

Working strategically with Local Authorities to end homelessness

Guidance for voluntary sector organisations in England

Let's end homelessness together

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Produced by

Innovation & Good Practice Team, Homeless Link, March 2020 – published July 2020

Acknowledgements

With thanks to: Local Government Association, MHCLG, HARP Southend, Mary Seacole HA, Padley Group, Voices of Stoke, Oasis Community Housing, Caritas Anchor House, The Manna Centre, London Borough of Camden, Newcastle City Council, Leeds City Council, London Borough of Enfield, London Borough of Southwark, London Borough of Westminster, London Borough of Havering, Luton Borough Council, South Norfolk Council.

Foreword from the Local Government Association

Last year, the LGA worked with Homeless Link to draft some guidance for the voluntary sector on partnership working to tackle homelessness. We wanted to highlight the vital importance of partnership at a time when levels of homelessness were high and rising, with over 4,000 people sleeping on the streets and over 83,000 in temporary accommodation.

The guidance contains many examples of excellent joint working against that context – charities and councils working hand in hand to ensure that people who are disadvantaged or are at risk of being so were quickly identified and prevented from becoming homeless, and to ensure that people who were already homeless could access timely, targeted and appropriate services and accommodation.

Since then, the world has been fundamentally changed by the COVID-19 crisis, and our social, economic, and environmental context is very different.

For many, the crisis has significantly increased the risk of hardship, homelessness, and compromised health. However, amongst the tragedies, the crisis has also created opportunities – at the time of writing 15,000 people, previously sleeping on the streets or in night shelters, have been rehoused and supported by councils and their partners, with profound positive effects on their wellbeing.

The crisis has also highlighted the importance of partnership. Councils, charities, and partners in the public sector have together been able to identify people who are disadvantaged or are at risk of being so – whether they are already experiencing chronic homelessness or just starting to experience financial insecurity and housing instability. Where these partnerships are working well, they have been able to swiftly bring together their collective resources to ensure that thousands have been safely accommodated, and given support with claiming benefits, improving their health, and their daily needs. And they have consequently strengthened local support networks, bringing together more services, more closely, so that the partnership benefits which we've seen can be embedded in the longer term, as we move towards recovery.

Councils and their partners can't end homelessness alone, and support is still needed from central government if we are to see everyone in for good. This includes reforming welfare benefits, including the benefit cap, so that people can afford and sustain safe accommodation. We also need support for people with no recourse to public funds, who are at a very high risk of destitution.

However, we hope that this guidance will go some way to highlighting how positive change can be made at a local level, so that we can collectively recover into a new, and better, normal.

**Cllr David Renard,
Chair, Environment, Economy, Housing, Transport Board
Local Government Association**

Introduction

About this guidance

Homeless Link developed this guidance in partnership with the Local Government Association between autumn 2019 and spring 2020, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.

It aims to help voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations (VCSE), including faith-based organisations, to develop effective joint working at a strategic level. While it may also be useful for local authorities (LAs), they may want to share this guidance with the voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations they work with.

A note on language

In this document, the term Local Authority (LA) refers to a local council, which could be a District, Borough, County or Unitary authority. It is equivalent to the term 'council'.

The term 'voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations' (VCSE) is used for any organisation that is not for profit, whether charitable or not and whether faith-based or not. There are many other terms used such as voluntary and community groups, third sector, charity, voluntary organisation or homelessness agency. VCSE is used as an umbrella term for these.

Why work together at a strategic level?

LAs play an important role in addressing homelessness. As well as delivering services to people experiencing homelessness, they have significant responsibilities for drawing up local strategies and plans that accurately identify local need and set out actions to meet that need, including the funding and commissioning of services.

VCSEs (including faith-based organisations) who work with people experiencing homelessness have an important role too, as providers of services, whether or not commissioned by the LA. They seek to engage with LAs to ensure local strategies are effective and that all those involved in delivering services are working in a co-ordinated way, ultimately making a difference in tackling homelessness. VCSEs that engage strategically will also benefit from being better informed and better supported by their LA. Their business plans will benefit from a joint strategic approach.

Most LAs are committed to working strategically on homelessness with a range of local organisations, including VCSEs such as day centres, outreach teams, hostels, supported accommodation, and advice services. These include both faith-based and secular organisations.

Working together is more important now than ever. Prior to the pandemic, a number of Government initiatives and funding programmes have provided opportunities for increased levels of joint working between LAs and VCSEs. These include the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer Programme, Homelessness Reduction Act (including the Duty to Refer Provisions) and the Rough Sleeping Initiative. There has also been increased focus on working 'upstream' to prevent homelessness, leading to a wider range of agencies being involved in tackling homelessness through earlier interventions.

During the Covid-19 crisis, there has been unprecedented joint working in order to move people from the streets and shelters into emergency hotels, and to provide food and support in this new accommodation. Where partnerships were already in place, the emergency response has often been coordinated more quickly, helped by an understanding of how to make best use of the skills and resources of each partner.

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Working together at a strategic level is not always easy – especially in areas where there are two tiers of local government. There can be barriers for a VCSE, for example finding capacity to engage, especially where they work across several boroughs or where there is a lack of knowledge of LA structures and contacts. There is significant variation in approach among LAs, which can be difficult to navigate.

It isn't always easy to know where the strategic role sits within the LA – it can sit within a Housing or Homelessness Team, within a Policy or Strategy Team or across more than one team. It can also be difficult finding the time and the right people to meet. Sometimes relationships can feel strained or difficult, either with the LA or with other organisations due to lack of funding, potential duplication or competition among organisation; it may seem that there is a lack of shared values. If you are a faith-based organisation, you may feel excluded from partnership working.

Different funding relationships

There are different types of funding relationships between VCSEs and LAs and this can have an impact on working together strategically.

Commissioning relationship

An LA may be 'procuring' or commissioning a service from a VCSE. In areas of two tier local government, the commissioner may be the upper tier or county level LA so this may not have any impact at all. If the commissioner is the LA that holds the strategic lead role around homelessness, rather than only as a provider of services, there could be specific meetings that bring together the LA department or team that acts as the commissioner. While this does offer additional opportunities to develop close working with the LA, it should not mean that non-commissioned organisations find themselves excluded from working strategically.

Grant funding relationship

The LA may provide a grant – whether one off or regular – to a VCSE and there may be conditions attached to the grant (a grant funding agreement and/or a service level agreement). There may be specific meetings where you come together with the LA department or team to monitor and oversee the service agreement. Again, while this type of relationship can offer some opportunity to work together strategically on homelessness locally, it does not preclude non-grant-funded organisations from developing strategic relationships. Indeed, some additional work might be necessary for grant-funded organisations to ensure that a more strategic relationship is also able to develop alongside the commissioner/provider dynamic.

No funding relationship

The LA may not provide any funding towards your services. In particular, this could be the case if you are a faith-based organisation. While this may mean that developing relationships with the LA at the right level is more challenging, it should not preclude you making strategic links.

This guidance aims to help in all these situations, although bear in mind there could be some differences in practice according to which category your organisation is in.

What does effective joint strategic working look like?

We have identified six elements of effective joint working on homelessness and it may be helpful to review each of these in the areas you work to assess any actions you could take toward achieving them:

1. There are effective operational relationships and links between the VCSE and the LA.
2. There are effective relationships at management and Board level between the LA and VCSE.
3. There are local multi-agency meeting structures and groups, which provide opportunities for the LA and VCSEs to work together on homelessness.
4. There is an up to date local homelessness strategy and action plan, drawn up with extensive input from VCSEs.
5. The LA and VCSEs have access to, and regularly share, good quality local data.
6. The LA and VCSEs maintain a good level of knowledge of local services.

The following sections give more information and guidance on each of these areas to help you assess your current situation and identify actions you could take to develop or improve joint working with your LAs. We have included reference to further guidance, examples and case studies.

1. There are effective operational relationships and links between the VCSE and the LA

Ensuring there are good operational links between the LA (usually the Housing Options Service) and the VCSE, particularly around referral of clients or client pathways, is a good foundation for effective strategic working. Referral of clients from your organisation *to* the LA maybe necessary as well as referral *from* the LA, particularly the Homelessness or Housing Options Team. Liaison and referrals with the Housing Benefit Department, Social Care or Children's Services may be important too. Agreed points of contact, written protocols and referral processes are always helpful.

Under the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) some organisations and public bodies have a statutory 'Duty to Refer' people they come into contact with, who may be homeless or threatened with homelessness, to the LA Housing Options Service for assessment and assistance. There should be regular operational dialogue between these referring organisations and the LA Housing Options Team and agreed referral processes. While the list of agencies covered by the statutory Duty to Refer is limited (e.g. prisons, job centres and hospitals), the Government encourages LAs to have a wider network of agencies that also commit to making referrals to the LA. It's a good idea to make sure you have considered the referral process for clients you might work with who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. You may want to approach the LA Housing Options Team to open up dialogue – being a referral agency could also open up opportunities, for example to take part in local training and information sharing about the HRA. It's good practice to monitor and review the referral arrangements regularly.

Duty To Refer Guidance

The Local Government Association (LGA) released comprehensive guidance for LAs in October 2018 on the Duty To Refer, which could be equally useful for VCSEs who are or might want to become a referral agency. The guide includes examples of referral forms and process charts.

www.local.gov.uk/duty-refer-opportunity-cooperate-tackle-homelessness

As a provider of services to people who are homeless, you may also benefit from having agreed client referral arrangements into your service. This may form part of any commissioning agreement or Service Level Agreement. It can be useful to have formalised processes for referrals and, where these are agreed, you

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should review them regularly. This creates opportunities to review both referral numbers and processes, and will hopefully lead to more strategic discussions arising from this evidence.

Going further

Working together with the LA at an operational level can open up opportunities to go even further, for example to co-locate several local organisations and services in one place (whether badged as homeless hubs, assessment hubs etc), joint assessment procedures and processes and, in some cases, joined-up data systems.

South Norfolk Help Hub

South Norfolk has a successful early help hub where a wide range of services and organisations from the voluntary and statutory sector are co-located. Some services have visiting presence whilst others are based there full time. The Hub is within the Council's offices and includes domestic abuse support services, mental health support and youth support for example.

www.south-norfolk.gov.uk/residents/south-norfolk-help-hub

MEAM (Making Every Adult Matter)

In some areas LAs and VCSEs have come together with the support of the MEAM charity coalition to develop effective, coordinated services that directly improve the lives of people facing multiple disadvantage. The MEAM Approach helps local areas design and deliver better coordinated services for people experiencing multiple disadvantage. It's currently being used by partnerships of statutory and voluntary agencies in 27 local areas across England.

www.meam.org.uk

2. There are effective relationships at management and Board level between the LA and VCSE.

Building and nurturing relationships with the right individuals at the LA can help create the right environment for effective strategic work around homelessness. It can be useful to consider relationships with Officers (paid staff) and with Councillors (those who are elected and make decisions at a more strategic level). It may be helpful to avoid thinking about LAs as commissioners when developing more strategic relationships and, in many cases, the individuals you need to engage with might not be involved in commissioning.

If you are not familiar with local government, it can be confusing to understand the structure of LAs and the role that Councillors play. You might find this summary helpful:

Local Authority Structures and Governance – an overview

The structure of government at a local level varies from area to area. Most areas in England are covered by two tiers of local council – that's a district or borough council and a county council. Responsibility for services or functions are split across the two tiers. Housing services – including homelessness – tend to sit with district councils, whereas services such as children's and adult's social care are usually covered by county councils. In other areas of England, including major cities, there is only one tier of local government responsible for all local services (sometimes referred to as Unitary). In London each of the 33 borough councils are Unitary. Some LAs also work together as 'combined' authorities where they collaborate and take collective decisions, and may have more devolved powers given to them by central government e.g. transport.

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Every council will have an officer workforce led by the Chief Executive that delivers (and/or commissions) services. Councils are also made up of councillors who are elected by the public in local elections. They can be referred to as local councillors, ward councillors or members. They aren't operationally involved in services – they jointly govern the council, make decisions, set local priorities and represent their ward.

Councils are political organisations and their arrangements for decision-making can be one of two main models: a leader and cabinet model or a committee model. Most are the first of these and usually each cabinet member will have a specific area of responsibility such as Housing or Children or Planning. The role of a Mayor can also differ – in most councils, a local Mayor is not elected and only serves in a ceremonial role. In some areas, there is an elected Mayor and they do have powers e.g. Manchester.

London also has an additional 'tier' of Government known as the Greater London Authority, also referred to as the Office of the London Mayor. The Mayor determines seven 'statutory' London strategies (for example the Environment, Spatial Development (the London Plan), Transport, Housing) and these are scrutinised by the London Assembly, made up of 25 elected members. Homelessness features heavily in the London Housing Strategy and in the activities of the London Mayor.

Find more information about how councils work on the website of the Local Government Association (LGA): www.local.gov.uk/about/what-local-government

You may already meet with your LA at an operational level, especially if you are a commissioned or grant funded organisation, or have agreed referral arrangements for clients. If you are not in these categories, it could be useful to set up regular meetings to ensure the LA is aware of the service you provide, your client numbers and the main impact of your services. If you struggle to get meetings agreed, then arranging a visit to your service or sending short regular updates could be helpful to establish a relationship and increase the profile of your service.

It can be beneficial to build and maintain relationships at a number of different levels with the LA. This could include Senior Officers within the Housing Options Teams, as well as higher up the organisation with a Head of Service, Director or Chief Executive and even with councillors – either ward councillors in the community or area where you operate, or with councillors involved in relevant committees or the council's Cabinet.

Frequency of meetings will vary depending on the individual and their level within the LA. Operational catch-up type meetings could be more regular, but with more senior officers at the LA, maybe less frequently or even once a year. Having occasional meetings with Councillors could also be useful to raise awareness of the services you provide and the trends, issues and challenges that you and your community face.

There may be opportunities to give presentations to a committee or groups of councillors or senior officers (this is more likely if you are a funded or commissioned service). It might be worth asking about this rather than waiting to be asked. Some VCSEs also actively seek local councillors to sit on their Boards.

It's worth bearing in mind that it is best not to be too dependent on just one or two individuals in the LA as, if they move on, it can be hard to establish the relationship again with someone else.

Case Study: Developing Effective relationships – HARP Southend

HARP Southend has worked hard to build strong relationships with Southend Borough Council (SBC), covering many levels of staff, senior officers and councillors. This has been strengthened further through the closer working that developed following Rough Sleeper Initiative funding from MHCLG in 2018. SBC nominates an elected Councillor every year to serve on HARP's Management Committee, which is a quarterly meeting of their Board of Trustees that also includes external members including the nominated Councillor.

HARP's effective liaison with the Council goes all the way up to their Chief Executive and Leader of the Council. A good example was the Housing First Workshop that HARP developed and hosted in early 2020 – it was attended by 35 individuals from agencies across the whole spectrum of organisations involved in homelessness, including SBC's Director for Housing (who is also the Deputy Chief Exec), Director for Adults and Community, Rough Sleeper Initiative Coordinator, Senior RSI Navigator and two Councillors.

HARP Officers have regular meetings with SBC senior staff to ensure they work together in harmony and that services are joined-up as far as possible. They also work closely with frontline SBC staff across a range of functions, from the Housing Benefit department through to the commissioning and housing options teams, and even their press officers.

HARP regularly host tours of their services to a wide range of stakeholders, including senior council staff as well as groups of local Councillors. Wherever possible they also share training opportunities with the Council. They have also worked closely with the Council (and other public sector agencies) on tackling Coronavirus as it affects homeless people (especially rough sleepers) including being part of the local Task Force Group.

HARP is taking the lead in setting up a Homelessness Forum in Southend. Jackie Bliss, Chief Executive of HARP Southend, says: "We are fortunate to have a Unitary Authority, making it much easier for us to maintain these relationships and to coordinate our efforts."

3. There are local meeting structures, which provide opportunities for LA and VCSEs to work together on homelessness at strategic level

Most areas have a Homelessness Forum, usually organised and led by the LA. These might have a wide scope to cover both single and family homelessness or they might be client group specific – a Single Homelessness Forum, for example. There might also be Working Groups or Panels focusing specifically on rough sleeping. There may also be voluntary sector led groups or partnerships which come together to tackle homelessness and might include individuals as well businesses. These might involve people with lived experience of homelessness.

There can be huge variation in the way these groups operate, how formal or informal they are, whether they are mainly networking groups or more strategic, with formal work plans and decision-making powers. As an organisation working with people experiencing homelessness, you should expect your LA to have at least one local group or forum for VCSE agencies to attend where you can hear from the LA and develop a joint strategic approach around homelessness and rough sleeping. If there is no group locally, you can contact Homeless Link's regional Partnership Managers for support with establishing a forum:

www.homeless.org.uk/about-us/our-people/meet-partnerships-team

Homeless Reduction Boards

In February 2019, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government consulted on whether local housing authorities should establish local Homelessness Reduction Boards – structures specifically to govern how homelessness services are planned and delivered locally. The consultation closed in May 2019 and, depending on how the Government takes this forward, this might change the type of local groups available to engage with.

As a VCSE working with people experiencing homelessness, it is good practice to be involved with as many of these groups as possible. You should use these opportunities to help the LA develop a good understanding of the issues in the local area and respond effectively to them. Such groups may or may not be 'strategic' in their focus but, either way, they will provide a platform or opportunity to develop strategic relationships. It's not always easy to find the time to get involved, especially if they aren't always effective or haven't been well attended in the past, but it is important to make time and ensure the right level of representation from your organisation. By doing this, you help to ensure that Homelessness Forums work effectively with a good balance of input from the LA and VCSE, nurturing a culture of joint working and joint commitment to tackling homelessness locally, as well as creating opportunities to hold the LA to account and challenge them where necessary.

Membership of a Homelessness Forum might be by invitation only. As they are not usually public meetings, information might not be on the LA website. It's best to ask the LA, e.g. the Head of the Housing Options Service, for details of their Forum and how you can join.

You might even want to consider whether to set up a wider VCSE-led partnership to ensure a good level of joint working around homelessness.

Newcastle – Homelessness Forum and Partnership

The **Newcastle Homeless Prevention Forum** is led by the City Council. Established in 2004, it brings together a range of partners to work together on preventing homelessness in Newcastle. The Forum meets quarterly and the council compiles and shares a quarterly information bulletin to highlight trends and to review how they are doing in relation to our work on homelessness prevention.

www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/housing/housing-advice-and-homelessness/information-professionals/newcastle-homelessness

The **Newcastle Street Zero Partnership** was created more recently and is a city-wide Partnership of public bodies, voluntary sector organisations and business that have come together to work jointly to end rough sleeping in Newcastle.

<http://streetzero.org/>

Enfield Single Homeless Forum

The Enfield Single Homeless Forum (ESHF) is voluntary sector led and aims to review services for homeless single people and couples without children. ESHF works together to:

- influence and apply pressure for improved services and housing options
- increase the availability of advice and support
- improve interagency working and make best use of resources
- develop and implement new initiatives to reduce and prevent homelessness
- supply and monitor good quality information about the needs of the homeless
- work with the private rented sector to increase housing opportunities for the homeless

Case study: Luton Homelessness Partnership

As well as a council led Homelessness Forum, voluntary sector organisations have come together in Luton with individuals with lived experience, the LA and others to form the Luton Homelessness Partnership. The Partnership represents over 20 local services and people with lived experience who are working together to end Homelessness in Luton through co-produced solutions. The Partnership has co-designed terms of reference and is chaired by the Chief Executive of a local Homelessness Charity with a Co-Chair who has lived experience of homelessness. They hope to raise funds for dedicated staff resources, however in the interim partners have been pooling resources collaboratively.

The Partnership was formed in 2019 and has already launched an Alternative Giving Campaign, Big Change Luton: www.cvsbeds.org.uk/bigchangeluton, as well as partnering with StreetSupport to set up a dedicated Luton Street Support website that is a central information point for all local homeless services: <https://streetsupport.net/luton/>

The Partnership has plans to further improve access to services and support for people who are homeless, with more co-designed and co-produced services and strategies, and ensuring the public are better informed about local services and support, as well as about the root causes of homelessness. They intend producing a Charter, which the public can sign up to and pledge their support to ending homelessness in Luton.

Chair of the Forum and Chief Executive of Mary Seacole HA, Mike Bushnell says: “We are very proud of the distance travelled and confident in aspirations and the difference we can make together. We want to promote collaborative working across the sector and offer opportunities for sharing resources, skills and knowledge. Our aim is to optimise the contributions of multiple sectors by linking housing with health, justice, education and social care systems, but also with sectors like transport, business and faith. Homelessness cannot be solved by any one agency on their own. It involves a complex mix of factors that are often interdependent across sectors and geographies. Networks, alliances, and coalitions of diverse stakeholders from governments, foundations, civil society, and business are a more powerful way to mobilise the vast range of resources and actions required to bring about real lasting change on a significant scale.”

Head of Housing Needs at Luton Borough Council, Nazakat Ali says: “Luton Council works closely with the Luton Homeless Partnership to help prevent and tackle Homelessness throughout Luton. The Partnership is a valuable resource in supporting the Council to deliver some of the actions in the Luton Homelessness Prevention Strategy.”

Luton Homeless Partnership film: https://youtu.be/04Fyrd_NAc

www.cvsbeds.org.uk/luton-homeless-partnership/

The Manchester Homelessness Partnership Toolkit

This 2018 toolkit describes how the Manchester Homelessness Partnership (MHP) was set up. The Partnership has continued to evolve, involving a wide range of organisations and individuals, and putting people with lived experience at the heart of a clear shared vision to tackle rough sleeping in Manchester. The Partnership is an umbrella group for a number of initiatives and, while not a blueprint for replication, it is a valuable source of ideas for an ambitious and diverse partnership approach.

www.homeless.org.uk/manchester-homelessness-partnership

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LAs are also likely to have a number of other local groups or structures which consider homelessness issues – Health & Well Being Boards, Community Safety Boards, Registered Provider Forums, Welfare Reform Groups etc. It is beneficial to be involved in these types of groups as well as a Homelessness Forum to ensure others know about your organisation, and that you keep well informed in order to be able to influence.

4. There is an up to date local homelessness strategy and action plan, drawn up with extensive input from VCSEs

LAs have a legal duty to draw up and publish a Homelessness Strategy (or Homeless Prevention Strategy) and engage with VCSEs in doing so. As a service provider, you should be involved and engaged in the Strategy. You need to know who in the LA is responsible for working on the Strategy and who leads on implementation of the actions within it. For example, this could be Strategy Officers, Managers from the Housing Options service, wider Housing Service Managers or performance and delivery officers.

Homelessness Strategy Guidance

The LGA published a guide for LAs in December 2019 on how to plan, write and deliver an effective homelessness strategy. This guidance will also be useful for, and of interest to, VCSEs as it sets out the legal requirements and statutory guidance on LAs, as well as emphasising the importance of involving a range of voluntary organisations in writing and delivering strategies.

www.local.gov.uk/making-homelessness-strategies-happen

There are a significant number of strategies and plans created at a local level that might also cover homelessness, and to which the Homelessness Strategy might link. It is useful to be aware of these and, where possible, have input too. Examples include the LA Corporate Strategy/Plan, Housing Strategy, Health & Well Being Strategy, Local Plan/Core Strategy, Community Safety Strategy and Anti-Poverty Strategy. In two tier areas of local government, they will sit with one tier or the other and sometimes both.

Birmingham Homelessness Prevention Strategy

Birmingham's Strategy is one which was developed collaboratively in partnership with a wide range of organisations operating in the City. The Council has established a cross sector and multi-agency Homeless Partnership Board to oversee and monitor its implementation. The introduction of the Strategy document includes a statement written by one of the VCSEs that sit on the Board. The Strategy also cross-references multiple other local plans and strategies including the City's Financial Inclusion Strategy, Early Help Strategy and the Health & Well Being Strategy.

www.birmingham.gov.uk/downloads/file/2531/birmingham_homelessness_prevention_strategy_2017

5. The LA and VCSEs have access to, and regularly share, good quality local data

To work strategically with the LA you will need a good understanding of local levels of homelessness and rough sleeping and an understanding of the main causes of homelessness, along with other relevant data such as the number of people in temporary accommodation. You will want to understand whether, or to what extent, your services are meeting these needs.

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As a provider of services to people experiencing homelessness, you will also want to ensure you are sharing good quality data on your services with the LA and others to build a strategic picture. This will include both quantitative and qualitative data from your service, with a focus on impact.

Having an opportunity to share and review good quality data with the LA and a range of agencies in the same area is one of the most important elements of effective joint working. This data can come from a variety of sources. It will help you to highlight patterns and identify gaps, and can be a powerful tool to shape new strategies, design new services or improve existing ones.

Here is a quick guide to the homelessness data available in your area:

LA level homelessness data

LAs are required to record data at a local level on the number of households seeking assistance as a result of becoming homeless or being threatened with homelessness, along with characteristics of these households, their support needs and reasons for their homelessness. The LA should also record the activities they take to prevent or relieve their homelessness and numbers in temporary accommodation.

The data is submitted by LAs to Government at the end of each quarter. These statistics changed with the introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act (HRA) and are now often referred to as 'H-Clic'. These data sets are collated and published each quarter by the Ministry of Housing & Local Government (MHCLG). These data sets can be accessed on the Government's website (gov.uk) as full tables listing all LAs for a select quarter, or as 'live' or 'interactive' tables to view particular LA areas or regions, which can be helpful for comparison purposes. As these data sets have been changed as a result of the HRA, they have initially been referred to as experimental.

While the LA will usually be well informed and actively using and sharing their H-Clic data, it can be useful too for a VCSE to explore this data directly. Your LA may be willing to assist you in accessing this data or the gov.uk website offers some information and explanation along with the data sets and interactive tables. An introduction to the Homelessness Statistics is available here:

www.gov.uk/government/collections/homelessness-statistics

The LA may also collect additional local data that goes beyond what can be accessed from the gov.uk tables. The LA is also likely to hold data on number of households registered and waiting for social housing in the area, the number of social housing (or council) units of accommodation in their area, the number of newly built units in a given period, the number of vacancies that occurred for example. This type of data may be helpful to understand the scale of the housing shortage in the area.

London Borough of Southwark – annual homelessness data review

The Council produces a detailed analysis of homelessness data, issued to its partners, which includes the H-CLIC data as well as additional data to build up a comprehensive picture for the Borough to help inform strategic working on homelessness. 2019 data review:

www.southwark.gov.uk/assets/attach/11197/2019-annual-review-of-southwark-homelessness-prevention-rough-sleeping-strategy-2018-v1.4.pdf

Rough Sleeping Data

MHCLG works with LAs to collect data on rough sleeping through an annual snapshot estimate process. MHCLG commission Homeless Link to oversee and verify this process for each LA in England. The data sets

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are available at: www.gov.uk/government/collections/homelessness-statistics#rough-sleeping. Data is available at LA level and also regionally with breakdowns showing age groups, gender and nationality (where known). Trends and changes in overall numbers can be seen over a three year period. Homeless Link also publish infographics based on the most recent data and showing figures for each LA since 2010:

www.homeless.org.uk/facts/homelessness-in-numbers/rough-sleeping/rough-sleeping-explore-data

In areas funded by the Rough Sleeping Initiative, known as RSI areas, where Government funding has been allocated specifically to tackle rough sleeping, bi-monthly counts of rough sleeping have been taking place. These returns are not published.

CHAIN data (London only)

In addition to the rough sleeping data set referred to above, additional data is collected for London. CHAIN is a multi-agency database recording information about people sleeping rough and the wider street population in London. The system, which is commissioned and funded by the Mayor of London and managed by St Mungo's, allows users to share information about work done with people sleeping rough and about their needs. Reports from the system are used at an operational level by commissioning bodies to monitor the effectiveness of their services, and at a more strategic level by policy makers to gather intelligence about trends within the rough sleeping population and to identify emerging needs. Quarterly reports are published by the Greater London Authority: <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/chain-reports>

Other data & data tools

There is a huge range of other data that can help build a more strategic picture of need in your areas of operation, to highlight both the causes of homelessness and its effects. Some examples include benefit claimant numbers (e.g. number of people claiming Universal Credit), unemployment, debt, house price and private sector rent data, health and well being, and even data from the census. Much of this can be accessed through the Office of National Statistics (ONS): www.ons.gov.uk.

A number of national charities and VCSEs publish information with data around homelessness:

Crisis publish an Annual Homelessness Monitor:

www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/homelessness-monitor/england/the-homelessness-monitor-england-2019/

Homeless Link produce an Annual Review of Single Homelessness Services:

www.homeless.org.uk/facts/our-research/annual-review-of-single-homelessness-support-in-england

The Centre for Homelessness Impact collates a range of evidence and data about homelessness:

www.homelessnessimpact.org

LAs also have wider data sets and collections of data that might help with contextual understanding of homelessness and housing need. These include:

- Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) – provides evidence on tenure, size and numbers of homes needed in an area, usually used to support and inform the LAs Local Plan or other Planning documents.
- Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) – describes the local community's current and future health, independence and wellbeing needs. It is a high level needs assessment that provides local commissioners with a wide range of quantitative and qualitative data that describes the key issues for the local population.

Homeless Link

VCSE data

As a VCSE, it's important that your own data is clear, well-presented and brought to the attention of the LA – ideally to a range of Teams and to Councillors. If you are a charity, this is usually done through an Annual Report of some kind, with case studies. If you are commissioned or funded then you will have some requirements placed on you for collecting and monitoring data. It is helpful to always include qualitative data and client stories to help demonstrate the impact of your service. It can be helpful to bring this data together and share it as widely as possible.

Measuring your impact

Homeless Link has produced a toolkit for small and medium VCSE organisations to measure their outcomes: www.homeless.org.uk/measuring-your-impact and guidance on how to analyse and share data: www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources/show-your-impact/analysing-and-communicating-data

Story telling for impact

Sharing stories of the people that you help to show the impact of your service are effective alongside data to bring it life, and can be helpful for the LA to get the full picture. Lots of VCSEs include client stories on their websites, for example:

Caritas Anchor House, London: www.caritasanchorhouse.org.uk/about-us/resident-stories

Voices of Stoke: www.voicesofstoke.org.uk/news-2/

Impact Reporting

Compiling, publishing and sharing an Annual Report is a great way to raise your profile and build links with the LA. Reports that use simple messaging, with pictures and infographics as well as stories, can be highly effective at getting information across and raising the profile of your organisation. Lots of VCSEs produce great reports, for example:

SPEAR London: www.spearlondon.org/impact-annual-accounts/

Booth Centre, Manchester: www.boothcentre.org.uk/governance-and-annual-reports.html

Going further with data sharing

In some areas, data sharing and use of data for strategic planning of services has led to more innovative and joined-up systems. These could include shared case management systems across an LA area. This can have many benefits including allowing clients to only have to report on their circumstances once and in some cases have the ability to input and update the information about themselves. Information sharing protocols are essential to these initiatives. For more information, see Homeless Link's report on case management and area-wide data systems: www.homeless.org.uk/case-management

6. The LA and VCSEs maintain a good level of knowledge of local services

Working effectively at a strategic level requires a good level of local knowledge – not only about the scale of the problem locally, but also about the current range of services that already exist, both to support those who are experiencing homeless and those at risk of homelessness.

Homelessness Forums and Partnership meetings should include opportunities for presentations, information sharing and service updates from local services so that attendees are hearing from others and sharing their own updates.

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Ideally, service mapping will be carried out regularly and the results shared widely. Some areas may have a Directory of Services that sets out the full range of local advice, support and accommodation services for people experiencing homelessness and details of how to access these services. This could be online or paper versions and aimed at people experiencing homelessness (suitable where there are direct access services) or advisers/professionals (appropriate where services require referrals). Directories should be well-known and well-used among local services, and someone has to be responsible for keeping them up to date.

Coventry Directory of Homelessness Services

Coventry City Council has an online Directory of Homelessness Services in its area, which includes accommodation and support services. The information available includes a summary of the service provided as well as referral and contact information.

www.coventry.gov.uk/directory/37/homelessness_services/

Homeless Link's National Directory of Homelessness Services

Homeless Link has an interactive tool on its website to look up homelessness services by town, city, LA area or postcode. Information includes opening hours and referral routes.

www.homeless.org.uk/search-homelessness-services

Going further with local networks – there are a number of examples of how to present and share information on local services to benefit those who might need services, those advising and supporting people experiencing homelessness, and those working strategically to plan and commission services.

London Atlas of Homelessness Services

The London Housing Foundation has commissioned an interactive directory of homelessness services, developed by Homeless Link. The Atlas covers services in London for 'single' homeless people. It shows the number of bed spaces available either by LA area, pan-London or in groups of Boroughs, and provides a clear overview of services to help those involved in commissioning and strategic planning of services.

<https://lhf.org.uk/atlas/>

Street Support Network

There are over 20 locations in the UK with a Street Support Network, bringing together an online directory of services for people sleeping rough. Information is online through a dedicated local Street Support Network website, for use by staff and people who are homeless or using services, as well as concerned members of the public who want to find out more and even donate.

<https://streetsupport.net/>

What other help is available if I want to get more involved in working strategically with LAs?

Homeless Link

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for organisations working directly with people who become homeless in England. Resources and toolkits are available to download that will help you to develop strategic and operational work in homelessness: www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources, as well as regular events and training: www.homeless.org.uk/events. The In-Form client management system helps charities to make best use of data: www.homeless.org.uk/products/in-form-client-relationship-and-service-management. And the regional Partnership Managers can help you to develop local responses to homelessness, for example by brokering relationships between the statutory and VCSE sectors:

www.homeless.org.uk/about-us/our-people/meet-partnerships-team

Local CVS and NVCO

Most areas will have a CVS (council for voluntary services) organisation to support voluntary sector organisations, and promote and facilitate joint working with LAs. The extent to which they might be involved in housing and homelessness issues will vary. The national body, NVCO, may also have resources, training and events that can help with development of joint working.

www.ncvo.org.uk

Local Government Association (LGA)

The LGA is a member organisation supporting LA members and promoting good practice through publications, training and events. As well as collaboration with Homeless Link on this guidance, the LGA have a number of other guidance documents and resources to support LAs in developing joint working with VCSEs and around development of homelessness strategies for example. They also have a team of regional advisers who work with LAs on their improvement needs and identification of good practice.

www.local.gov.uk

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)

The Government Department that leads on homelessness has a team of specialist officers that work mainly with LAs to support the implementation of the Homeless Reduction Act at a local level, known as HAST advisers. The MHCLG also have a team of specialist officers that support the Rough Sleeping Initiative and work mainly with LA at a local level, known as RSI advisers.

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ministry-of-housing-communities-and-local-government/about



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.

Let's end homelessness together

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