

Supporting Local Authorities: RSI 2022–2025 Stakeholder Engagement Case Study

Introduction

In December 2021, Stoke-on-Trent City Council's Commissioner for Homelessness Services made contact with Homeless Link to discuss opportunities for support with the RSI 2022 – 25 self-assessment aspect of this bid. There were no initial issues or concerns around partnership approaches within Stoke-on-Trent, however the willingness of the LA to be a participant and not the lead for the process was thought to ensure maximum attendance.

Following further discussions, it was agreed that the Partnership Manager would take the lead to plan, deliver, facilitate and chair the stakeholder session and act as single point of contact for all pre and post meeting correspondence. This approach was taken to ensure that complete transparency and impartiality was evident throughout the event and subsequent follow up and feedback. Several meetings were held with both the Commissioner and Strategic Housing Manager within the local authority and it became apparent that support would also be needed with overall management of IT in regards to breakout out room set up and facilitation of the meeting.

Similarly, a request was made by Liverpool to support them to chair and facilitate a stakeholder event following an initial offer made through the Partnership Managers attendance at the City Centre Stakeholder Meeting, which brings together providers from both commissioned and non-commissioned services.

Change Needed

Within both local authorities where Homeless Link support and leadership was provided, there was an emphasis on ensuring that an impartial and objective chair and facilitator was present to demonstrate to stakeholders that a collaborative approach was being taken and was not solely led from a local authority perspective. This not only strengthened existing partnerships but showed the commitment of the local authority to remain transparent and that all providers within the city are equally valued. To ensure that this ethos was evident, recommendations were made and agreed about what would be included in these events. Both events differed in terms of speakers and presentations but the following similarities were included in both events:

- An overview of existing RSI funded provision to tackle homelessness

- Lived experience perspective and input
- Challenges faced moving to a three year funding programme
- A transitional approach aimed to ending homelessness
- Opportunity for open discussions

The leadership role of the Partnership Manager during the stakeholder events included but was not limited to:

- Pre-planning and development of stakeholder event and confirming speakers
- IT support to set up and send joining instruction to all stakeholders within the city and to ensure that permissions were set for screen sharing as required.
- Chairing and managing speakers and facilitating the RSI Adviser and LA Q&A session
 - Setting the scene
 - Ensuring that the purpose of the events were understood
 - Collectively identifying strengths and gaps within services
 - Challenging stakeholders to consider solutions and alternative, transformative service delivery
 - Encouraging honest and open dialogue whilst keeping all stakeholders on track and conversation meaningful.
- Contributing to overall agenda and delivery of session and planning of the individual break out room facilitation (6 breakout rooms, approx. 44 stakeholders in attendance)
- Closing of session and next steps

Impact of Homeless Link involvement

For each event, local strengths were recognised and there was clear evidence of strong partnership working. Outreach and floating support were recognised positively and the value of this model was widely accepted as good practice with a willingness to continue this through future strategic and operational planning.

The following gaps were identified for Liverpool:

- Hospital discharge, especially people who are discharged to B&B's as often follow ups are not done efficiently.
- Mental ill health remains and issue for many people supported through homelessness services.
- Support for non-UK nationals and people with restricted eligibility, particularly:
 - How to work within legal frameworks

- Non-UK Nationals experiencing multiple disadvantage and often so far away from the employment market so not eligible for some interventions

And for Stoke on Trent:

Prevention

- Addressing the support needs of people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. This included understanding past convictions, experiences and routes into homelessness.
- Dual diagnosis and multiple complex disadvantage was raised in each break out room and although recognition has been given for the developments in drug and alcohol services it was felt that more could be achieved through collaborative approaches.
- Prison release pathways have been highlighted as a strength, but the systemic issues still have huge implications on how pathways can be developed due to lack of communication between different departments.

Intervention

- Access to accommodation on the basis of suitability for the client groups and the reliance on PRS for both people experiencing multiple disadvantage and through Housing First can be problematic.
- Addressing support needs and meaningful activities recognising that there are individuals who would need ongoing support for a considerable amount of time.
- Education and public awareness at all levels include teaching and educational settings for young people. In turn preventing people becoming homeless.
- Staffing, capacity and funding were all listed as areas development however it is hoped that a long term investment will ensure that this is addressed and service provision is sustained.

Recovery:

- Further development of volunteering and peer/lived experience opportunities with a wider city reach. There are also suggestions that this could be further developed to secure employment opportunities and a focus on meaningful activity.
- Partnership working with social care and health could be strengthened within commissioned services to end homelessness and rough sleeping in the city.
- Access to rehabilitation services (both residential and community) are limited. Request for specific homelessness and rough sleeping provision.
- Support for people experiencing domestic violence and the need to develop provision with specific and dedicated funding streams.

Stakeholders felt that they had been respectfully and appropriately consulted on homelessness provisions locally and were able to voice concerns, challenges and solutions to ending homelessness. Stakeholders felt they had a clearer understanding of the process and strategic

approach that was being taken to end homelessness focussing on prevention, intervention and recovery. The Partnership Manager collated all feedback to demonstrate the views of stakeholders. It was also the responsibility of the Partnership to make sure this was shared with all stakeholder (both in attendance and those who were unable to attend) as well as attending the local Homelessness Partnership Forum to provide a summary of findings.

Recommendations

Although support provided to local authorities around RSI 2022 – 25 self-assessment has been time limited there are opportunities to utilise the feedback and collective identification of gaps and challenges of service delivery through Homeless Link's ongoing work in local areas. In light of the information and feedback provided at each event the following recommendations should be considered:

- Homeless Link Partnership Manager to support, strengthen and/or review hospital discharge pathways
- Upskill and enhance knowledge around drug and alcohol support and consider harm reduction approaches in areas where residential rehabilitation support is limited or not available
- Develop stronger and robust health and homelessness partnership approaches and initiatives by developing effective communication pathways, forums and co-location
- Consideration toward an asset/strength based model and flexible approaches to previous conviction history and contextualisation
- To ensure effective evaluation and monitoring, LA and Partnership Manager to carry out regular stakeholder reviews to support and feed into the transitional model of RSI funding over the next three years which can be built into overall homelessness strategies

Local Authority Feedback

Stoke-on-Trent

"In order to ensure the self-assessment process was not specifically led by Stoke-on-Trent City Council (SoTCC) we approached Steve Barkess to ask for his support in helping arrange and deliver a Co-production Workshop. As Partnerships Manager for Homeless Link Steve has a good understanding in relation to homelessness and rough sleeping issues that exist in Stoke and other areas of the West Midlands and we felt this was invaluable to have this support and to reassure that a robust co-production process was followed. Steve has good knowledge of the city and many of the stakeholders have worked with him or know him through his active work in

the sector providing a level of assurance for participants and knowledge that he has a good understanding of issues that exist in the City.

Steve helped SoTCC to develop the approach including facilitation of the workshop on the day through MS Teams and Chaired the workshop. Steve provided a point of contact for invitations circulated for the event and sending out preparation materials for the day. Steve helped SoTCC to pull together the agenda and provided a presentation as an introduction to the event clearly setting out what the purpose was and closed the workshop advising what next steps would be.

Steve also fielded questions during the workshop providing a wider depth of knowledge and understanding for the participants in relation to homelessness and rough sleeping.

The involvement of this support provided an element of independence to enable stakeholders to contact Steve directly and we felt it provided an opportunity for an open and honest assessment to take place. Steve collated the feedback and findings from the workshop and circulated to all who attended which was helpful support for SoTCC and also enabled participants to feel that it was not led directly by the Council.

Feedback about the workshop has been very positive from stakeholders including SoTCC's Rough Sleeper Advisor from DLUHC who also presented at and attended the workshop.

The event has been invaluable to SoTCC with feedback being used from the Workshop to inform the self-assessment and plans for the next 3-years to help secure resources to help reduce and end rough sleeping in the City"

Liverpool

"It was invaluable having Homeless Link facilitate this event. This meant that the session was so much more objective and LCC officers were in attendance and contributing in the same way as any other representatives rather than being seen as 'leading' the discussions or driving the agenda ourselves. The event was so well led and organised. The discussion flowed freely and I felt we got so much out of the session that really helped us to develop our Self-Assessment and our final bid. Furthermore, a number of the comments / suggestions / feedback were really helpful in terms of service improvement / development more generally and/or for areas that are not relevant for the RSI program direct"