# A New Season For Night Shelters

## Research Report

Juliette Hough and Becky Rice – June 2021

# Contents

# 1 Executive Summary

## Background

▶ This report presents the findings of independent research into the experiences of night shelters in winter 2020/21, and learning from this extraordinary period. It is based on research undertaken with 59 people representing 11 shelters, including guests, coordinators and trustees, as well as data from Housing Justice and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

▶ Shelters were affected from the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Those open in March 2020 worked with local authorities and regional government to move guests from communal spaces to individual rooms or self-contained accommodation as part of the Everyone In initiative to prevent Covid-19 transmission.

▶ The year 2020 was like no other – the usual 'off season' (during which winter shelters close, typically from April to November) was very active for shelters working to plan for winter 2020/21 in the face of great uncertainty. Some also contributed to efforts to support people in Everyone In provision across the whole year.

▶ Government guidance in the form of 'operating principles' for winter shelters was published by MHCLG in mid-October 2021 confirming that communal sleeping spaces would be very hard to make safe and were to be strongly discouraged in favour of self-contained or single room options.[1] Only two communal sleeping projects were identified by Housing Justice during the season.

## Preparing for the season

▶ Decision-making about what to provide involved discussions with staff, trustees, churches, local authorities including public health teams, and others. The resulting operating models fell into five broad categories:

— hotels/hostels (some with shared facilities and some self-contained)

— single room accommodation in shared house/house in multiple occupation (HMO)

— pods/modular accommodation

— provision of alternative non-accommodation support

— shelters that did not run.

▶ Developing new models of accommodation provision involved: securing funding, securing and adapting new buildings, recruiting staff and developing new staff and volunteer roles, developing and implementing new processes and policies (including for infection control), and developing new relationships with accommodation providers, the local authority and partner agencies.

## Key facts about the season

▶ Housing Justice estimates that the costs for running night shelter provision more than doubled in 2020/21 compared with the previous year. Providing a shared house or hotel cost a minimum of £50,000-£85,000 for three months, with some organisations incurring significantly greater costs.[2]

▶ An estimated 840 bed spaces were available across the shelters in England between 31 October 2020 and 31 March 2021. This compares with 2,519 in 2019/20, a 68% decrease.

▶ Rough sleeping counts and estimates show a sharp drop in the number of people visibly sleeping rough on a single night in 2020/21 compared with the previous year.

▶ The profile of guests overall was fairly consistent with the previous year in terms of gender, support needs and nationality. However, the picture in London differs from outside of London; in London the proportion of guests from outside of the UK increased significantly between the two years. Volunteer numbers were significantly reduced in the 2020/21 winter season.

## Headline feedback about new accommodation models

▶ Almost everyone interviewed – guests, volunteers, coordinators and partners including local authorities – strongly believed that 24-hour access, self-contained or single room accommodation was more desirable than the communal, night-time-only model. It provided privacy and stability for guests, and made it easier for them to access support and employment. It was also more accessible for women. Even where 24-hour site access was not possible – for example, in some pod accommodation – the privacy afforded was considered beneficial compared with communal sleeping spaces.

▶ Single room, self-contained and pod or modular provision is, however, more expensive, with increased accommodation and staffing costs, and usually meant that fewer people could be supported. Other drawbacks included concerns about people being *'behind a closed door'* and therefore potentially isolated and less safe from self-harm or exploitation.

▶ Volunteers' roles were radically altered. For many volunteers, relationships with guests and other volunteers felt less close and the role felt less meaningful than in previous years. Volunteers were motivated by the desire to help others and many said they were willing for their role to change if that better supported guests.

▶ Positive outcomes for guests seen across many of the different accommodation models included: improved health and well-being; improved access to support, and stronger, more trusting relationships with services; and increased desire to stay off the streets and move into more permanent accommodation.

▶ Negative outcomes included: isolation in some self-contained accommodation and, in some cases, a reluctance to move on to less desirable accommodation.

▶ Some areas reported that relationships between shelters and local authorities were strengthened by working together to provide an emergency response to Covid-19.

## The future

▶ MHCLG is expected to publish updated Operating Principles for 2021 in June 2021. Housing Justice does not expect these Operating Principles to differ substantially from the 2020 Operating Principles.

▶ Shelter representatives generally predict an increase on current low levels of rough sleeping including a rise among people who have not previously experienced homelessness.

▶ Shelter and local authority representatives felt that there will continue to be a demand for faith and community-based shelter provision. Faith and community winter night shelters can play a unique and valuable role in supporting those who the statutory sector do not assist effectively, including, for example, those who are thought not to have access to public funds.

▶ Several of the local authorities participating intended to move away from funding communal night shelter provision. The Everyone In model of single room accommodation, together with the provision of move-on support, was viewed as preferable.

- Generally, shelters also felt that self-contained options offered a better guest experience; however, the scale, affordability, hospitality, inclusiveness, and flexibility of the circuit shelter is still considered to be a very strong model with distinct advantages to some shelters.[3] Where shelters close, new shelters may be opened up by churches or others because of these factors, where there is a visible need in the community.

- Several local authorities were seeking alternative ways to work with night shelter providers – for example, by providing floating support or mentoring/befriending services.

- Volunteers are at the heart of the shelter movement and are highly valued; clarity and innovation around the volunteer role is a key area of attention in planning the coming season and beyond. For some shelters this will mean moving away from shelter support to other community-based volunteering.

- There is no single, clear dominant model for night shelters in the future emerging from the research. Plans for the future fell into the following broad categories:

  — returning to the previous night shelter model when possible

  — retaining elements of the new model – fixed-location, 24-hour access, self-contained accommodation

  — considering not running the night shelter

  — expanding the role of the shelter – in particular into floating support

- Plans depend on public health considerations, government policy on rough sleeping including in relation to provision for foreign nationals, the cost of different options and availability of funding.

## Conclusions

- The contribution of the shelter network has been critical to ensuring that people who would otherwise be sleeping outside are safe from Covid-19 and the dangers of sleeping outside during the winter months.

- 2020/21 has opened a space for reflecting on fundamental questions about the role and approach of night shelters, and questioning the usual way of doing things. Interviewees were open to the possibility of change in response to their changing understanding of need and how it could best be met.

- The overall picture of shelters' responses to the pandemic season is one of diversity, impacted by factors including the level of need in an area, the values driving the shelter, the needs of the community, and the resources available.

- While a consensus on a preferred format and use of shelters across the country is unlikely to emerge in the coming years, the past season has been significant and will represent a turning point for many shelters and for the overall shelter landscape.

- Understanding the drivers and values that sit behind differing perspectives will help to ensure constructive and open communication and the best outcomes possible from this network of organisations.

[3]A circuit model refers to a shelter that moves around; for example the shelter may be in a different venue for each day of the week for the period of the shelter opening.

## Recommendations

- The models explored in this report should be considered by shelters planning for the coming season.

- An overarching consideration is infection control and ensuring a minimal and acceptable level of risk in relation to Covid-19.

- Information and data about the local context (including rough sleeping levels and emerging needs and gaps) from relevant local authorities, street outreach teams and other partners should be gathered by shelters to guide their plans.

- Move-on and exit planning should be a priority from the outset. This will require close links with the local authority and ensuring the best knowledge of and access to move-on accommodation.

- New funding opportunities such as the Homelessness Winter Transformation Fund may emerge and should be considered, bearing in mind the level of restrictions these might entail.

- Where shelters are not reopening, ways of harnessing the community response to homelessness and other forms of disadvantage should be considered; these range from floating support to large-scale food provision to smaller contributions.

- Guest experiences and practical considerations locally should drive the approach to volunteering; this research suggests that volunteers will be open to adapting to whatever will best serve those in need.

- Shelters should communicate with volunteers from previous years to ensure they feel valued and connected to the community response.

- Appraising the volunteer roles in new models should be an ongoing process; it may be that as government guidelines change the approach is adjusted.

- For any projects hoping to open new shelter provision, there is a wide range of areas to consider identified by this research. Toolkits on Best Practice are available from Housing Justice and additional ones will be published on future dates. https://housingjustice.org.uk/what-we-do/night-shelters/coronavirus-night-shelters/our-covid-19-resources

- Where self-contained or single room accommodation is being taken forward into next season and beyond, it may be that claiming housing benefit for some spaces where possible is a useful source of income; Housing Justice should support shelters to explore this option.

- Regardless of shelter models, space to store possessions and access to showers should be provided where possible.

- As fewer infection control requirements are in place, shelters should build in some of the advantages lost from communal shelters such as communal eating, befriending and activities.

- Shelters should consider providing access to immigration advice and supporting those experiencing homelessness for the first time, via referral, in-reach or in-house services.

## Recommendations for local authorities

- Local authorities should aim for ongoing, positive relationships with shelters throughout the year; where there are good links between shelters, local authorities and other providers better outcomes are achieved.

- Local authority teams should work in partnership internally to support shelters in an efficient and joined-up way, across rough sleeping commissioning, housing options and public health teams.

- Where local authorities are planning on providing new funding or adjusting funding arrangements with shelters, they should be sensitive to the ethos, values and level of resource and experience shelters have.

- The Government should ensure more timely advice on shelter provision in 2021 to prevent additional burden and anxiety in the planning process for the coming season.

## **2 Introduction**

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## Context

The Covid-19 pandemic meant that all winter night shelters in England, Scotland and Wales were closed in the final two weeks of March 2020. Guests staying in these projects moved to self-contained or single room accommodation to prevent transmission of the virus. This was part of the Government's Everyone In initiative, which put the onus on local authorities to provide accommodation for people rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping in their area.

In Scotland and Wales, communal night shelters have remained closed since March. In England, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) established Operating Principles setting stringent rules by which communal spaces could reopen. It also made available an initial £2 million in funding to support providers of night shelters to adapt to Covid-19 secure provision.

By January 2021, many shelter providers had transformed their provision, moving from offering camp beds in church halls to take on hotels, shared houses, disused care homes and other forms of accommodation.

## Research purpose

Housing Justice commissioned independent researchers Juliette Hough and Becky Rice to conduct research to capture learning from the winter season 2020/21 to inform good practice for winter night shelters in the future. The research aimed to answer the following questions:

*What alternative provision did night shelter providers run in winter 2020/21?*

*What results did this provision yield and what learning is there for the future?*

## Alternative models of provision in winter 2020/21

Housing Justice identified five broad categories of alternative night shelter provision in winter 2020/21. The research explores each of these in detail.

**Figure (a) Archetypes of alternative night shelter provision in winter 2020/21**

| Type of provision | Definition |
|---|---|
| Hotel/hostel | Self-contained accommodation (a single room with its own bathroom, and the ability to eat alone (with food delivered or made by the guest)), where the night shelter provider has block-booked a number of beds, and is providing support |
| Single room (shared house/house in multiple occupation) | Single room accommodation provided in a house, with some shared facilities |
| Project using pods/external modular units | Pods used to separate a room internally or an exterior unit, such as a Bunkabin |
| Alternative support | No accommodation but alternative support provided |
| Did not run | A night shelter project that ran in 2019/20 but did not run in 2020/21 – these projects are often rotating night shelters who could not access a static site |

> **By January 2021, many shelter providers had transformed their provision, moving from offering camp beds in church halls to take on hotels, shared houses, disused care homes and other forms of accommodation.**

# 3

# Methods

This section outlines the methods used to conduct this research.

## Overall approach

The research combines qualitative research on 11 winter night shelters and analysis of quantitative data from night shelters submitted through the Housing Justice online portal.

## Selection of case studies

A minimum of one case study was selected for each of the five types of winter shelter provision identified by Housing Justice in winter 2020/21. Coordinators of an additional five shelters were selected to take part in-depth interviews. Case studies were selected by the researchers from a shortlist provided by Housing Justice to provide a spread across types of provision, geographical location, type of area (urban/rural) and size of project. The archetypes and related night shelters taking part in the research are described in figure (b) below.

### Figure (b): Case studies of archetypes of winter night shelter provision in winter 2020/21

| Type of provision | Case study project (in-depth research) | Interview conducted with coordinator |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Hotel/hostel | ▶ Nottingham Winter Shelter<br>▶ Glass Door, London<br>▶ Bristol Churches Winter Night Shelter | — |
| Single room (shared house/house in multiple occupation) | ▶ King's Lynn Winter Night Shelter | ▶ Merton Winter Night Shelter |
| Pods/external modular units | ▶ Tabor House, Birmingham | ▶ Southampton Churches Winter Shelter |
| Alternative support | ▶ Peterborough Winter Night Shelter | ▶ Mana House, Kendal |
| Did not run | — | ▶ Grantham Ark Winter Night Shelter<br>▶ Greater Together Manchester Night Shelter |

## Qualitative research

Fifty-nine people took part in in-depth interviews or group discussions between March and May 2021 (see figure (c) below). They included coordinators, guests, volunteers, staff, trustees, partner agencies and local authority representatives from or working with 11 different winter night shelters.

### Figure (c): Number of interview/focus group participants as at 1 April 2021

| | Coordinator* | Guests | Volunteers** | Local authority | Partner agency | Staff/senior manager/ Trustee | TOTAL |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Birmingham | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | — | 1 | 7 |
| Bristol | 1 | 3 | 10 | 1 | — | — | 15 |
| King's Lynn | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | — | 1 | 6 |
| London | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | — | 1 | 8 |
| Nottingham | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 11 |
| Peterborough | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | — | 2 | 7 |
| Non-case study shelters | 5 | — | — | — | — | — | 5 |
| TOTAL | 11 | 12 | 20 | 7 | 2 | 7 | 59 |

*'Coordinator' in this report refers to the person or people with responsibility for the delivery of the shelter provision. In some cases, this is someone with the job title coordinator or manager but this also includes volunteers or people providing consultancy with coordinating roles. **One of the volunteers interviewed had been a guest the previous winter.

Following the qualitative fieldwork, two online discussion groups took place with 17 winter night shelter representatives and Housing Justice staff to test emerging findings and inform the development of the conclusions and recommendations.

## Analysis of quantitative data

The data presented in section 5 was collected by Housing Justice via:

▶ The Impact Portal on the Housing Justice website, where shelters across England and Wales can provide information about their project for the period 31 October to 31 March for a given winter season

▶ The Housing Justice shelters tracker, which contains information collated by Housing Justice in their ongoing work with the shelters.

Data from these sources is combined and analysed by Get the Data, social impact analysts.

The number of responses submitted to the Impact Portal has varied over the eight years it has been conducted. Forty-seven shelters completed the survey in 2020/21 and 85 in 2019/20. To provide estimates of figures for the whole of England for key metrics such as the number of bed spaces overall, information is analysed by applying weights and extrapolation. The analysis, conducted by Get the Data, weights the data to extrapolate results for all night shelters based on the sample of night shelters that submitted data. The sample was first split into three regions: London, rest of England and Wales. For each region, the number of open night shelters is divided by the number of returns to generate a weight. The original data are then multiplied by the weight to return an extrapolated result. The weights are calculated for each year data are available for and if one region had no data submitted, then an England and Wales weight is calculated and used instead of regional weights (this applies to 2018/19).

In addition to this primary data, statistics from MHCLG are referred to in this section to provide context.

**4**

# Case studies of alternative provision

This section presents case studies of six winter night shelters that adopted different models of provision in winter 2020/21. These are based on interviews in each area with coordinators, guests, volunteers and local authorities, and in some areas with staff, trustees and partner agencies (see chapter 3 for details of interviews).

## Bristol Churches Winter Night Shelter

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|---|---|
| **Archetype** | Hotel/hostel |
| **Lead organisation** | InHope |
| **Previous model** | Twelve-bed rotating winter night shelter running January to March. |
| **Provision in winter 2020/21** | Seven private en suite rooms within a 13 bed B&B, open January to end of March. Guests have access to communal room at mealtimes, where socially-distanced meals are eaten at café-style tables (with six people in the room). |
| **Resources and funding** | Accommodation and some salary costs funded by £35,253 from Homelessness Winter Transformation Fund. The rest of the project costs were funded by outstanding funds from the previous year plus contributions from churches this year. B&B manager has background in homelessness and is the night manager. Volunteers cover regular breakfast, lunch and evening shifts over two six-week periods (two people per shift) – smaller numbers volunteering with more frequent shifts than in previous years. |
| **Guests and referrals** | ▶ People with low support needs were referred via the St Mungo's street outreach team, who continued to support people staying in the shelter.<br>▶ The bedspaces were not always fully utilised due to other referral options created by the Everyone In initiative. |
| **Outcomes** | ▶ Move-on outcomes are roughly similar to last year, but opportunities for interaction, provision of support, and quality of guest experience have improved. Of seventeen guests, eleven had positive moves on, including reconnection abroad/to their local area or moving into their own tenancy.<br><br>One guest said they had made the decision while in the B&B to move into longer-term accommodation after seven years living in a tent:<br>*'Being in here has reintegrated me back into society [...] I thought I've got to break the chain of being homeless [...] It's made me realise all the things I've been missing for a few years.'* |
| **Guest experiences** | ▶ Guests enjoy the 24-hour access, the quality of the accommodation, and the opportunity to 'build a rapport' with volunteers.<br>▶ The guests interviewed did not yet have plans for moving on after the shelter closed (in a few weeks' time). Although they were being supported with this by the local outreach team, this was causing anxiety.<br><br>*'It's more confidential and private. As I'm working I have 24[-hour] access so I'm happy with that... You do what you want, if you don't want food you don't go down. It's better – you have more control for yourself over what you want.' – Guest*<br><br>*'It's excellent, I couldn't wish for more. I've got a beautiful room with my own toilet, shower and wash basin.' – Guest*<br><br>*Continued...* |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Volunteer experiences** | ▶ From a total of 400-500 volunteers who had previously taken a role in the shelter, 82 people volunteered for a shift at the B&B in winter 2020/21. There were approximately 130 volunteers altogether, including chefs, cleaners, bakers and delivery drivers.<br>▶ People volunteer in teams of two rather than eight or so as in previous years. Volunteers miss the camaraderie, fun and fellowship of working in a team; however, they believe that the quality of provision is better for guests this year and are willing to change their roles in order to support this.<br>▶ More regular shifts mean that many volunteers have felt able to get to know guests and have more meaningful conversations this season, which they have found very rewarding. Others have had less close contact with guests and miss this.<br><br>*'We've lost some things that have been a real joy – working with other [volunteers in previous years] ... was lovely. We didn't have as much contact with the guests this year. But what we've lost in our own personal enjoyment in mixing with people, our guests have gained in security and in the venue itself ... [and] quality of care.' – Volunteer*<br><br>*'Something about the conversation goes from one week to the next. You don't have to go through introductions, it has a relaxed nature, people are proud to talk about what they've achieved. Last week one guest talked about having to start to make decisions. I never had these conversations with guests before.' – Volunteer* |
| **Challenges faced** | ▶ Practicalities – e.g. providing food without a large kitchen on-site, and ensuring Covid safety.<br>▶ Securing move-on accommodation. |
| **What's worked well** | ▶ Guest choice – e.g. guests can eat in shared space or in rooms; can be social or alone; and can come and go as they wish. This works well for all, and particularly for people who have avoided traditional hostels and/or night shelters in the past.<br>▶ 24-hour access and a fixed location makes it easier for people to work. People have enjoyed having their own room, and volunteers and staff prefer not having to ask people to leave in the mornings.<br>▶ Interaction between guests and volunteers is more relaxed and higher quality than in previous years. Mealtime conversation at the café-style tables is relaxed. Having fewer, more regular volunteers makes it easier for guests and volunteers to get to know each other.<br>▶ The B&B manager has a background in homelessness and acts as night manager, so staff/volunteers are not needed overnight. |
| **The future** | ▶ Would like to retain reduced numbers of volunteers, provide daytime space and a place for guests to leave their bags. Self-contained rooms in a fixed location would be beneficial, but would require funding.<br>▶ Considering opening earlier in the year (November rather than January).<br>▶ The project is establishing a befriending project, in which guests leaving the night shelter are matched with volunteers. |

# Nottingham Winter Shelter

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| **Archetype** | Hotel/hostel |
| **Lead organisation** | Emmanuel House |
| **Previous model** | Circuit night shelter, 25 beds, part-funded in 2019/20 by local authority with Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) funds for the non-winter months of the year. Low to medium support needs. |
| **Provision in winter 2020/21** | 45 beds, single rooms with own bathrooms in four-star hotel, 24-hour service. |
| **Resources and funding** | Night shelter staff present 24/7. Local authority is funding hotel and staff costs up to March 2021. |
| **Guests and referrals** | People with more complex needs have been accepted this year. |

**Outcomes**

▶ Outcomes are much improved this season. A large proportion of hotel guests have moved onto and sustained longer term tenancies, including those who had not moved into tenancies in the past. 126 people had been supported to achieve a positive move-on at the time of the research.

▶ Guests have had improvements in health, as a result of improved access to services (for example, homeless health team nurse visiting the hotel, and navigators working with GPs), being off the streets all day and having their own bathrooms (which helps, for example, with taking care of wounds).

▶ Improved trust by people who had not previously engaged with services.

▶ Reduced contact with emergency health services and the police.

▶ Particularly good outcomes for people with no recourse to public funds (NRPF), many of whom have been supported to gain eligibility for public funds or to be reconnected.

*'There were significant improvements in well-being, just by the fact people had access to good quality accommodation, their own toilet and washing facilities, three meals a day and good support. For some, there were physical and mental health improvements, and some reduced their drinking.' – CEO, Emmanuel House*

**Guest experiences**

The two guests interviewed much preferred the hotel to a normal night shelter. It made it easier to look for work and look towards the future. They felt a sense of pride staying in accommodation that they did not have to leave in the daytime. They have found the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes helpful and have had useful support with benefits. The visiting nurse helped one guest with medication for depression. They did, however, miss being able to talk to other guests, which was only possible outside the hotel.

*'The hotel is very helpful, much better than a normal shelter. I feel proud I can stay in the hotel, not on the street in the daytime... Also I can start looking for work, I can have a shower, it's really helpful. It's so much better to stay here because I can have a look something else on the future. I feel more positive for the future; I can make plans.' – Guest*

*Continued...*

**Volunteer experiences**

▶ Volunteer roles are very different, with a lot less interaction with guests and other volunteers than in previous years. This year volunteers prepared meals in teams of two and delivered food to people's doors.

▶ The volunteers interviewed said their roles felt a little less worthwhile this year and that they missed the interaction with guests. They said, however, that the outcomes for guests this year were far better than in previous years and believed this model of provision should continue, and were happy to adapt their roles in order to be of most value.

*'It feels a tiny bit less worthwhile, as people seem okay, but before it felt you were making a massive difference, now I feel I'm just doing a job. But if I can be of use and be pleasant...' – Volunteer*

*'I think I've lost a little as someone who's volunteering, but that's obviously not the most important thing. [...] Staff and volunteers have to follow what's best for the guests.' – Volunteer*

**Challenges faced**

▶ Opportunities for interaction between guests were limited and guests were more isolated this year than in previous years.

▶ The high-quality accommodation has possibly made some people reluctant to move on to hostels or less desirable accommodation. There were some examples of people turning down multiple offers of assured shorthold tenancies.

▶ Some evictions and return to rough sleeping for people with high support needs including drug problems.

**What's worked well**

▶ Relationships between staff and guests – supported by 24-hour service: *'Having staff around all the time to talk to you, the consistency of staff, has allowed people to build rapport and trust. Knowing we see them as individual people and genuinely want to help people.' – Service Manager, Emmanuel House*

▶ High-quality accommodation and food. Staying in a hotel with other guests who are not experiencing homelessness may have helped people feel more respected and helped increase their self-esteem.

▶ Strong relationships with local authority and partner agencies, enabling joint working and wraparound care, supported by regular communication. Partner agencies visited the hotel to provide support, and volunteers and local businesses provided hot meals and support.

▶ 24-hour accommodation (and beds remaining open so that people could leave then return) enabled stability and looking towards the future.

▶ Single room accommodation is more accessible to women (many of whom refused the former night shelter).

▶ Emmanuel House navigators provide move-on support which has supported people to stay in their tenancies.

**The future**

▶ Funding for the hotel will end in June, and the future is uncertain.

▶ In the immediate future, Emmanuel House expects to move away from traditional night shelter provision, especially in the non-winter months.

▶ Exploring options for alternatives, including 24-hour access and the provision of a number of beds in one place.

▶ Also considering partnering with a Registered Social Housing provider who can provide small houses in multiple occupation (HMO) units with Emmanuel House providing support.

▶ Emmanuel House is partner in a local authority proposal for RSI funding to fund support for people moving into the private rented sector.

# Glass Door Shelter

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| **Archetype** | Hostel accommodation |
| **Lead organisation** | Glass Door Shelter, London |
| **Previous model** | The country's largest shelter, operating multiple circuits across four boroughs via a network of faith organisations in west and south-west London. Across these, Glass Door provided shelter for an average of 148 people a night in 2019/20. The shelter model included two paid staff present at all times and wraparound casework support for guests. |
| **Provision in winter 2020/21** | Two hostels in the City of Westminster providing individual rooms with shared bathrooms, initially offering 80 beds per night, extending to just over 100 as the season progressed. Tapering to one hostel in April and due to close in June. 24/7 access and 24-hour staffing and Glass Door caseworkers on-site each weekday. All meals were served for guests to take up to their rooms.<br><br>Separately to this, a meal service was provided in one of two church venues each evening for anyone to access, run largely by volunteers with some staff presence.<br><br>197 people were provided with overnight accommodation in 2020/21 up to May 2021 compared to 829 the previous year. |
| **Resources and funding** | ▶ Funding sources included additional support from existing donors and trust funders and a grant from the Homelessness Link Covid response fund in 2020/21.<br>▶ The accommodation service cost £908,000 in 2020/21 compared to £533,000 for the shelter bed spaces and associated costs for 2019/20. A 'bed space' was £57 per night compared to £26 per night. This reflects not just the accommodation but all other service costs too.<br>▶ Trustees being willing to draw on the organisation's reserves enabled the leadership team to act quickly.<br>▶ The model required additional funding to cover 24/7 staffing in hostels, the room rate (no housing benefit was claimed) and equipment, e.g. PPE. |
| **Guests and referrals** | ▶ An online referral/assessment form was available to selected referral agencies. While the service aimed to be as accessible as possible, people needed to have low to medium support needs and needed to have an assessment by a Glass Door caseworker if self-referring.<br>▶ Just over one-third (34%) of guests were known to have NRPF. |
| **Outcomes** | ▶ Although there were far lower numbers of guests during this year's hostel season to date (197 in the hostel compared with 828 in last year's shelter), there was a higher proportion of hostel guests who went on to be housed, around one in three and a half guests (57 of the 197 guests in the hostel – data correct as of 20th May 2021).<br>▶ For some groups it was easier to achieve outcomes in the hostel due to enhanced access to casework on-site. Having a private room, storage in that room, and access to showers made it easier to work or look for work for some guests.<br>▶ Some groups were just as hard to secure outcomes for as in previous years; for example, a number of guests from Eastern Europe who did not have good employment prospects left without securing accommodation. |

*'The hostel stay has given guests a decent number of months to get those building blocks in place. So, in the next couple of months, the housing outcome will hopefully come, where guests have options. Arguably, there is less incentive for people to move on because they are in a nice room, all their needs are catered for and the challenges around the benefits cap means they will likely be worse off when they move into accommodation.' – CEO, Glass Door*

*Continued...*

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|---|---|
| **Guest experiences** | ▶ Both guests interviewed found the facilities, service and staff at the hostels excellent. They would have accepted a communal sleeping space, but were very pleased to have their own rooms for privacy and to enable good night's sleep. While women were accommodated on specific floors, being in a mixed environment overall was challenging for the female interviewee.<br>▶ Having moved on to temporary accommodation and a women's hostel respectively, they were both struggling with being housed with people who had higher support needs. Overall, they preferred the provision at Glass Door. |

*'In the room I found everything like pyjamas, all the things a woman needed, they show me where I can wash my clothes and take a shower. For two weeks [before arriving] I didn't take a shower. I sleep for two days non-stop. Everyone is like acting like it's a hotel. We do the queue for the food... Mask on, space between people. Very organised... I don't know how to thank them.' – Glass Door guest*

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| **Volunteer experiences** | ▶ The volunteer input dramatically reduced in the 2020/21 season. Many volunteers were not able to participate and opportunities were also curtailed. The total number of volunteers registered was around 1,600 (mostly shelter volunteers) in 2019/20 and 470 in 2020/21, of which 416 were dinner service volunteers (usually shelter volunteers) split across 32 teams. Volunteering in the hostels was minimal and consisted largely of serving meals prepared by the hostel's own volunteers.<br>▶ Volunteers provided the separate dinner service. While there was less 'sense of connection' at the dinner service, there was a strong sense that the volunteers would do whatever helped people most and they strongly valued their roles.<br>▶ Volunteers were very grateful to Glass Door for keeping them informed and involved, e.g. through Zoom meetings and via requesting specific donations. |

*'Personally, for me, this year was not as rewarding. It wasn't as humanly connected, but it was very important. Something I could do.' – Glass Door dinner service volunteer*

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| **Challenges faced** | ▶ The overriding challenge for Glass Door was being unable to provide the same scale of provision and the open-access ethos of the shelter compared with previous years.<br>▶ The hostels were suitable for people with lower support needs, but on occasion people with high support needs, in terms of mental health or substance misuse, stayed and tended to fare less well than other guests and occupy a substantial amount of staff time. People being behind a door opposed to in a communal space meant there was less visibility when people with higher support needs were struggling and less 'self-policing' and peer support in the environment.<br>▶ There was less opportunity for community-led outcomes, including peer support and volunteer support. People were not able to eat together which is a central part of the usual Glass Door service.<br>▶ Setting up a large-scale hostel provision, including new referral procedures, legal agreements, and policies was intensive, hard work for the team but also rewarding. There was not the same sense of an 'off season'; the intensity of work has continued through from 2019/20.<br>▶ The location being fixed and known, with access all the time, felt less safe for some people than previously when the shelter moved around. |

*'One of the things we pride ourselves on is our open-access ethos and that anyone can self-refer into our services generally... [This year] we are slightly less open access; the process design had that at the forefront to minimise this but there are still barriers so it's not the ideal scenario we would like to have.' – Service Development Manager, Glass Door*

*Continued...*

## Glass Door Shelter *Continued...*

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| **What's worked well** | ▶ The opportunity to set up two sizable accommodation projects was the result of an existing, trusting relationship with the London Hostels Association, a social enterprise and Glass Door donor. |
| | ▶ Self-contained rooms with 24-hour access, and access to showers and three meals a day provided a high level of 'dignity, stability and safety'. |
| | ▶ Having a caseworker on-site and all-day access to accommodation meant the guests were more consistently accessing this service. |
| **The future** | ▶ The Glass Door team are proactively modelling different scenarios for the coming season. A blended model is currently a favoured option. |
| | ▶ The benefits in terms of adaptability, scale, efficiency, value for money, and level of community input enabled by a circuit model mean that Glass Door will return to this when possible. |
| | ▶ It is hoped that with vaccination and advice from a leading expert, it will be possible to make the traditional circuit model acceptably safe for the coming season, where the alternative is sleeping outside. |
| | ▶ In addition, Glass Door envisages running one hostel for those who would benefit most and creating a 'pathway' through from shelter to hostel, to medium- to long-term move on. It may be that shared rooms could increase the capacity of the hostel. |
| | ▶ While communal eating and shared activities could be developed in a hostel without Covid-19 restrictions, this would be limited in scale and flexibility and not be a like-for-like replacement for the spacious, shared dining spaces offered in faith buildings. |

**Self-contained rooms with 24-hour access, and access to showers and three meals a day provided a high level of 'dignity, stability and safety'.**



**Image** Chelsea and England footballer Reece James with Glass Door's hostel manager Bruce Marquart.
*Photo: Lisa Tse*



**Image** A Glass Door hostel guest receives his Covid-19 vaccine.

# King's Lynn Winter Night Shelter

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| **Archetype** | Single room accommodation in shared house/HMO |
| **Lead organisation** | King's Lynn Winter Night Shelter |
| **Previous model** | 22 beds, fixed location, winter only (November to March). Supported by a manager and staff team with the support of volunteers. 104 guests in 2019/20. |
| **Provision in winter 2020/21** | Six beds in converted vicarage – each person in large single room (originally intended for sharing) with shared bathrooms. 24/7 access (9pm curfew). 23 guests in 2020/21. Staff team expanded to cover 24-hour opening, with continued support from volunteers. |
| **Resources and funding** | Funding sources: grants, donations, local authority grant. £40,000 grant from Homelessness Winter Transformation Fund in 2020/21 paid for two new staff members. Volunteers support staff on evening, breakfast and night shifts (as in previous years). <br>— Cost of service July 2019 to June 2020: £112,349. <br>— Cost of service July 2020 to June 2021: £123,866. <br>— Plus additional capital expenditure of £85,098 to adapt former vicarage as night shelter. |
| **Guests and referrals** | Guests have high support needs; guests at the time of the research either have NRPF or were evicted from the council-run pods. Referrals in 2020/21 from local authority housing options team. |
| **Outcomes** | ▶ The coordinator has found that improved one-to-one support has resulted in better outcomes. <br>▶ Of 13 guests who have moved on there have been nine positive/neutral accommodation outcomes: two people moved on to council-run pods, two went to prison, one was sectioned, one was accommodated in a hotel, one moved into private rented accommodation, and two into Housing association flats. <br><br>*'One individual stayed with us for the fourth year. He has been on [the] street for all this time. He was brought to us by the police before Christmas and he stayed for 30 days without washing or leaving his room. He was sectioned. He phoned the other day – it was like talking to a different person, how well he was. The council are going to put him forward for supported housing.' – Coordinator* |
| **Guest experiences** | ▶ Guests appreciate the one-to-one support and having their own room. <br>▶ Rooms are big, not designed for one person, and guests tend to prefer to spend time in communal areas or on the street in the daytime and only use the rooms to sleep. <br><br>*'It was bloody brilliant; it's the reason my life is way it is now. I've got regular window cleaning work. I rent a room in a shared flat. They really helped me turn my life around. They helped me, spoke to me, gave me somewhere to sleep, fed me, mentored me. Supported me, kept me on the straight and narrow, made sure I was alright.' – Former guest* <br><br>*Continued...* |

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| **Volunteer experiences** | ▶ A pool of 100 volunteers conduct weekly/fortnightly/monthly shifts. <br>▶ Volunteers miss the 'busyness', especially on the night shift, but find the closer relationships with a smaller number of guests more meaningful. <br><br>*'[The most rewarding thing] last year was when I was cooking if people said they really enjoyed the meal. This year, it's being able to listen to people and speak to them, feeling at least you've been there and they've been distressed or in a difficult state and you've been able to help support them and they're a bit better now.' – Volunteer* |
| **Challenges faced** | ▶ The shelter no longer has control over referrals; all referrals come through the local authority (who check GP records to ensure people are not vulnerable to Covid-19, and require rough sleepers to be verified and have a local connection). This makes it harder to adhere to its core value of being open to all. <br>▶ The local authority asked the shelter to claim housing benefit for guests. This has changed the type of tenure so that the coordinator now has less control over managing issues such as behaviour, risk and exclusions. <br>▶ The need to turn people away because of lack of bedspace. 'There are the frustrations of not being able to say, "Yes, we have a bed, come in." Last year we used to say, "Come back tomorrow, we'll make a cup of tea."' – Coordinator <br>▶ Loss of sense of community and increased tensions between guests because of smaller number of guests. |
| **What's worked well** | ▶ 24-hour access brings stability. <br>▶ Mentoring and one-to-one support with people has 'really blossomed' (Coordinator), made possible by guests being present in the daytime and by the bigger staff team. This work was conducted by street outreach in previous years, and the outreach team trained the shelter staff to provide this support. <br>▶ More move-on options for people because of Covid-19 support pathways. <br>▶ Community support (volunteers and funding). 'There's been a huge sense this winter of how much the community is behind us.' – Coordinator |
| **The future** | ▶ The shelter is considering dividing rooms with internal partitions in order to accommodate more people. <br>▶ Opening all day would be useful. <br>▶ Opening all year round is unlikely – it would be complex operationally in terms of staffing, volunteers and energy needed. Currently the Manager fundraises during the summer months, and volunteers say they would struggle to volunteer all year round. |

# Tabor House, Birmingham

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| **Archetype** | Pods/modular |
| **Lead organisation** | Father Hudson's Care |
| **Previous model** | 11 beds, fixed location. Open all year, closed during daytime, Three to 28 nights stay. |
| **Provision in winter 2020/21** | Closed March to July 2020 then reopened with six beds, 24-hour access, 28 night limit removed. Internal segregation with floor to ceiling dividers. Dedicated communal spaces and shared bathrooms and kitchen. Provides classes and support in daytime. Accommodates people with NRPF – does not charge rent or claim Housing Benefit. |
| **Resources and funding** | Primarily funded by donations, some small grants. Additional Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) funding for outreach worker and well-being classes this year. Staff: full time outreach worker, part time volunteer coordinator, part time caseworker, manager. Rent converted office building. Volunteers support daytimes and nights.<br><br>— Cost of provision 2019/20: £120,000<br>— Cost of provision 2020/21: £150,000 |
| **Guests and referrals** | Guests primarily have no recourse to public funds (NRPF). Referrals from local agencies; no self-referrals. |
| **Outcomes** | ▶ Guests report improved health and well-being and feeling safer.<br>▶ They have had support with passports, immigration status and securing benefits.<br>▶ Staff have seen improvements in guests' English language skills.<br>▶ Since Tabor House reopened in July, two guests have returned to their country of origin, one secured full-time work and independent accommodation, and several returned to their families.<br>▶ Guests have found it difficult to move into work because of lockdown restricting travel and limiting the availability of work. |
| **Guest experiences** | ▶ Guests very much appreciate having a place to stay off the streets. They value the English language classes, and support with papers and benefits from Tabor House and partner agencies. They appreciate the individual pods: 'it's better in your own room.'<br>▶ All guests interviewed wished to find work, in order to be able to find longer-term accommodation:<br>*'I would like a job and a room.'*<br>*'It changed my life. The staff and the manager are very kind, when you need anything you ask for it, they try to help you. [They've helped with] breakfast, meals, English [classes], my passport and papers. The room is alright, I am happy.' – Guest*<br><br>*Continued...* |

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| **Volunteer experiences** | ▶ Active volunteer numbers reduced from around 100 to 37, and the volunteer role has changed (for example including more cleaning).<br>▶ The volunteer interviewed said they had less interaction with other volunteers but that gave them more opportunity to interact with guests at mealtimes and in the communal space, which they enjoyed. |
| **Challenges faced** | ▶ Managing a reduced volunteer base: weekend and daytime shifts have been difficult to cover.<br>▶ Guests did not always adhere to lockdown rules and had been questioned by the police for being outside during lockdown. As a result, they were limited to two hours a day outside the hostel. Guests struggled with the two hour limit, saying it made it harder to see friends or look for work.<br>▶ The language difficulty – with many guests speaking only very limited English.<br>▶ The reduced number of bed spaces and longer stays mean fewer people can be accommodated. |
| **What's worked well** | ▶ Because guests are all present during the daytimes, there has been the opportunity to provide English classes, which are seen to be an important foundation to help people move into work, as well as to work closely with people to provide other support including to secure status. This means people with poor English language can be accepted to the shelter, as they can be supported to improve their English and move into work, which was previously not the case.<br>▶ There is a communal space in which socially-distanced meals are shared around a large table, and people can watch TV together, which provides the opportunity for interaction and conversation between guests, volunteers and staff. Initially people 'grazed' throughout the day, but guests are now encouraged to eat dinner together (prepared by volunteers) in order to enhance the community feel.<br>▶ The internal pods have given guests a sense of space, privacy and safety. They have opaque side walls and Perspex fronts – staff say these mean they do not need to worry about guests' safety behind closed doors.<br><br>*'The whole of Tabor House has always been about being a really open, very friendly and spacious space, we didn't want to lose that and make it into dark cells, we wanted to keep the sense of community and allow people to have a safe space as well. We came up with the idea of rooms made of Perspex – you can't see through the side walls, but the front is clear Perspex so we kept the airiness of the building and ensured people have their own breathable spaces.' – Coordinator* |
| **The future** | The shelter is currently:<br>▶ Developing a proposal to keep the pods. It is hoped that when lockdown ends it will be easier for guests to move into work and independent accommodation and free up space for others.<br>▶ Considering whether to remain 24-hour or night only.<br>▶ Expanding the support available in the daytime. Tabor House is developing a partnership with Crisis to provide ESOL and work ready classes, and is also introducing mental health well-being sessions and drumming sessions. |

# Peterborough Winter Night Shelter

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| **Archetype** | Alternative support |
| **Lead organisation** | Light Project Peterborough |
| **Previous model** | Circuit winter night shelter for people with low support needs, with eight beds. Secured local authority funding to expand from winter to year-round provision from 2020/21 to include crash beds, but this funding was repurposed and is not going forward. |
| **Provision in winter 2020/21** | Did not open. Provided support to guests accommodated in hotel by local authority through the Everyone In initiative. Night shelter funding repurposed to fund expanded multi-agency floating support team for those moving on from hotels into own tenancies. Light Project Peterborough employs five floating support workers and a manager, with an additional three workers employed by Cross Keys Homes and Longhurst Group. In addition, the organisation has piloted the training of nine volunteers to provide telephone support to those whose floating support has come to an end (this is still at an early stage). |
| **Resources and funding** | Staff present 24/7 at hotels, funded by the local authority (with Next Steps funding). Floating support team funded through the local authority's RSI funding. |
| **Guests and referrals** | The floating support service works with everyone housed through Everyone In. |
| **Outcomes** | Between September 2020 and March 2021, the floating support team had supported approximately 150 people. Of these, almost all had maintained their tenancies. 12 people had been evicted, and eight of these 12 had been supported to move back into accommodation. |
| **Guest experiences** | The guest interviewed found the floating support very valuable.<br><br>*'[The floating support is] really helpful because you always need that support. [The support worker is] always there for you to talk to if you have problems with bills or need something sorted, like the leak in my ceiling which she got sorted in half an hour, I've been trying to get it sorted for months.' – Guest*<br><br>*Continued...* |

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| **Volunteer experiences** | ▶ Light Project Peterborough has a volunteer base of 400-500 people. It has sought other opportunities for former night shelter volunteers to get involved in social action (for example, giving Christmas presents to 300 children in temporary accommodation).<br>▶ Volunteers have missed the night shelter as an opportunity to connect with people and do something of value.<br>▶ Volunteers providing telephone mentoring have found this rewarding and valuable, although they say it is 'early days' (both volunteers interviewed had been allocated a mentee and conducted two or three telephone calls with them).<br><br>*'Personally, from our church's point of view, a lot of people [volunteers] really missed out on having that connection [with guests in the shelter]. It's the strength of being able to sit down and have a conversation and a meal which was unique to the Peterborough night shelter.' – Volunteer*<br>*'I prefer doing the phone support in many ways [compared with the night shift at the shelter] because it's more personal because you're dealing with the person one to one.' – Volunteer* |
| **Challenges faced** | ▶ Funding delays: *'We're a small charity that punches above its weight. We spent a lot of money this year; the funding hasn't come through as soon as we hoped.' – Coordinator*<br>▶ Standing down volunteers; the loss that many experienced of something they *'loved'.* |
| **What's worked well** | ▶ Floating support was introduced when it was observed that people moving on from Everyone In accommodation could potentially lose their tenancies and return to the streets. It fills a gap in the support pathway. It reduces isolation and, by bringing the support to people, helps them stay away from old networks they wish to avoid.<br>▶ Close working with the local authority to provide support in hotels has strengthened the partnership with the local authority, which highly values the work of Light Project Peterborough and the community.<br>▶ The multi-agency team, with new staff learning from existing floating support workers in partner organisations. |
| **The future** | ▶ Light Project Peterborough is still determining whether to run winter night shelter accommodation in 2021/22. It supports the local authority's decision to continue its offer of accommodation to all eligible rough sleepers.<br>▶ Light Project Peterborough has been invited by the local authority to submit a tender to continue to provide floating support, in partnership with Cross Keys Homes and Longhurst Group. Peterborough City Council may also fund Light Project Peterborough to coordinate the volunteer base to provide peer mentoring.<br>▶ The organisation has proposed that the Night Shelter Steering Group of churches broadens its remit to wider social action, Peterborough Christians for Social Action, in order to make full use of volunteers' strengths and goodwill.<br>▶ Light Project Peterborough has identified two key groups not well provided for locally: those with NRPF and those with high support needs who are not maintaining tenancies. It is considering whether independent units could potentially be provided for these groups. |

# 5

# Statistical Overview

This section presents an overview of quantitative data relating to night shelters in England, including the type of provision and a profile of the guests accommodated in them. The data is largely taken from the Housing Justice Impact Portal.
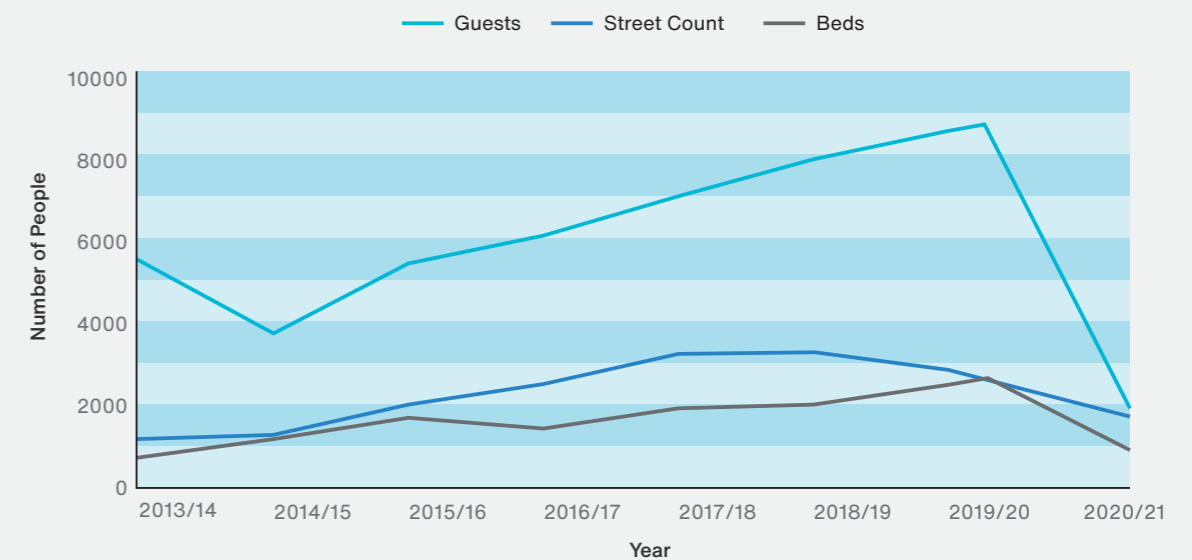
## Number of spaces in shelters

An estimated 840 spaces were available across the shelters in England between 31 October 2020 and 31 March 2021. This is a 68% decrease on the 2,519 spaces available in 2019/20. This drop may not be consistent across the country – for example, Housing Justice has data showing that the drop was less pronounced in London where it is estimated that spaces halved over the same period (from 607 to 374; it should, however, be noted that these figures are based on a different data set.)[4] The case study from Nottingham shows an increase there from 25 communal shelter spaces in 2019/20 to 45 hotel spaces in 2020/21; this was in part a result of the partnership with the local authority in 2020/21 as the local authority funded emergency beds via the shelter.

In the years preceding the pandemic, there was a significant increase in the estimated overall number of shelter spaces across five years before they slightly reduced in 2019/20. In 2021 there were an estimated 2,083 guests who stayed at shelters for one or more nights, compared with 8,641 in 2019/20 – a decrease of more than three-quarters (76%). This suggests there were slightly fewer guests 'per bed space', suggesting less turnover of guests. On average each project had 35 guests over the 2020/21 season, compared with an average of 59 the previous year. Shelters had an average of 14 spaces, with a wide range of between two and over 100 spaces.

Spaces relative to rough sleeping figures are presented in figure (d); this shows that while there was a sharp reduction in shelter spaces this year, there was also a sharp drop in the number of people identified in official street counts and the estimates figure for the year.[5] During the winter months there were also many people who may otherwise have been accommodated in shelters who accessed accommodation via the Everyone In initiative. Data released by MHCLG shows that in November 9,809 people who had been sleeping rough or were at risk of sleeping rough were accommodated in emergency Everyone In accommodation.[6] In January the figure was 11,263. There may be some crossover in this data and the hotel provision provided by some shelters in partnership with local authorities. In other cases, shelter volunteers and staff were providing support to people in Everyone In accommodation instead of providing spaces in a shelter.

Data for guest and bed numbers is extrapolated from submissions to the Impact Portal to reflect estimates for the whole shelter network. Sources: Housing Justice, analysed by Get the Data, and MHCLG live tables.
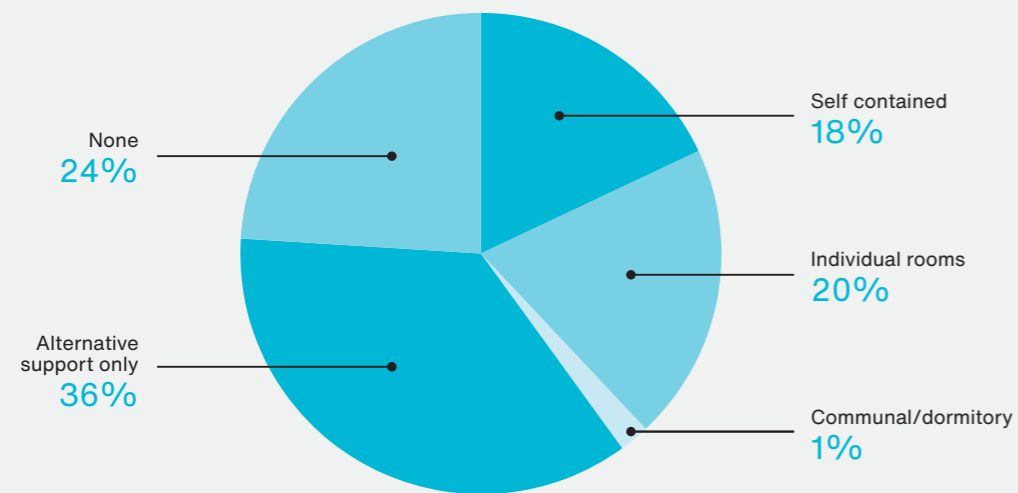
## Overall operating models

Prior to the 2020/21 season the models of operating were straightforward. The most common model, accounting for 56% of shelters in 2019/20, was the circuit model; the remaining shelters were static. Figure (e) shows that the picture was radically altered and more diverse in 2021/20. More than half of shelters did not provide accommodation, with 24% not operating at all during the season and just over one-third (36%) providing alternative support such a food provision or supporting those in Everyone In provision. It is estimated that around 1,790 people benefited from the alternative support provided by these projects.

The remaining projects were split between fully self-contained provision (18%) and individual rooms with some shared facilities (20%). Two shelters provided communal or dormitory accommodation during the season. Fourteen of the projects providing accommodation used some kind of modular unit. Six were indoors and consisted of room segregators or Commonweal Pods.[7] The remainder were external including Bunkabins (3), Portacabins (2), shipping containers (1) and Hills Pods (1).[8] In total, in 2019/20 there were 151 projects providing bed spaces compared with 60 in 2020/21.

The volume of staff across the network remained fairly stable, increasing by an estimated 35 people in 2020/21 compared to 2019/20 (estimated at 425 in 2019/20 and 457 in 2020/21) despite the reduction in the number of services and guests. This demonstrates that moving away from communal and circuit models demands a higher level of staffing.

**Figure (e) Operating models (2020/21)**



- Self contained
  **18%**
- Individual rooms
  **20%**
- Communal/dormitory
  **1%**
- Alternative support only
  **36%**
- None
  **24%**

Base: 158 known projects. Source: Housing Justice tracker.

## Infection control

Across accommodation provision it is estimated that there were 12 cases of Covid-19 identified and 104 guests were required to isolate due to contact with people who had contracted Covid-19. Having to isolate was more common among guests in single room accommodation than those in self-contained accommodation. Without responses from all shelters, it is important to note that this is an estimate only. However, the low figures correspond with qualitative feedback; those interviewed were proud of the low number of Covid cases within projects as a result of tight infection control, and some mentioned that where cases were identified it was believed these were the result of contact outside of accommodation.

Data from the Impact Portal suggests that most shelters (85%) were able to access PPE in an easy and timely manner. For the few who did not the most common issue was accessing PPE being a slow process. Feedback on access to tests was slightly less positive with 60% of shelters who needed tests confirming they had access in a timely and easy manner and more than one-third (37%) responding 'somewhat easy and timely'.

## Staff and volunteers

The estimated number of staff employed across the network was 457 in 2020/21 compared with 425 in 2019/20. The overall number of volunteers dropped greatly to 4,179 in 2020/21 compared to nearly 14,000 the previous year. The volunteer figures include those working on 'non-accommodation' provision such as food and donation services.

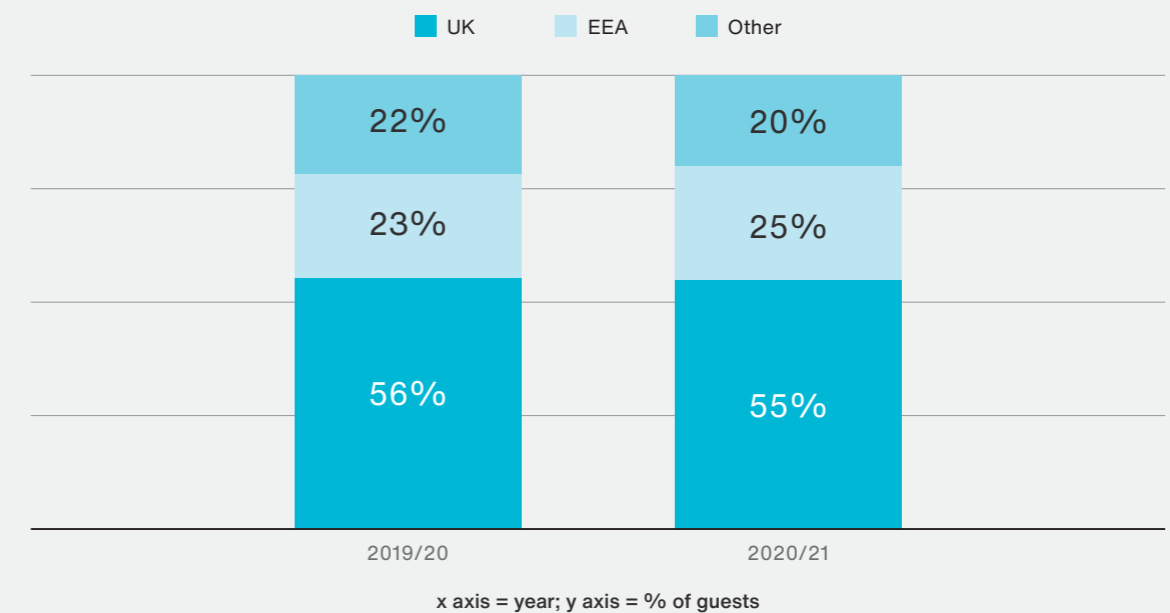## Profile of shelter guests

### Gender
There was a slight increase in the proportion of female guests (20%) this year compared with 2019/20 (16%). Communal night shelter accommodation with mostly men can be a poor option for women in particular and an offer of self-contained accommodation is more likely to be accepted.

### Nationality
Figure (f) provides extrapolated data from the Impact Portal showing a broad nationality breakdown (UK nationalities, EEA nationalities and other nationalities). The profile this year was similar in terms of European nationals; in 2020/21 just over half (55%) of guests were British nationals, one-quarter (25%) were EEA nationals, and one-fifth (20%) were people with other nationalities. In London the proportions of people from countries other than UK countries was higher than outside of London. In 2019/20 32% of guests in London were from EEA countries compared to 19% outside of London. In 2020/21 a third (32%) of London guests were from EEA countries compared to a fifth (21%) of those outside of London. The difference was even more marked in terms of people from counties outside of the EEA; this accounted for 30% of guests in London in 2019/20 and 36% in London in 2020/21 compared to 19% in 2019/20 and 9% in 2020/21 outside of London.

**Figure (f) Nationality overview of guests in shelters in 2019/20 and 2020/21 and data table showing London and Non London breakdown of non UK guests**



Legend: ■ UK ■ EEA ■ Other

| | 2019/20 | 2020/21 |
|---|---|---|
| Other | 22% | 20% |
| EEA | 23% | 25% |
| UK | 56% | 55% |

x axis = year; y axis = % of guests

Data extrapolated from submissions to the Impact Portal to reflect estimates for the whole shelter network. Sources: Housing Justice, analysed by Get the Data. Bases: 2,083 in 2020/21 and 8,619 in 2019/20.

| | Nationality – London | | | Nationality – outside London | | | Nationality – England | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | UK | EEA | Other non-UK | UK | EEA | Other non-UK | UK | EEA | Other non-UK |
| 2019/20 | 39% | 32% | 30% | 63% | 19% | 19% | 55% | 23% | 22% |
| 2020/21 | 32% | 32% | 36% | 71% | 21% | 9% | 55% | 25% | 20% |

### Support needs

Figure (g) shows the proportion of shelter guests with support needs in various areas. The proportion of guests with support needs in the areas of drug use, alcohol use, mental health, and criminal justice has been fairly consistent between the past two seasons with variations of 1-6%. The most commonly identified support need was in the area of mental health (34% of guests in 2019/20, dropping to 28% in 2020/21). Shelters reported that around a fifth of guests had support needs around substance use; 22% having alcohol support needs in 2019/20 dropping to 17% in 2020/21, and 21% having drug related support needs in 20/19 compared to 20% in 2020/21. A similar proportion had support needs relating to criminal justice (for example known to be on probation); 21% in 2019/20 and 19% in 2020/21.There was a marked increase in the proportion of guests with immigration issues, from 13% in 2019/20 to over a fifth (22%) in 2020/21. This is likely to relate to the need to apply for EU Settled Status for some guests. Only a small proportion of people staying in shelters are reported to have physical disabilities or learning disabilities, and in both areas there was an increase in 2020/21 compared to the previous year. The proportion known to have physical disabilities increased from one in twenty (5%) to nearly one in ten (9%) between 2019/20 and 2020/21. The proportion known to have a learning disability doubled from just 2% to 4%. It should be noted that not all shelters directly request this information from guests, so figures could underestimate need.

**Figure (g) Overall support needs profile of guests, 2019/20 and 2020/21**



Data extrapolated from submissions to the Impact Portal to reflect estimates for the whole shelter network.
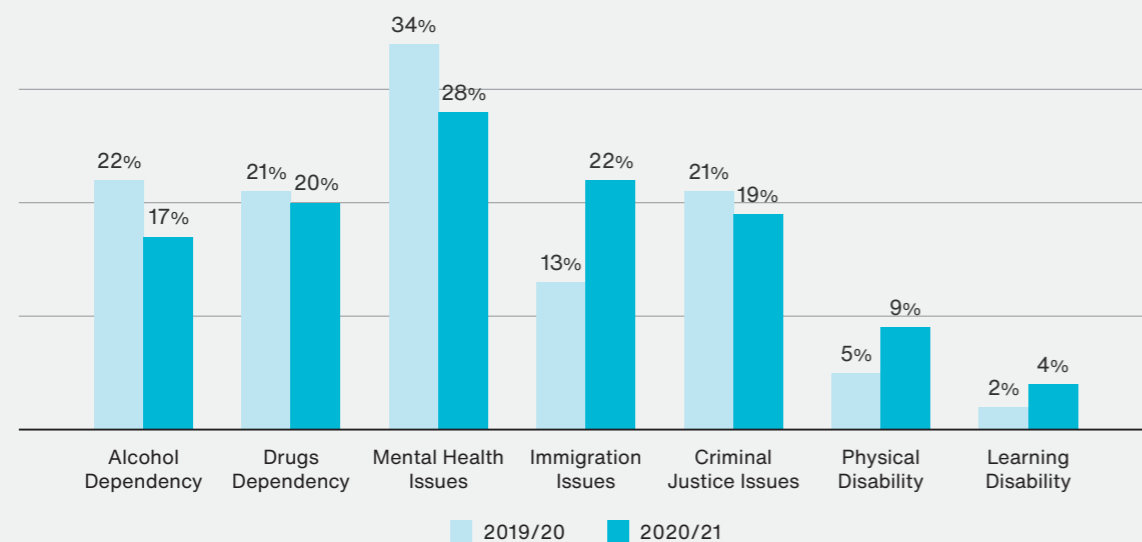Sources: Housing Justice, analysed by Get the Data. Base: 2,083 in 2020/21 and 8,974 in 2019/20.

## Move on

In 2020/21 over four in ten (45%) move on outcomes were positive and stable, a significant increase on 2019/20 (23%), and far higher than previous years where in some cases very few positive and stable move on outcomes were reported. The proportion of moves to positive but not stable accommodation remained fairly consistent at around one-quarter (23% in 2020/12 and 24% in 2019/20). Negative outcomes had decreased from half (51%) in 2019/20 to just under a third (32%) in 2020/21.

**Figure (h) Move on outcomes 2019/20 and 2020/21**

| Move on category | Description | 2019/20 | 2020/21 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Positive and stable | Medium to long-term sustainable accommodation including supported accommodation, social housing, long-term hosting (6 months or longer), voluntary repatriation | 23% | 45% |
| Positive and not stable | Short-term accommodation intended to form part of a journey out of homelessness including other shelters, sofa-surfing/staying with friends or family, backpackers' hostels, short-term hosting or mental health hospital | 25% | 24% |
| Not positive | This refers to outcomes such as returning to the streets, entering custody/prison, forced repatriation, dying, leaving the shelter without telling anyone or being asked to leave. | 51% | 32% |

Data extrapolated from submissions to the Impact Portal to reflect estimates for the whole shelter network.
Sources: Housing Justice, analysed by Get the Data. Base: 2,083 in 2020/21 and 8,974 in 2019/20.

# 6

# Planning, delivering and implementing the new models

This section outlines some key themes relating to the process of planning, developing and implementing the new models, including making the decision about what to provide, the process of developing a new model, ensuring Covid-19 safety, relationships with local authorities and other partners, and volunteer experiences.

## Responding to the Covid-19 pandemic

This extraordinary season for night shelters began in March 2020, when winter shelters were about to close and year-round shelters were required to close as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Shelters and local authorities worked quickly to house guests in single room accommodation through the Everyone In initiative. Some shelters, especially year-round providers, continued to support guests in their new accommodation; others closed for the season as planned.

## Deciding what to provide for winter 2020/21

Coordinators said that the late publication of the Government's guidance made planning for the season difficult.[9] Some assumed that communal provision would not be possible and planned accordingly; others hoped that it would be and some of these were unable to open.

Some night shelters (or the organisations running the shelters) had already been working with local authorities since March 2020 to provide support to people accommodated through Everyone In; for many of these, this continued through the winter of 2020/21.

Some shelters held discussions with managers and steering groups/trustees about what type of provision could be offered, and selected the best option based on (i) their values and purpose, (ii) what was achievable practically and financially, and (iii) Covid-19-related safety considerations for guests, staff and volunteers. Decisions also involved discussions with public health teams to clarify what could be opened safely and other local authority partners to clarify whether a night shelter was needed.

Some shelters did not have the funding to offer an alternative to communal provision or were advised by funders/commissioners not to open. Of these, some provided alternative support (ranging from formal, funded relationships with the local authority to independent offers), which took the form of floating support, meals and daytime activities.

Several shelters said that they found support and guidance from Housing Justice during the decision-making period very helpful. This included providing links to MHCLG and providing access to networks of other shelters.

*'We did some work over the summer saying: what should we do, shall we do anything? [...] We were at the stage we had to make a decision, if they [MHCLG] said we can open we'd have to move like crazy. But we thought why would we [open]? Because there's an offer to everyone. We've talked for a number of years saying we want to make the night shelter redundant, and this was an opportunity to do that.' – Coordinator of shelter offering alternative support.*

Shelters were seen to adapt quickly to a changing and uncertain environment:

*'I have been impressed with how willing to adapt and change shelter projects have been. It was not made easy with last minute guidance. The vast majority have been pragmatic. A lot of have diversified.' – Greater London Authority*

## Developing a new model

Developing a new accommodation model involved some or all of the following:

▶ Securing a building (where shelters did not already have their own building) and negotiating terms of use (including cost per room and staffing considerations including at night)

▶ Adapting buildings

▶ Securing funding for building and staffing costs

▶ Recruiting new staff to cover 24-hour opening/new roles

▶ Communicating with churches and volunteers

▶ Developing new staff and volunteer roles and rotas, and providing volunteer training

▶ Developing safety protocols, including in relation to Covid-19, working with partners in public health teams in local authorities

▶ Developing new tenancy or licence agreements (including, for some, beginning to charge rent and require people to receive housing benefit)

▶ Developing new processes for cooking and eating meals

▶ Adapting/developing relationships with partner agencies, including new referral arrangements and arranging for agencies to come to the accommodation to offer support.

For many coordinators, the season meant a significant change in role, and was very demanding:

*'It's been tiring. At [the shelter] we talk a lot about the on-season and off-season, and we didn't really get that break last summer when there was so much planning in response to the early stages to the pandemic, and then planning for this year... Constantly things to adapt to and change. That's tiring ... but it's been a really good thing to be part of, being part of something when you are working on new and innovative [approaches], and trying to solve problems is rewarding.' – Service Development Manager*

## Ensuring Covid-19-related safety

The responsibility of ensuring that guests, volunteers and staff were protected from Covid-19 put significant stress and pressure on many coordinators. Thorough protocols were put in place, including cleaning and social-distancing measures and the requirement to wear masks. None of the shelters involved in this research experienced Covid-19 outbreaks in their accommodation.

*'It's much more stressful [this year] because I feel I've got the duty to ensure everyone remains safe, and that's not been easy.' – Coordinator*

## Costs

Housing Justice estimates that the costs for running night shelter provision more than doubled in 2020/21 compared with the previous year. Providing a shared house or hotel cost a minimum of £50,000-£85,000 for three months with some organisations incurring significantly greater costs.[10] The additional expenses primarily related to accommodation costs and staffing for 24-hour provision. Sources of additional funding included the Homelessness Winter Transformation Fund, the Spring Transitions Fund run in London, the Next Steps Accommodation Programme funding, local authority funding including RSI, and using the organisation's reserve funds, as well as donations. In addition, some shelters secured funding from other trusts and foundations (for example the National Lottery Community Fund).

[9]MHCLG, 2021, Op. cit.

[10]Estimate provided by Housing Justice on the basis of data collected from shelters.

## Relationships with local authorities

Relationships with local authorities varied widely in the different areas covered by this research. Some shelters and local authorities reported improved relationships as a result of closer working during the pandemic. For other shelters, relationships with local authorities had deteriorated, with new ways of working together bringing up complex power dynamics and highlighting differences in values.

Some of the local authority representatives interviewed described faith and community-led winter night shelters as an important element of the local homelessness pathway. Others saw them as playing a more separate role. The shelters in the former group tended to achieve more positive outcomes in relation to move on.

Several coordinators said they had received helpful support from Housing Justice and MHCLG in building their relationship with the local authority. In several areas, MHCLG representatives had met with local authorities in order to discuss how they could best work together with night shelters; this was highly valued by shelter coordinators and helped to establish/improve relationships.

Having strong existing relationships with local authorities was very helpful for night shelters during this period. For example, in Southampton, the church leader who coordinates the shelter hosted a multi-agency forum including the local authority and was able to use this group to determine the model for 2020/21, linking closely with commissioned services while also retaining independence from any statutory funding for the shelter itself.

## Relationships with partner agencies

Relationships with partner agencies were very important for shelters offering 24-hour access accommodation. Having partner agencies come to the accommodation to offer specialist support for guests helped to achieve positive outcomes in relation to a range of issues, from health to gaining immigration status to move on. In Nottingham, for example, partners said that the pandemic had helped to strengthen relationships between local agencies, who now have weekly meetings, reported to be focused and productive, and a range of specialist agencies visiting the accommodation regularly to support guests.

In other areas, partnership working has been more limited. One shelter, unable to open this year, found itself excluded from local cross-agency groups focusing on rough sleeping. Another shelter said that many local support agencies had been closed, with staff working from home, and that it had been challenging to find agencies that were willing to come to the shelter and support people.

> *'I don't want to see people having a wasted opportunity. Trying to get agencies in when a lot are working from home is not easy. Trying to find places where people can get support has been difficult.' – Coordinator*

This winter, many shelters running 24-hour accommodation projects have found themselves taking on roles which have in the past been provided by external agencies that are now closed – for example, providing support and activities in the daytime. The need for this is likely to change as other providers reopen.

## Experiences of volunteers

Volunteer numbers were significantly reduced this winter season. Many older or vulnerable volunteers were shielding and unable to volunteer, and the shelters kept volunteer numbers to a minimum (for example, two per shift) in order to minimise risks in relation to Covid-19.

Several volunteers described some fears for their own safety and the safety of guests early in the pandemic (related not to the shelter's safety measures but to broader fears about the pandemic); they had volunteered despite this and had been highly motivated to help people during an uncertain and worrying time. A number of coordinators described being careful to ensure volunteers felt safe volunteering.

Many volunteers performed quite different roles this winter than in previous years. Before volunteers would often cover evening shifts or morning shifts, welcoming guests, cooking and serving meals, and joining guests around the dinner table for conversation. This year, volunteers described, for example:

▶ Pre-preparing food in a different location and bringing it to the shelter

▶ Covering the night shift and having little interaction with others

▶ Cleaning as part of Covid-19-related measures

▶ Distributing food to people in a hotel at their bedroom doors.

Volunteers were primarily motivated by the desire to provide meaningful help for people and through close relationships with other volunteers and with guests.

> *'I suppose [the most rewarding thing about volunteering] is having the contact with the guests, as a sort of feeling you're able to help them in their journey and progress to get back to a better life.' – Volunteer*

For many volunteers, relationships with guests and other volunteers felt less close and the role felt less meaningful than in previous years. This was partly related to Covid-19 safety measures, and partly related to the provision of self-contained accommodation. There was reduced social interaction with other volunteers, which had been an important source of enjoyment in previous years, as a result of the substantially reduced numbers of volunteers. There was also less opportunity for interaction with guests, who spent more time in their rooms, and as a result of reduced communal spaces and often no communal meals.

In other settings, by contrast, volunteers reported closer relationships with guests, which they found very rewarding. For example, this was the case where there were fewer volunteers on the rota; people conducted more regular volunteer shifts; there was a space for people to come together – for example, to eat (socially-distanced) meals together; or where new volunteer roles such as mentoring enabled closer relationships.

Several shelters described the importance of keeping the people who were not able to volunteer in their usual roles this year engaged. They described finding new ways for volunteers to stay involved – for example, providing puzzle books, notebooks and pens, transporting toiletries and food, and making face masks.

Several volunteers and staff members believed that having smaller teams of volunteers working more regularly benefited both volunteers and guests through more meaningful interactions:

*'Something about the conversation goes from one week to the next. You don't have to go through introductions. It has a relaxed nature. People are proud to talk about what they've achieved.' – Volunteer*

*'You build up a rapport with volunteers. [When] they change over, you've got to re-establish connections with them.' – Guest*

Volunteers were motivated by the desire to help others and many said that they were willing for their role to change if that better supported guests. Several described learning from this year about how to help people most effectively. All of the volunteers interviewed intended to volunteer again next year.

### Experiences of shelters that did not run

Shelters that did not run this winter season, and were not working closely with the local authority to support Everyone In provision, described several consequences:

▶ Some shelters sought to provide some form of alternative support, for example, through providing meals and support at associated day centres or, in one area, developing a programme of well-being workshops.

▶ Shelters could feel excluded from discussions about rough sleeping, such as forums and partnerships, and were not always informed about where former guests were housed.

▶ Coordinators described the importance of continuing to communicate with volunteers and some expressed concern about whether volunteers would remain engaged in the future.

▶ The support of Housing Justice was greatly valued. This included arranging conversations with local authorities together with MHCLG and facilitating increased connection with other night shelter providers through virtual meetings.

> **Volunteers were motivated by the desire to help others and many said that they were willing for their role to change if that better supported guests. Several described learning from this year about how to help people most effectively.**



**Images** Although the 'Greater Together Manchester Night Shelter' did not run, volunteers still worked hard to ensure that people housed in hotels got three good quality meals each day.

**7**

# Review and comparison of the alternative models

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This section summarises the outcomes of the alternative models of provision reported in the research interviews. It identifies the benefits and drawbacks of self-contained 24-hour access accommodation and compares the alternative models of provision.

## Outcomes of the alternative models of provision

Outcomes varied across shelters. Interviewees, including guests, coordinators, volunteers and others, described the following outcomes in comparison with previous years.

### Positive outcomes

▶ **Improved health and well-being:** Guests described obtaining medical treatment, new medication, improved physical and mental health, and reduced substance use. Improvements in health and well-being were attributed to the direct health benefits of having a place to be indoors in the daytime, improved links with healthcare services (see below), and better living conditions such as a private room and bathroom.

▶ **Improved access to support and stronger, more trusting relationships with services:** Guests and other interviewees reported that having a fixed place to be during the day made it easier for guests to access support. In several shelters, partner services came to the accommodation during the day. Shelter staff could also build closer relationships with people, getting to know them better and gaining more understanding of how their needs could be met. This is a role day centres and/or outreach teams may have undertaken to provide for some guests in previous years. Some shelters were exploring additional support or activities to offer during the day – for example, Tabor House in Birmingham, which mainly supports people with NRPF, is offering a programme of ESOL classes, support with becoming work-ready, and well-being sessions.

▶ **Increased desire to stay off the streets and move into more permanent accommodation:** 24-hour accommodation gave people the opportunity to experience being in more permanent accommodation. In Nottingham, guests in the four-star hotel said they were proud to stay in the hotel, and professionals interviewed said that they had seen increased self-esteem in guests as a result of staying in high-quality accommodation. A guest in Bristol who had previously avoided night shelters said that staying in the B&B had opened his eyes to what he had been missing and he now felt more motivated to stay in accommodation.

▶ **Move-on outcomes were better than previous years in some areas, the same in others:** Some shelters reported much improved outcomes for people compared with outcomes for shelter guests in previous years. For example, in Nottingham and Peterborough, many more people than usual had moved on to their own tenancies. In both of these areas people had been staying in hotel accommodation, support was provided to maintain tenancies after move on, and there were strong relationships between the shelters and the local authority and other partner agencies. Clear referral processes were in place, with the night shelters working as part of a structured local pathway. Other shelters did not see significant improvements in move-on outcomes, possibly because of a lack of move-on options or support. Some guests were due to leave their accommodation shortly after their interviews for this research took place, because of the imminent closure of the shelter at the end of the season. Several had no accommodation in place and expressed anxiety about this.

▶ **Better quality accommodation that is easier to stay in:** Several interviewees described fewer tensions, difficulties and evictions as a result of people having self-contained accommodation (although people in one small shelter said that smaller guest numbers had increased tensions). One interviewee said that this season provided the opportunity for people to go back to the streets and then return to accommodation which was being kept open for them.

### Negative outcomes

▶ **In many shelters, there was the loss of a sense of community and increased isolation.** This was due to both the model of accommodation and restrictions on social interactions as a result of Covid-19. Eating (socially-distanced) meals together helped some shelters to retain a sense of community. The nature of hotel and hostel buildings means that the far larger communal mealtimes some shelters previously featured would be unlikely in these settings in the future when social distancing is not a consideration.

▶ **Some shelters reported the more negative outcome of 'getting stuck'.** Where accommodation was particularly high quality (e.g. in hotels), it was reported that some people were turning down offers of hostels or their own tenancies, with move-on increasing only when there was a risk of funding coming to an end. Receiving free meals and not having to pay rent (in some shelters) may also have caused people to be reluctant to move on. Where accommodation was of standard quality, there was also a sense of being 'stuck', which may be more related to restrictions on social interaction and activities due to Covid-19. One shelter had found that some people had been 'lying in bed all day' and had introduced morning activities to combat this.

Some of the **key features that people said enabled positive outcomes** were:

▶ Having your own room
▶ 24-hour access to accommodation
▶ Support from the winter night shelter staff and volunteers
▶ Support from partner organisations
▶ Relationship with local authority – working together to find move-on accommodation and support
▶ Support for people to access settled status and benefits.

## Benefits and drawbacks of 24-hour access, self-contained accommodation

Almost everyone interviewed – guests, volunteers, coordinators and partners including local authorities – strongly believed that 24-hour access, self-contained accommodation was more desirable than the communal night-only model. The exceptions were one former guest who was currently a volunteer and one coordinator (from different shelters), who both believed that the sense of community that comes with communal provision was vital to well-being, self-confidence and recovery. Both had observed cases where this had been lost in self-contained accommodation, with negative effects on guests. Another shelter felt that a blended model of communal shelter alongside hostel provision would be best and achieve the benefits of both models.

The following are key benefits and drawbacks identified by guests, coordinators, volunteers and others interviewed.

### Benefits of self-contained accommodation

▶ All guests interviewed said that they preferred having their own room to sharing a room.
▶ A private room provides dignity, personal space, safety and a sense of ownership over the space.
▶ A private bathroom enables people to take better care of their health (for example, wound dressing).
▶ It is more accessible to people who prefer to spend time alone or do not wish to sleep communally.
▶ It is more accessible to women.
▶ A positive experience of moving into accommodation may increase people's desire to stay in accommodation over the longer term.
▶ Living in self-contained accommodation can demonstrate readiness for a home.
▶ It can reduce tensions between guests.
▶ Guests have more choice and control, for example, over whether to go to meals or not, or to be sociable or not.
▶ It was important for infection control.

*'I like having a private room, definitely. In other years it was like a dormitory, if someone takes [your spot], they can start a fight. I can sleep if I want… No one wakes you up. [… In the night shelter] everyone asks you to come for dinner, if you don't want to eat they're upset. You can do what you want, if you don't want food you don't go down. It's better, you have more control for yourself over what you want. [In the night shelter] you're dining in the middle of the room with a mattress in the corner. Everyone sees you, unless you get under a blanket.' – Guest*

*'I think the pods offer a sense of privacy guests didn't have before… That space is theirs so they can put things how they want to. It's a lot clearer what belongs to you. It's good for your mental well-being having your own space.' – Coordinator*

*'Interviewee 1: 'Having your own bathroom is pivotal, and being able to take as long as you need, it just builds up self-esteem, particularly for women.'*

*Interviewee 2: 'We used to get a lot of women referred to go to the winter night shelter and we had loads of women refuse. We haven't seen that at all [this year]. We've been able to get hold of more women and accommodate more as well.' – Partner agencies (pair discussion)*

## Benefits of 24-hour access, fixed-location accommodation

- All guests interviewed said they preferred having 24-hour access to their accommodation.
- People (including those who are vulnerable or in poor health) do not have to spend daytime on the streets in the cold.
- Support can be more easily provided to someone who is in one place and needs can be better assessed and understood.
- It provides secure base and a place to leave your bag.
- Safety and stability can enable people to start to look to the future.
- A fixed place to live with facilities such as showers makes it much easier to work (including shift work).
- It creates a change in power dynamics – volunteers are visiting guests in the guests' space, rather than the other way round.

*'It's better this year that you've got your own room. […] You're not rushing about in the morning or dreading leaving because you know will be walking round in the freezing cold, you have more stability.' – Former guest, current volunteer*

*'Now it's much better because there's very much more close contact, I can ask all the time … [for] the support … needed.' – Guest*

*'We weren't losing them all the time [this year], especially the guys with NRPF. There's lots of paperwork we're trying together to get them to fill out [to see] if they can become eligible. They're normally a nightmare to get hold of, but [in the accommodation they are] all in one place all the time. We weren't wasting hours and days chasing after people.' – Local authority representative*

## Challenges of self-contained accommodation

- Loss of social interaction and sense of community – especially where guest numbers are smaller. (Covid-19-related social distancing restrictions significantly added to this).
- Risk of 'getting stuck' when options offered (e.g. hostels or private rented sector accommodation) are less attractive and more expensive than current accommodation.
- Provision of self-contained accommodation is expensive. The hotels and B&Bs currently being used (often at negotiated rates) will not be available when Covid-19-related restrictions on travel are lifted.
- Where larger spaces have been modified to enable single occupancy, fewer people can be supported. For some shelters, this has meant turning people away.
- Some staff felt that it was harder to ensure the guests' safety in private rooms and that there was a risk of self-harm, drug use or bullying.

*'I think it was more homely last year because more people were there all the time. There was always someone there you could sit and have a chat to and a laugh with. It's a bit boring at night once people have gone to bed. It's really important [to have people to talk to].' – Current volunteer and former guest*

*'One has a lot less social interplay or chance to get to know the guests… In [the night shelter], in the hours before they went to sleep, there was a calm, enjoyable, relaxed period where you could talk to people, signpost them to staff, offer them normal company. You can't do that in a hotel where people's physical needs are looked after but it's harder to look after their other needs.' – Volunteer*

*'I honestly feel we're not meeting the needs of homeless people as much as we did when we had 20 people in. Although people are going through and stabilising, we're only doing it six at a time. [The outcomes for each person are] very similar.' – Staff member*

*'Our guest advisory group were saying that they really saw that people who maybe had challenges that would have been self-policed by the community aspect of a communal shelter really didn't do very well in the hotels and when they were isolated their problems became worse. They saw people deteriorate or have to be moved out of the hotel as it wasn't appropriate for them, but the shelter had really worked for those people.' – Coordinator*

## Challenges of 24-hour access, fixed-location accommodation

- If support services are not provided at the accommodation, people may be less likely to access them as they would be when spending time at day centres.
- Volunteers often volunteer at home churches and may be less likely to travel to a fixed location – some loss of volunteer support and the related benefits to volunteers and to guests.
- It requires 24-hour staffing and so is expensive.
- There is a risk of lethargy or 'getting stuck' if there is nothing to get up for.

## Benefits and drawbacks of alternative models

Figure (i) outlines the key benefits, drawbacks and opportunities relating to providing different models of alternative night shelter provision.

**Figure (i): Summary of the benefits, drawbacks and opportunities of different models of alternative night shelter provision in 2020/21**

| Model | Benefits | Drawbacks | Opportunities |
|---|---|---|---|
| Self-contained or single room accommodation in hotel/B&B/HMO | ▶ Can be very positive move-on outcomes where there is local support and a clear pathway. <br>▶ Improved mental and physical health. <br>▶ Dignity, self-esteem, stability, and sense of safety. <br>▶ Can be more accessible for women. | ▶ Potential isolation and loss of peer support and sense of community. <br>▶ Potential safety issues for those vulnerable to self-harm and exploitation. <br>▶ Expensive – only sustainable with significant additional funding. <br>▶ Hotel/B&B accommodation will be less available/affordable when Covid-19 travel restrictions end. <br>▶ Where accommodation is very high quality, some instances of people turning down less attractive move-on offers. | ▶ To work closely with local partners to ensure there is a move-on offer for each resident. <br>▶ To seek funding for self-contained accommodation as part of restructured local pathway (a whole-system local approach is beneficial to this). <br>▶ To develop offer of daytime support (e.g. workshops, learning, one-to-one support). <br>▶ To welcome partner agencies to provide support during daytime (health, immigration, benefits, employment, English language classes etc.). |
| Pods and modular | ▶ Allows more people to be accommodated than individual rooms, while maintaining social distancing. <br>▶ Provides personal space and stability. <br>▶ Improved mental and physical health. <br>▶ More affordable than self-contained, single room accommodation. | ▶ Potential isolation and loss of peer support and sense of community. <br>▶ Potential safety issues for those vulnerable to self-harm and exploitation. <br>▶ In some models the challenges of having to leave during the daytime were still present. | ▶ To develop offer of daytime support (e.g. workshops, learning, one-to-one support). <br>▶ To welcome partner agencies to provide support during daytime (health, immigration, benefits, employment, English language classes etc.). |

*Continued...*

| Model | Benefits | Drawbacks | Opportunities |
|---|---|---|---|
| Providing alternative support | ▶ If defined and necessary role in local pathway (e.g. provision of support in hotels/floating support), it can have significant impact and value. | ▶ If not defined and necessary role in local pathway (e.g. provision of meals when people have alternative access to food), the support may not be valuable/utilised. | ▶ To fill gaps in pathway (e.g. tenancy sustainment/floating support). <br>▶ Close joint working with local authority helps yield good results. <br>▶ To explore other roles that volunteers could play locally. |
| Not running | ▶ An appropriate response if emergency accommodation is not required locally (i.e. because a better alternative exists or number of people sleeping rough is negligible). | ▶ No/reduced emergency accommodation for people sleeping rough. <br>▶ Organisation can lose its place in local networks and discussions. <br>▶ Detrimental impact on volunteers and community. <br>▶ Potential loss of volunteer goodwill. | ▶ To reassess purpose and values and best way of achieving these. <br>▶ To develop alternative means of support. <br>▶ To explore other roles that volunteers could play locally. |
| Returning to communal circuit model | ▶ Flexible emergency response. <br>▶ Relatively cheap to run – use of church buildings, donated food. <br>▶ Draws on network of volunteers. | ▶ Not yet known if will meet future Covid-19 safety guidelines. <br>▶ Often nowhere to go during the day – health and well-being impacts. <br>▶ Risk of same people returning every year. <br>▶ Harder to provide support when people are only present for the evening/night. | ▶ To explore any means of improving experience, e.g. place to be/provision of support/meaningful activity during the day; fewer volunteers doing more shifts. |

## Frank's experience

Frank (in his late 50s) has been sleeping in a tent for seven years. He's been staying in his own room in Bristol Churches Winter Night Shelter for a few months. He has enjoyed the high-quality accommodation and the chance to have more meaningful conversations and support because of the smaller number of guests and volunteers present. He now wishes to move into longer-term accommodation.

*'I like it all. After being on the streets for a number of years, it's the first time any of the charities have walked the walk, not just talking the talk. It's really good, you can self-isolate, you can do what you like. You can go out as much as you want or stay here as much as you want. The way everything is geared around the homeless person, it's not just geared for just a bed and a bite to eat. Everyone tries to take an interest in how you're coping with being indoors.*

*'Coming to this building I didn't realise quite what I was going to. I was under the impression it was still in churches. I hadn't a clue I would have my own room. This building is a guest house. I pressed the intercom and a very nice lady who's the owner said, "I'll give you the code, come in upstairs to room [x], There's a key; there's everything in there you need. Make yourself at home." I couldn't believe where I was. There was a chair, I sat and thought, "Am I in the right place?"*

*'It's made me realise all the things I've been missing for a few years. It's helping me to re-integrate myself into society.*

*'With having a smaller group of people [guests and volunteers], it's easy to open up a bit about your past, and how you're viewing things now you're on the inside. [Volunteers] didn't have the time previously. They were [busy] trying [to help people]. In a normal night shelter, they may give you a booklet to attend AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] or a drug service, but here there's a greater chance to open up in yourself.*

*'[The outreach team] are trying to find out what is available through the council. There's the possibility of a one-bed flat or council bedsit. I'm looking forward to it. I'm really looking forward to moving on and having a reasonably good time.'*

## Maaza's experience

Maaza, in her 40s, has been living in the UK for over 15 years and in Europe since she was a child, but was born in East Africa. Her housing situation had been precarious for at least the last five years. She had stayed in hostels previously, but experienced sleeping rough for the first time in 2020. Factors in her becoming homeless were fleeing domestic abuse, PTSD, and being asked to leave a shared house, as a previous tenant was returning.

Having lived in several boroughs, Maaza has struggled to get rapid help for her housing situation from multiple local authorities. After leaving both north and south London boroughs she had lived in, she came to Westminster and spent time sleeping around Victoria coach station where she could charge her phone and use the toilets when they were open. She also spent time on buses to keep warm. Having had a Streetlink referral she felt pressure to try and be 'found' by outreach workers but this never happened.

*'[The homelessness organisation] tell me to go to council, the council say [you] have to go on the street and they [outreach] will find you – to get off the bus [where I had been sleeping]. [Another time] the council called me but my handwriting is no good, I know how to read and speak but my handwriting... so I ask them to send me text message; they said "we don't use text message"... so I couldn't find the place [they told me to go].'*

While she had no accommodation, Maaza got sandwiches from one of the days centres in Westminster and soup from another – one of these services suggested she go to Glass Door. By this time, she felt physically and emotionally exhausted.

*'I was looking so dirty, I couldn't sleep, I was scared to be outside. Glass Door for me; they saved my life. When I came to Glass Door ...you have been in the street and he [Glass Door caseworker] listen to you and understand you and didn't judge you. From 11 o'clock I meet [the Caseworker], they give me coffee and he send me to the hotel...I felt safe...'*

Maaza found the practical aspects of the Glass Door hostel including food and drink provision, bathroom facilities and infection control of a high quality. The negative side of the accommodation for her was that it was mixed, and female only would have been preferable. While she would have accepted communal sleeping space at the time she accessed the hostel, she felt she would have had serious reservations.

*'I would still have gone to Glass Door. [But] better to have own room, you have your own bed. Sometimes you don't know who is sleeping in the same room, they can be sick, have mental health, how are you going to sleep [in a space] with someone you don't know? I don't know – very difficult – if you don't have choice you would accept it.'*

During her stay at Glass Door, Maaza was supported to link back with health services about ongoing health conditions, and assisted to deal with arrears from a previous tenancy and issues with benefits. With help from her Glass Door caseworker she identified an all women accommodation service she felt would be suitable. She has struggled with the change in atmosphere, finding it less calm and ordered than the Glass Door hostel.

Maaza is uncertain as to what the future holds. She is unlikely to secure social housing, however she hopes that a previous employer will reopen as lockdown eases and she can return to the work she so enjoyed at a social enterprise before the pandemic and secure her own flat, and somewhere she can stay for a long time rather than moving from one place to another.

*'[My Glass Door Caseworker] she done a lot for me, I have a problem with phone writing (texting), so I can send a voice message [on WhatsApp] and she says "don't worry, we will find a solution." I don't know how to say thank you to Glass Door; they help people like me, they listen to you, don't judge you and believe you. I don't have the words.'*

# 8

# Learning from the 2020/21 season – the role of shelters

This section summarises interviewees' views about recent and potential future change, and the unique role of the faith and community sector in responding to homelessness and rough sleeping.

## Opening spaces for reflection

This season – with its new ways of doing things – has opened a space for reflection on the role and model of winter night shelters in the future. While the issues explored are familiar, the experience of the 2020/21 season has provided fresh perspective and evidence, and opened the dialogue wider. There is more to 'play for' – for individual organisations and the whole sector, as winter shelters respond differently to the learning from the pandemic and a different landscape of shelter provision emerges.

Many of the coordinators, volunteers and local authorities interviewed for this research have been reflecting on fundamental questions about the role and approach of night shelters, and questioning the standard way of doing things. There is some rhetoric outside the network, firmly against the night shelter model; this is where the familiar debate emerges with some people 'for' and others 'against' shelter provision. The reflections and views of shelters themselves are diverse, nuanced and rooted in the extraordinary pandemic experience.

## Receptiveness to change

Most coordinators and volunteers interviewed were open to the possibility of change. Many, motivated by the desire to help people in need, were keen to change in response to their changing understandings of need and how it could best be met. For example, volunteers in a group discussion agreed that the provision in previous years had been more volunteer-led, and that this year's provision felt more guest-led. Even though they had lost some of the elements of the role they enjoyed – for example, social interaction with other volunteers – they were clear that they would be happy for their roles to change if the provision better met the needs of guests. This was echoed in several volunteer interviews.

*'I think I've lost a little as someone who's volunteering, but that's obviously not the most important thing. [...] Staff and volunteers have to follow what's best for the guests.' – Volunteer*

In most cases, coordinators believed that steering groups and trustees would also be open to recommendations for change based on the 2020/21 experience.

## Shared views about the role and shape of night shelters

Most shelters involved in this research agreed that:

▶ Single room accommodation is preferable to communal accommodation (as long as communal spaces and activities can be retained)

▶ 24-hour access is preferable to asking guests to leave during the daytime

▶ Night shelters are still needed as an emergency response to rough sleeping

▶ Night shelters play a valuable role in accommodating and supporting those who are not eligible for statutory provision

## The role of the faith and community sector

Coordinators and some local authority representatives described the unique role that faith and community-led night shelters play in responding to homelessness and rough sleeping. Some of these can be taken into other models of working (daytime work and self-contained/individual room provision); others are specific to the communal shelter model.

### A flexible emergency response
Winter night shelters are agile and can quickly make buildings, food and volunteers available. The circuit model in particular is very flexible, inexpensive, makes a reasonable level of demand on any given venue, and enables many people to contribute.

*'What's nice about the rotating thing is that the commitment is not that high – once a week for a month is not a massive ask.' – Shelter representative*

Some participants predicted that if established shelters shift to lower capacity, self-contained provision or close, other communal sleeping spaces will emerge if there are still people rough sleeping. The shelter model is the community response to the emergency they see in front of them and while there is visible rough sleeping in an area, faith communities and the wider community will seek to help. This has implications for the network and Housing Justice's role in supporting shelters.

*'While there isn't enough housing and we are a long way from there being enough housing – there will be that [shelter] level will be required. The alternative is that enough new housing is built and people can access it immediately... We are so, so far away from that – unless Government say we will just keep using hotels which they won't. There will be a requirement [for shelters] again, even if there is a bit of a lag.' Shelter representative*

### Openness to all – supporting those without eligibility for local authority support
A clear theme emerged from the interviews that faith and community winter night shelters play a unique and valuable role in supporting those who the statutory sector do not assist effectively. Many shelters have an ethos of not turning people away, extending hospitality to all they can. These included people with NRPF (or assumed to have NRPF), and those without a local connection (or without the evidence to prove one at the time of accessing a shelter), and sometimes those with high support needs who had been evicted from statutory accommodation.

*'We're here for the people who are the most desperate, who have fallen through the most loops. The night shelter doesn't look for easy cases who will move on to move-on housing. Our aim is to make sure no one dies on the streets this winter... Someone's got to be here for the people no one else wants.' – Coordinator*

### Offering something different
Many people described the faith and community sector as offering something different than other, often commissioned, homelessness services and statutory services. Words used included 'kindness', 'care' and 'community'. Offering hospitality was of great importance to churches and volunteers, in the form of welcoming people to their church and sharing a meal, and people spoke about the 'family feel' of the communal night shelter. The role of faith in motivating their work was important to many volunteers and staff:

*'We try to install a culture of love, that's what makes the difference. You can do all the stuff around the edges, but people need to feel loved to have hope for the future. People felt love in both contexts [the night shelter and alternative accommodation model].' – Coordinator*

*'I believe that God loves me and therefore I want to love other people, I want to treat every person as a loved human being... If you treat someone as a statistic or number or tick box to move them on, they know. When you treat them as a human being with dreams and hopes for future ... they can tell. They know we go above and beyond and that's why they engage better, they're given the chance to be themselves.' – Staff member*

One local authority described the benefit of the 'authentic approach' that a non-commissioned service can have:

*'A benefit is the night shelter is not a commissioned service. We might have paid for bits but the staff team has evolved and been allowed to be more authentic in terms of how they support people because they are not confined by a contract, as non-commissioned service working in churches. It's different to a more formal relationship where they receive money to deliver outcomes. [It's] really important as a sector to ensure they don't lose that authentic approach. Some of their success is that all services are a bit different, and different places work well with different people. There's diversity in the offer; it's really good.' – Local authority*

**Benefiting the whole community**

One coordinator of a shelter that did not run this season described a loss not only to guests, but to the community as a whole, including volunteers whose volunteer work was important to their well-being. Volunteers likewise described the benefits of volunteering for themselves:

*'Whilst we volunteer, we learn so much, we gain so much from working with others and supporting them. It's a two-way process and it's building up an understanding and relationship building. I think there's a lot of support and encouragement that's volunteer to volunteer, worker to volunteer, and volunteer to guests and vice versa, a lot of mutual understanding, knowledge sharing and strength.' – Volunteer*

**Images** Several volunteers and staff members believed that having smaller teams of volunteers working more regularly benefited both volunteers and guests through more meaningful interactions.

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# Planning for the future

This section explores the future of winter night shelters, how the role of volunteers might look and the process of planning for the 2021/22 season.

## The context for the coming season

At the time of this research, most areas were seeing significantly fewer people sleeping rough as a result of the Everyone In initiative. While this drop in numbers was viewed as an opportunity to prevent people returning to the street, interviewees generally expected to see the following in the future:

▶ A rise in rough sleeping as Everyone In provision and funding relating to the pandemic comes to an end and people return to the streets

▶ An increase in new rough sleepers, as the furlough scheme ends on 30 September, restrictions on evictions end on 30 June, and the financial effects of the pandemic, including job losses, lead to people losing their homes

▶ A potential reduction in affordable private rented sector accommodation, as demand increases from those experiencing the financial effects of Covid-19, leaving less accommodation available for people who have been homeless

▶ Changes in the central and local government response to people from EU countries, as the deadline for applying for settled and pre-settled status passes on 30 June 2021 and uncertainty about how this will be handled by the authorities, including the UK Border Agency and the police

▶ More work opportunities due to the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions, which will help some people find employment and move away from homelessness.

One large shelter assesses that the level of need is more or less the same as prior to the pandemic at the current time, based on approaches to their casework service and that this is not fully reflected in trends in rough sleeping figures.

## Local authority views, priorities and strategies

There was a broad range of views from the local authority representatives interviewed for the research. All stressed the value of the faith and community sector. Some saw the sector as an integral part of the homelessness pathway and wished to continue working closely with them, while others worked much less closely with faith and community sector providers.

**Key findings were as follows:**

▶ Several of the local authorities spoken to for this research intended to move away from funding communal night shelter provision. Several had decided to discontinue funding to night shelters.

▶ Everyone In has been seen as a great success in many areas and several local authorities were seeking funding and developing strategies to build on this success. Single room accommodation, together with the provision of move-on support, was seen to be an important part of this. Examples of alternative provision being considered are crash-pad-style emergency accommodation, with assessment and support to move on quickly, HMOs and small hostels.

▶ Several local authorities were seeking alternative ways to work with night shelter providers – for example, by providing floating support or mentoring/befriending services. This was often building on already-strong relationships that had been strengthened further by working together to provide an emergency response to Covid-19.

▶ Most local authorities believed there was still a role for night shelters in supporting those not eligible for statutory provision, in particular those with NRPF, although some interviewees were clear that communal sleeping spaces are not a desirable option for this.

*'Not to be derogatory to the winter shelter's previous work, but it would be a shame to go back, it seems outdated, when we've done all this work. This has proved how well people can do given the opportunity.' – Local authority*

*'We have a large cohort of people ineligible for support. It's difficult because we can't commission services for them using public funds... Sometimes a church hall or pop up is vital because it means we can keep people safe... Not as a go-to or standard, but where we have individuals who can't access [statutory provision], we need something.' – Local authority*

## Reimagining volunteer roles

Coordinators highly valued the volunteers who enabled them to provide support. In most areas, volunteer numbers had decreased from hundreds to dozens, so this is a key area of attention in planning the coming season and beyond.

One coordinator said that the smaller numbers of volunteers had had positive effects because the same people volunteered more often, enabling guests and volunteers to build closer relationships, and meaning that volunteers required less direction and support after learning their role. This coordinator hoped to retain lower numbers of volunteers in the future, but was aware that this would leave other people who wished to volunteer without roles.

In Peterborough, where the night shelter did not run this year, the coordinator is reimagining the role that volunteers and churches can play. He has proposed that the night shelter steering group (consisting of churches and chaired by him) refocuses to become a social action group with a broader remit, so that the skills, time and energy offered by volunteers can be harnessed to engage in social action across the city (see Light Project Peterborough case study).

## Plans for 2021/22

At the time of the research, many shelters were still undecided about the next winter season, including whether or not they would run the night shelter. Most were towards the beginning of a decision-making process involving evaluation, reflection and discussions with trustees. Many shelters were dealing with extreme uncertainty about funding, commissioning and policy decisions affecting them. MHCLG is expected to publish updated Operating Principles for 2021 in June 2021. Housing Justice does not expect these Operating Principles to differ substantially from the 2020 Operating Principles.

There is no single, clear dominant model for night shelters for the future emerging from the research. There is a broad range of future aspirations across different shelters. The provision of winter night shelters is likely to diversify this winter and in coming years. Plans for the future fell into the following broad categories.

**1. Returning to the previous night shelter model when possible**

Some shelters intend to return to the previous model in subsequent seasons, as far as Covid-19 regulations allow. Reasons were as follows:

▶ Although most interviewees believed that 24-hour access, self-contained accommodation was preferable to communal, rotating, night-only spaces, people referred to needing to make pragmatic decisions.

▶ Any form of night shelter was deemed to be preferable to sleeping rough, and communal, rotating shelters were low resource and able to respond quickly to need.

▶ Where shelters did not have access to their own buildings, a circuit or communal space was sometimes seen to be the most realistic option.

▶ Interviewees representing several shelters believed that the sense of community, quality of support, and the opportunity to look to the future are integral to the night shelter model and for some people this is more effective than a 'higher quality' offer in terms of accommodation.

Some interviewees were considering small adjustments based on learning from this season (for example, providing a place for people to leave bags and a space to spend time during the day).

**2. Retaining elements of the new model – fixed-location, 24-hour access, single room accommodation**

Several coordinators were considering ways that some beneficial elements of the new model could be retained. Aspirations included:

▶ Exploring the feasibility of securing access to single room accommodation, for example, by taking on buildings or through partnerships with local landlords

▶ Where shelters had their own buildings, introducing/retaining internal partitions in order to (i) enable more people to be accommodated in large rooms while ensuring Covid-19-related safety, and (ii) provide guests with more privacy and personal space

▶ Introducing 24-hour opening – this generally required a larger staff team so was more costly.

Glass Door in London, by far the largest shelter project in the country, are modelling different options for the forthcoming season; final decisions will be impacted by the revised Operating Principles for winter shelters and an ongoing assessment of appropriate infection control measures. A key option being explored is a hybrid of a communal shelter circuit model, alongside a smaller hostel provision than in 2020/21 for those who would most benefit from their own room. Glass Door benefit from a year-round staffing team and infrastructure which means they are able to undertake development work across the year.

**3. Considering not running the night shelter**

One coordinator was assessing whether the number of people sleeping rough locally was high enough for there to be a need for the night shelter in 2021/22. Although several coordinators said it would be desirable not to run the night shelter again, most believed it would be needed in some form as emergency provision.

**4. Expanded role – in particular into floating support**

Several night shelters had taken on new roles supporting the local authority's Everyone In response. For some of these, this partnership would continue in some form, with two of the night shelters involved in this research expecting to provide floating support in the future.

**Considerations in decision-making**

Issues that people were considering when making decisions about the future included:

▶ Public health: People were aware that restrictions on communal provision might still be in place in winter 2021/22.

▶ Government policy on rough sleeping: Any national policy initiatives in relation to the Government's goal of ending rough sleeping by 2027 were also identified as likely to have an impact, especially if they set out new policy in terms of provision for foreign nationals including those with NRPF.

▶ Cost of different options and availability of funding: Little funding is required for communal rotating night shelters and projects have established ways of securing this funding.

▶ Availability of self-contained spaces: The access to individual rooms afforded by the pandemic might be hard to replicate in future years.

▶ Extent of need, and alternatives for people sleeping rough: For example, one shelter that had to turn people away and was aware of people sleeping rough was keen to reopen with internal pods in order to provide more beds. In a smaller rural area, by contrast, the coordinator was assessing whether numbers of rough sleepers were likely to be high enough to justify the need for a shelter next year, depending on whether the council continued to provide accommodation for those who were housed through Everyone In.

▶ Relationships with the local authority and other partner agencies: Several shelters were clear that they needed to retain their independence from local authority funding or their ethos would be compromised.

*'When [the local authority] were talking about the funding we could get, it's so restrictive compared to what we do – only people that they put forward, people with high needs, not turning anyone down that they put forward. And they won't let us even talk about NRPF, even if we fund it separately.' – Shelter representative*

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# Conclusions and recommendations

This section concludes the report and offers recommendations for shelters and local authorities emerging from the learning from this research.

## Conclusions

The contribution of the shelter network, from the initial Everyone In response in March 2020 through to spring 2021, has been critical to ensuring that people who would otherwise be sleeping outside are safe from Covid-19 and the dangers of sleeping outside during the winter months.

The overall picture of shelters' responses to the pandemic season is one of diversity, impacted by factors including the level of need in an area, the values driving the shelter, the needs of the community, and the resources available. The network as a whole pivoted to provide an estimated 840 self-contained or single room (including pods) spaces to guests as well as providing extensive support to other accommodation projects for people who had been experiencing or where at risk of rough sleeping. This type of accommodation is generally viewed as being preferable to communal sleeping spaces, with some exceptions for those who may be reluctant to access a single room.

Different shelters have experienced features of the 2020/21 season in contradictory ways. For example, some shelters found that individual rooms can reduce safety and decrease access for guests with higher levels of need, while others found that private rooms offer greater safety and are more appropriate for those with higher levels of need. Likewise, some felt that fewer volunteers working more intensively is desirable, while others felt that the essence of the community-led shelter response is lost without a large volunteer workforce.

Although a consensus on the preferred format and use of shelters across the country is unlikely to emerge in the coming years, the past season has been significant and will represent a turning point for many shelters and the overall shelter landscape. A period of adaptation and embedding of new approaches will require fresh input from Housing Justice to support shelters as they make decisions about the future. Understanding the drivers and values that sit behind differing perspectives will help to ensure constructive and open communication and the best outcomes possible from this network of organisations.

## Recommendations for shelters

▶ The models of provision explored in this report should be considered by shelters planning for the coming season.

▶ An overarching consideration for shelters which might provide some type of communal setting should be how they can keep guests safe this winter and ensure a minimal and acceptable level of risk in relation to Covid-19.

▶ Shelters should work with public health teams locally. Staying connected with Housing Justice for the latest on likely timings for Public Health England guidance will be essential to planning.

▶ To fill a gap and welcome those who have not been able to access other assistance, shelters should seek information and data about the local context (including rough sleeping levels and emerging needs and gaps) from relevant local authorities, street outreach teams and other partners to guide their plans.

▶ Move-on and exit planning should be a priority from the outset; close links with the local authority and other local teams working with guests should be fostered to ensure the best knowledge of and access to move-on accommodation.

▶ New funding opportunities may emerge and should be considered bearing in mind the level of restrictions these might entail. It is recommended that shelters link with others with statutory funding to see how they have negotiated funding agreements and link with Housing Justice for advice on this.

▶ Where shelters are not opening for the coming season or in the future, the unique value of the previous service and ways of harnessing the community response to homelessness and other forms of disadvantage should be considered; these range from a full pivot to floating support or medium to large-scale food provision to smaller contributions thought targeted donations and fundraising.

▶ Guest experiences and practical considerations locally should drive the approach to volunteering; this research suggests that volunteers will be open to adapting to whatever will best serve those in need.

▶ Shelters should communicate with volunteers from previous years to ensure they feel valued and connected to the community response.

▶ Appraising the volunteer roles in new models should be an ongoing process; it may be that as government guidelines change the approach is adjusted.

▶ For any projects hoping to open new shelter provision, there is a wide range of areas to consider identified by this research. Toolkits on Best Practice are available from Housing Justice and additional ones will be published on future dates. https://housingjustice.org.uk/what-we-do/night-shelters/coronavirus-night-shelters/our-covid-19-resources

▶ Where self-contained or single room accommodation is being taken forward into next season and beyond, it may be that claiming housing benefit for some spaces where possible is a useful source of income; Housing Justice should support shelters to explore this option.

▶ Regardless of shelter models, people having a space to store things and access to showers are highly beneficial and should be provided where possible.

▶ The impact of new models in the context of fewer infection control requirements should be considered – for example, if more communal eating and activities are possible, some of the disadvantages of single rooms (e.g. isolation and less enriching volunteering) may be reduced.

▶ Shelters should consider providing access to immigration advice and supporting those experiencing homelessness for the first time, via referral, in-reach or in-house services.

## Recommendations for local authorities

▶ Local authorities should aim for ongoing, positive relationships with shelters throughout the year; where there are good links between shelters and local authorities and other providers better outcomes are achieved.

▶ Local authority teams should work in partnership internally to support shelters in an efficient and joined up way, across rough sleeping commissioning, housing options and public health teams.

▶ Where local authorities are planning on providing new funding or adjusting funding arrangements with shelters (for example, to maintain individual rooms beyond the 2020/21 season), they should be sensitive to the ethos, values and level of resource and experience shelters have. For example, many shelters are unlikely to find an arrangement sustainable or appropriate where they have to turn people away because they are believed to have NRPF, and it may be that a mixed funding arrangement is preferable.

▶ The Government should ensure more timely advice on shelter provision in 2021 to prevent additional burden and anxiety in the planning process for the coming season.

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