation into how Manchester could approach homelessness differently was co-produced, involving people with lived experience both as researchers and contributors. The Charter was similarly developed with decision-making as well as consultative power held jointly by those with lived experience and those with ‘learned experience’.

Putting co-production at the heart of the effective governing document set the tone for everything else that followed.

## Connecting: the role of Street Support Network

### Key Learning

- It is vital to be connected at the grassroots level for the movement to work effectively and be sustainable
- Offer organisations something of value to get their buy-in and continued engagement
- No amount of tech can replace the value of someone operating the ‘switchboard’ and being able to put those working on similar initiatives separately together

An important element of the Partnership is that it is not hierarchical and there are no individuals within it who have more or less decision-making power. However, as can be seen from the role of Justlife and the UTA Action Group, there are still roles and anchor organisations that make the rest happen. Key amongst these is the pivotal role the Street Support Network plays in providing the infrastructure and linking together the components of the Partnership.

Street Support Network was co-founded by digital experts Viv Slack & Gary Dunstan as a way to connect and signpost to the patchwork of support available in Manchester for people experiencing homelessness. The Street Support Network website now provides the following features:

- **‘Find help’** collates & shares an underlying database of providers and grassroots groups in the city. Service information is crowd-sourced with organisations entering and updating their own info.
  - Being place-driven with significant local connections, Street Support Network is positioned to maximise the motivation of local groups to provide and update the correct details. Being independent and part of a broad local movement is integral to the model, as it has made it possible for Street Support Network to maintain this service with a very small core team.
  - The ‘Give help’ functions act as a motivation for groups to be involved and keep their information up to date, as they can benefit from increased volunteer support, donations and other resource offered by members of the public.
- **‘Give help’** is a bulletin board that groups, organisations or individuals can post items they need to, for members of the public or other groups to respond to. Typical items might be:
  - Volunteer roles; sought after items such as kitchenware when someone moves into a new house or clean knickers (always in demand!).
  - The website connects the person offering help directly to the group or individual that needs it, reducing the time, energy and resource required on behalf of the core team and enabling more action on homelessness to be taken.
  - These ‘small miracles’ of someone needing something practical, putting the call out, getting a response and then solving their problem are tangible, everyday impacts the Street Support Network has enabled – which may previously have been too administratively time consuming for organisations, and not easily accessible for the public.
- The **Charter** section hosts the Manchester Homelessness Charter, alongside the 299 pledges and an invitation to make more. The Charter site also links to the Action Groups and other channels for those who would like to get more involved.
- The **Big Change MCR** section provides information on the flagship alternative giving scheme works, how to donate and how the fund has helped individuals who are homeless.

- The **Standards Toolkit** page has a variety of useful resources and tools for volunteer groups to use. The template policies and suggested training offer a ‘fast-track’ to good practice for new groups, supported by two levels of Best Practice Standards that can be applied for by groups to demonstrate their high quality of support.

As the Partnership has developed, Street Support Network’s role has grown beyond the role of the website. An essential function of the Street Support Network in Manchester – and by local advocates on the ground in other areas the website covers – is now connecting people and organisations and sharing best practice. With full time members of staff solely focused on supporting partnership working, the Street Support Network is on the ground in the city hearing about what is going on and being able to complement the digital matching service with a human one, joining up dots that tech can’t do alone.

This has enabled the Street Support Network to play crucial roles in many of the new partnership developments in Manchester. It has helped bring about more co-operation between street based voluntary groups and the Council where previously there was mistrust; and broker meetings when there is mutual interest but different approaches, due to its neutral and non-competitive role. It also acts as the host and facilitator when new developments such as the Homelessness Reduction Act emerge and there is a benefit of developing responses in partnership across the sector.

As demand has grown for their service, employment opportunities for people with recent lived experience of homelessness have been created within the team. With three out of the six employees having personal experience of homelessness, one role focused on co-production and lived experience involvement, and another on business engagement, the organisation is able to hear a wide range of voices, and truly involve all citizens in the partnership.

### How could Street Support help your partnership?

The Street Support Network website can be extended to other locations for a fee. As the place-driven aspect of the project is essential to its success, it is recommended areas have the following in place to make the most of Street Support (or any other technology platform):

- Local organisations who want to work in partnership – there is energy to work together, collaborate around a shared mission, and engage in open conversation
- One or more local advocates willing to make connections and encourage organisations to participate
- A local creative or digital partner is engaged to provide support in communicating/marketing the initiative to the public and businesses
- A budget for set-up fees and ongoing technical support, which could be raised through business sponsors, public sector, grants and/or donations

## What has the Partnership achieved?

### Key learning

- Outcomes are both immediate and practical as well as deep and systemic
- All outcomes come about as a result of the co-production embedded in the Partnership at all levels
- Of the longer term changes, increased transparency, culture shift and flourishing of people with lived experience are some of the standout achievements for those involved.

The Manchester Homeless Partnership aims for long-term, systemic change which ends homelessness outright. This means that it isn't looking for quick fixes or 'relief of symptoms'. However, it has been able to achieve a number of immediate, practical changes that improve the situation for people who are homeless as well as deeper, longer term cultural change which aim to prevent homelessness for the foreseeable future. A number of specific outcomes the Partnership has achieved are listed below, along with how the changes are achieved through co-production.

### Broader changes achieved by the Partnership

**Transparency** is a big achievement mentioned regularly by members of the Manchester Partnership. The norm of collective working has led to fewer and fewer discussions and developments happening behind closed doors and more and more in the forum of the Partnership/Action Groups. This helps with calling out things which people don't agree with, but constructively, and in public, without it becoming a poisonous disagreement. Equally, people and organisations are encouraged to follow up actions because there are others holding them to account.

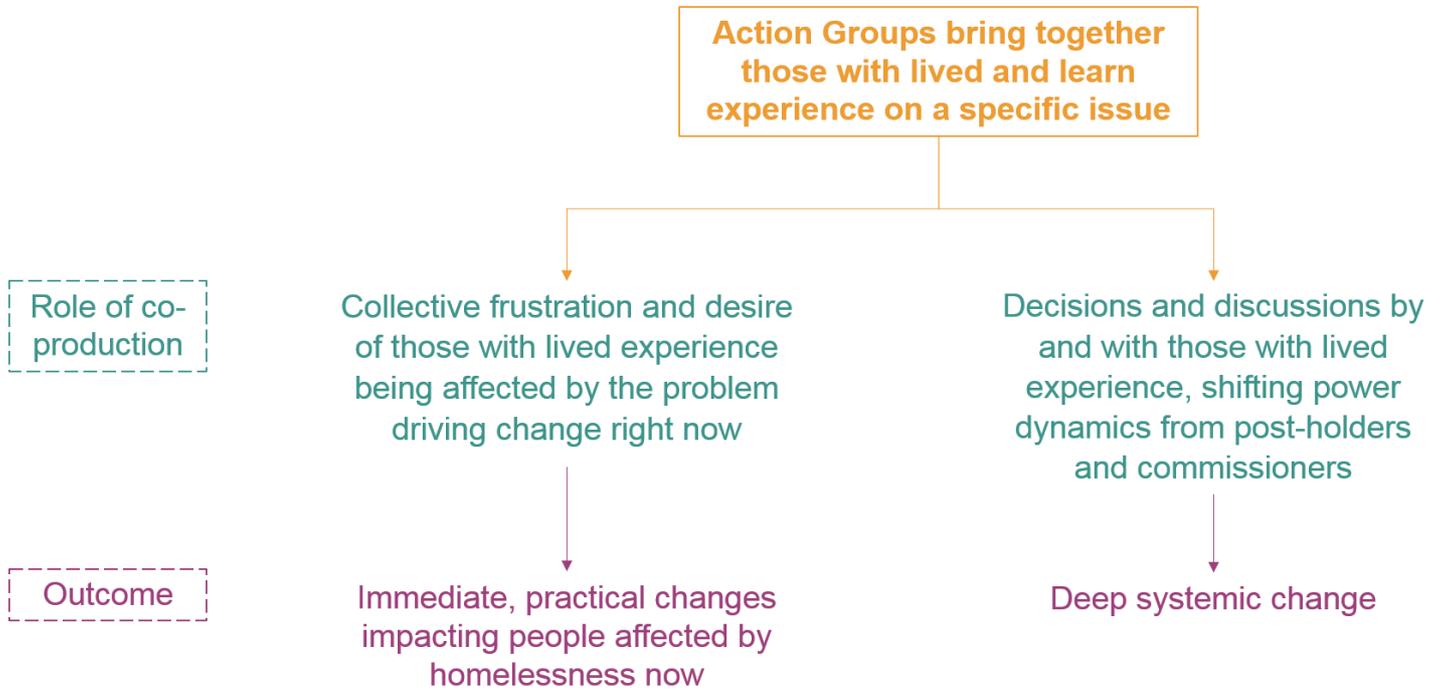
**Culture change** is another major achievement. Inclusiveness and being partnership-led are now expected defaults for Manchester homelessness services, with the voice of lived experience leading and not just as a token consultation. This certainly doesn't mean this is always achieved, but if the culture sticks and grows it will achieve systemic change that is in-depth and long term.

Across the Partnership are numerous stories of people with lived experience who through their involvement have developed their skills and found strength to **change their lives**. One example is an individual with significant alcohol dependency prone to by his own admission "wandering off down rabbit trails", who through the course of Action Group meetings has been able to communicate his views, seen them acted on and the power balance re-dressed. He now limits his drinking the night before meetings so that he can be sober the next day, and brings notes he's made in the time between because he knows his memory isn't great.

In another instance, a B&B tenant who began getting involved in the Action Group has grown hugely in confidence, using the forum to develop their ideas and their facilitation skills. This culminated recently in

them co-hosting a national conference on UTAs and ‘working the room’ throughout like an experienced politician!

**Figure 4: How does the Manchester Homeless Partnership achieve change?**



For further examples of achievements by the Manchester Homelessness Partnership, please see Appendix C.

## Tensions and challenges

**Key Learning**

- Conflict is inevitable when you aim for systemic change, but this can be healthy and generate change quicker and more effectively if approached constructively
- Gaining real control over the solution is a tangible immediate outcome for many people experiencing homelessness
- It is difficult to bring all the branches of the Partnership together without sufficient centralised resource

A central principle of the Partnership is to learn and develop. This helps it avoid making the same mistakes and entrenching structural inequalities. Learning from the tensions which do exist and the challenges which have arisen is of utmost importance to anyone seeking to develop something similar.

### **1) Tension between explicit short term practical changes, and implicit longer term systemic change**

As discussed above both immediate and long-term changes are sought by the Partnership via the Action Groups, but due to their immediacy and visibility it is the former which are clearest to participants. It can mean shorter term changes which would immediately affect those experiencing homelessness can be in conflict with the longer term systemic ones which are much slower but can potentially impact many more people.

This poses a particular challenge to the co-production model. Co-production is harder and takes longer, unless it is tokenistic which can be more damaging than doing none at all. However, co-production can also harness this tension as a constructive force: it is much harder for services to resist cultural change when those who would be affected by it are working alongside them and going home to temporary or unsuitable accommodation.

### **2) Being part of the solution has an impact all of its own**

Further learning when it comes to involvement of those with lived experience is not to oversell benefits for them immediately. Short-term changes are possible as the examples above show, but emphasising the opportunity to change things for future people who find themselves in similar situations can be as motivating.

The experience of the Partnership also suggests that having decision making power over efforts to end homelessness and a higher degree of control is in itself a significant benefit to people experiencing it. This aligns with theories of person centred and strengths based practice, and helps manage the tension between short and long-term changes.

### **3) Risk of burnout**

Lack of direct funding can create challenges around capacity, particularly for frontline workers who still have high caseloads and lots of immediate work to be getting on with. The risk of those involved becoming overwhelmed by the time required to make it work and feeling pulled away from work they 'should be doing' is significant.

For individuals such as Jez Green who've devoted a lot of time to the Partnership, it has been important to get the backing of the organisation they work for. However, depending on some key individuals and advocates within organisations has caused challenges when they move on, particularly within key decision-making bodies such as the Local Authority.

One way to mitigate this risk is to spread the load across many shoulders, which the Action Group network has helped to do. This is another argument for co-production, as it increases the resource and number of people who can take responsibility.

#### 4) Linking disparate pieces of work

With little central resource and most progress happening in Action Groups, it can be a challenge linking activity to other ongoing work. Failure to do this and co-ordinate collectively can result in silos which are potentially missing out on opportunities or duplicating work.

Street Support's connecting role has mitigated this, but it nonetheless took a long time for the Partnership to get more specific resource and agree how to use it. Going into its third year, Street Support now has two GROW Trainees and two additional posts to help keep communications and particular streams of work going. However, the Partnership has not yet solved this issue and it is an area where they are keen to improve or learn from others.

#### 5) Relationships really count

From the initial 'City Conversation' which led to the Charter to the role of Street Support sitting between the partners and Action Groups, it is effective, trusting relationships through which the MHP works.

Relying on relationships does mean that things might become difficult at times when relationships are strained. Undoubtedly there have been times when parts of the Partnership have not worked as effectively as they should because of a breakdown in relationships. What those involved have learned is that getting through this is the ground for change, and the change achieved much greater as a result.

#### **Case Study: Redesigning Women's Direct Access Services**

In 2016, efforts to redesign the women's hostel in Manchester began under the umbrella of the MHP via co-produced methods. The Group was led by the voluntary sector, co-chaired by a woman with lived experience, with others involved including the City Council, referral partners and people both living and working in the hostel.

Embarking on the redesign in this way was a significant departure in its own right. However, expectations and attitudes weren't always in sync. This created significant challenges, exacerbated by evident power imbalances between people reliant on the hostel for their continuing safety and those making the final decisions about structure and resourcing.

Although the commitment to co-production was admirable, there was a feeling that less decision making power was given to those with lived experience than expected. This has resulted in some residents feeling *less* listened to. Nonetheless, the work shone a light on the power imbalances, increasing appetite for change. It is also part of a 'new norm' that services in the city will be co-produced, which continued with a February 2018 co-production event and the ongoing redesign of the Citywide Homelessness Strategy. The specific focus of gender as an element of commissioning has also prompted conversations elsewhere about the role of gender sensitive commissioning.

## **Appendix A: What to do now to set up a grassroots partnership in your area**

- a) Hold a 'City Conversation' event about changing the way you approach homelessness**
- b) Allocate resource to lead on developing partnership work**
- c) Connect with peer networks to ensure involvement of those with lived experience of homelessness**
- d) Convene a Driving Group to support and maintain momentum**
- e) Involve an organisation such as Street Support to help provide infrastructure**
- f) Conduct co-production training for all key individuals involved**
- g) Launch with a 'hook' such as a Charter to capture public imagination and set the tone**
- h) Establish action groups to focus on key issues and encourage autonomy**
- i) Arrange for regular opportunities to review, learn and understand what else is needed**

## Appendix B: Key Learning from the MHP

### **Doing: The role of the Action Groups**

- Appoint Co-Chairs, one of which is someone with lived experience, to embed co-production into the fabric of the Action Groups
- Provide training on co-production for all Co-Chairs to help get off to the right start
- Provide a flexible brief within the area of focus so there is autonomy to set their own schedule of activity and evolve their focus
- Bring the Groups together on a regular basis so those involved can seek help on particular items, but not feel required to 'report back'

### **Guiding: The role of the Charter**

- Develop a Charter in conversation rather than writing in isolation to make it meaningful
- Give true influence to people with lived experience so that the power dynamic is addressed from the beginning
- Use 'pledges' as a hook for securing buy-in and commitment for diverse groups within your area such as businesses and public services

### **Connecting: the role of Street Support**

- It is vital to be connected at the grassroots for the movement to work effectively and sustain itself
- Offer organisations something of value to get their buy-in and continued engagement
- No amount of tech can replace the value of someone operating the 'switchboard' and being able to put those working on similar initiatives separately together

### **What has the Partnership achieved?**

- Outcomes are both immediate and practical as well as deep and systemic
- All outcomes are connected to the degree of co-production embedded in the Partnership
- Of the longer term changes, increased transparency, culture shift and flourishing of people with lived experience are some of the standout achievements for those involved.

### **Tensions and challenges**

- Conflict is inevitable when you aim for systemic change, but this can be healthy and generate change quicker and more effectively if approached constructively
- Gaining real control over the solution is a tangible immediate outcome for many people experiencing homelessness
- It is difficult to bring all the arms of the Partnership together without sufficient centralised resource

## Appendix C: Selected Achievements of the Manchester Homelessness Partnership

Achievement	Group involved	Practical Changes	Cultural and systemic changes
Manchester Street Poem	Arts & Heritage Group	<p>Provided participants with major sense of achievement, identity and camaraderie</p> <p>Generated donations for homeless charities</p>	<p>Increased awareness and understanding homelessness amongst general public and city residents</p> <p>People with experience of homelessness visibly put front and centre of efforts to understand and address it</p>
Big Change MCR alternative giving programme	Big Change MCR Action Group	Support for over 800 people affected by homelessness	Avoids usual stigmatisation of homelessness in the public arena and demonstrates positive depictions can be effective
Co-produced city-wide Homelessness Strategy	Strategy Scrutiny Group	New strategy to address homelessness incorporating all city services	Decisions taken on how to address homelessness determined equally by those experiencing and those working in homelessness
Minimum standards for emergency shelters	Emergency Accommodation group	Improved quality of emergency accommodation for rough sleepers, including the City Council's own provision	Raises standards overall, but may be a barrier for new providers
Use of UTAs for people with high mental health needs	UTA Group	Council lead found out about placing of people with high needs in UTAs, and able to speak to Community Mental Health teams to direct instead to purpose-built facility	Recognition of benefits common dialogue can have to all public services who achieve better results



## What we do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for organisations working directly with people who become homeless or who live with multiple and complex support needs. We work to improve services and campaign for policy change that will help end homelessness.

## Let's end homelessness together

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