homeless link

Working together: the homelessness sector's path beyond COVID

The state of the homelessness sector as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic

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Executive Summary

For the homelessness sector, COVID-19 presented a new, but familiar crisis. Accustomed to working in situations of incredible adversity, uncertainty and mounting pressure, the voluntary, community and faith-based sector (VCS) worked alongside local authorities, capitalising on unprecedented levels of support by central government to not only get through the pandemic but come out stronger.

To understand not only the challenges the sector faced over the past fifteen months but also the challenges and opportunities they are likely to face going forward, Homeless Link has completed two research reports. This report explores the common trends and priorities in the sector as we come out of the COVID-19 pandemic, providing valuable insights into the future of homelessness provision. The research includes an online survey with those working in the sector (n=158), interviews with sector leaders (n=8) and information gathering through work with Homeless Link's more than 850 members. The findings and themes discussed herein are further explored in our report, Homelessness Provision for the Future, which explores best practice provision during the pandemic.

Vitally, this research reveals not only the many struggles the sector has come through and is likely to experience in the years to come, but the wealth of learning opportunities that can be used to inform future provision and policy. Those working in the sector were able to capitalise on the opportunity presented by Everyone In to house all those at risk of or experiencing rough sleeping in England. In doing so, they have demonstrated an ability to quickly adapt, finding creative solutions that are responsive to existing and emergent needs and challenges. Being able to house and support tens of thousands of people over more than fifteen months also presented an opportunity for reprioritisation and rethinking, leading to a greater focus on the future of homelessness provision.

What emerged through this research is a shift across the sector from short- to long-term homelessness provision, particularly as night shelters and communal accommodation closed and many saw the benefits of longer-term approaches aimed at ending and preventing homelessness. Organisations were able to focus not only on providing long-term housing but on meeting clients' social, emotional and psychological needs. The opportunity to support those with NRPF also presented a positive for many, though concerns about the inability to support these individuals post-pandemic remains.

Organisations responded to the increase in need with incredible creativity and adaptability, often quickly creating new services or adapting old ones to meet emergent and shifting needs. Ways of working also shifted, with more collaboration and joined up working across the sector and across local authorities and other types of service provision. However, these rapid adaptations came at enormous cost, with organisations struggling to maintain consistent support in an environment dominated by short-term funding.

In the initial and ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the sector demonstrated an ability to **quickly and creatively adapt**, building off the **widespread success of Everyone In**.

- Respondents were generally **positive about government interventions targeting homelessness**, with 94.8% (120) agreeing that Everyone In helped to reduce homelessness in their local area and 87.6% (113) saying the same of the pause on evictions.

- Across the sector, it was noted that there were **changes in the demographics of those presenting to homeless services**, with many citing increases in those experiencing homelessness for the first time (58.0%, 76), who had recently lost their job (57.9%, 73) or who had fled domestic abuse (53.5%, 68).

- At a time when many other services stopped or went entirely remote, a **huge range of new and adapted services** were developed across the sector. Organisations worked incredibly hard to not only secure housing for clients, but to ensure they were meeting clients' **social, psychological, emotional and basic needs.**

- Most respondents **increased their level of support** over the course of the pandemic (71.7%, 99), particularly in providing services for mental health (90.8%, 119), basic needs (74.4%), drug and/or alcohol misuse (69.2%, 90) and digital exclusion (65.1%, 94).

In response to the pandemic and in managing Everyone In provision, **new ways of working** emerged, including an **increase in collaboration** with local authorities and the health sector, as well as across the VCS. Most described improvements in local ways of working, with the hope that these practices would continue and develop moving forward, as the sector used the opportunity to focus on not only the state of homelessness provision, but how to improve for the future.

- Many cited increased **partnership working** and more **streamlined approaches** as amongst the biggest positives coming out of the pandemic, including **improved relationships with the health sector**. 69.2% (90) stated that partnership working had increased in their local area.

- The closure of night shelters and other forms of communal accommodation had a mixed response, though many described the positives in being able to **shift toward long-term, individualised housing provision** through **centralising referral procedures**.

The ability to build upon the new practices and partnerships, combining the best from old and new ways of working, has presented an opportunity to **rethink and reprioritise** homelessness provision in England. However, this comes at significant challenge, with the impacts of the pandemic potentially continuing for years to come and continuing struggles when constrained by short-term funding and a lack of affordable housing.

- Most respondents reported an increase in **individuals in need of services** not only since the start of the pandemic (60.0%, 81), but also as of March 2021 (59.3%, 80).

- While most described themselves as financially resilient coming out of the pandemic (81.6%, 111), a common concern was that the increase in funding needed to meet the many challenges of the pandemic seems to now be contributing to a **decrease in future funding**.

- Only 40.3% (54) felt that government funding over the course of the pandemic was sufficient, while 45.3% (58) believed local authority funding was sufficient to provide needed support.

- Pre- and post-pandemic, two of the biggest challenges continue to be around a **lack of affordable accommodation** and the precarious nature of **short-term funding** opportunities.

It is hoped that the findings in this report will be built upon in future research examining the challenges and successes of the homelessness sector as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic. There is an incredible opportunity to capitalise on the learnings from the pandemic, but a substantial risk if the necessary structures and support are not in place.

Introduction and methodology

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented an extraordinary challenge for the homelessness sector in England. For a sector accustomed to struggling to secure resources, affordable housing and funding, it has also been an opportunity to demonstrate incredible resilience, creativity and adaptability.

At the start of the pandemic, the commitment demonstrated by central government to save lives and protect those who were rough sleeping was incredibly successful. The most immediate of these measures was the announcement of the 'Everyone In' initiative on 26th March 2020, instructing all local authorities to move all rough sleepers and those in communal shelters into safe accommodation. This was supported by an initial £3.2 million in targeted funding, alongside wider funding given to councils to support vulnerable populations through the pandemic.

Beyond the initial 'Everyone In' funding a range of government funding, both new and existing, was announced throughout the pandemic to support local authorities and homelessness providers. There were also a range of measures put in place that looked to prevent new homelessness, including a pause on evictions from both the private and social rented sectors. This was initially announced for a three-month period until the 25th June 2020, before being extended until the 31st May 2021. It has now come to an end. There was also a suspension of evictions from asylum accommodation during this period.

There were also changes to the welfare system that have added to preventative measures taken during the pandemic, including the increase of the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) back to the 30th percentile (frozen as of April 2021), a £20 per month uplift in Universal Credit and an extension of exemptions to the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) for those who have experienced homelessness. This was in addition to the temporary suspension of sanction and deduction payments, although these have now resumed.

Research by University College London suggests that this rapid response to the first wave of the COVID-19 outbreak prevented **21,092** people from being infected, **266** from dying and **1,164** from been admitted to hospital.[1] Within a matter of days, almost no one was rough sleeping in England, and by May 2020, just over a month after the start of Everyone In, **14,610** people had been provided emergency COVID-19 accommodation.[2] Despite this incredible initial response, however, the sector worked to support a continuing stream of people in need of safe, clean housing. Ultimately, this meant helping to meet the needs of tens of thousands of people for an indefinite period of time, at a time of national and international crisis.

1. Lewer, D. et al. (2020) COVID-19 among people experiencing homelessness in England: a modelling study. The Lancet Respiratory Medicine. 8 (12), 1181–1191.
2. Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government (2020) Coronavirus (COVID-19) emergency accommodation survey data: May 2020

A report from the National Housing Federation (NHF) summarises some of the key themes from a recent event, jointly hosted with the Local Government Association and focused on partnership working. They found that delegates – who included local authorities and the public, voluntary, community and business sectors, generally described an increase in partnership working across sectors, with greater flexibility and streamlining leading to a general improvement in provision for clients.[3]

Key research has emerged capturing the experiences faced by homelessness organisation from 2020 through the beginning of 2021 highlighting changes in the profile of people needing support, how providers met the challenges of Everyone In and the ongoing barriers they were facing. Despite this a wealth of learning opportunities remain unexamined, little is known about how the new ways of working established in response to the pandemic will shape the sector moving forward and what new insights have emerged.[4]

In response to this gap in knowledge, MHCLG commissioned two research reports from Homeless Link, examining the state of the sector as we emerge from the pandemic and the best practices that have come out of the sector's response. This report presents the findings from the first piece of research, while the second report, Homelessness Provision for the Future, further develops many of the themes identified herein through the exploration of best practice from across the country.

a. Methodology

Data collection for this report was conducted from May to June of 2021 and included an online survey and semi-structured interviews with those working in the sector, including voluntary sector and faith-based organisations, housing providers and local authorities. The survey was completed between late May and early June by 207 individuals, with 158 valid responses. It addressed areas related to experiences, opportunities and challenges during the pandemic and organisational and governmental priorities moving into the future.

In reflection of the huge diversity of work within the sector, organisations ranged from night shelters to food delivery services, supported accommodation providers, prevention services, day centres, local authorities and more. The most popular services provided by respondents included support with basic needs (95.7%, 134), housing advice and support (95%, 132), welfare advice (88.0%, 117) and accommodation (85.0%, 115).

The survey and interviews utilised a combination of purposive, convenience and snowball sampling strategies. The survey was shared through Homeless Link's social media, member newsletter and other communications channels, while interview participants were identified to increase representation across location, organisation size and type of provision.

Interviews were conducted with representatives who work on a national level, as well as those that work in each of the primary regions of England. They also provide a range of services, including: supported housing, day and resource centres, emergency accommodation, hostels, training and social housing. Using a semi-structured style, interviews touched upon similar themes to the survey but remained respondent to emergent themes relevant to organisations' experiences during the pandemic.

Table 1. Location of respondents' organisations

Area	Proportion	n
South East	20.3%	32
London	17.1%	27
South West	13.3%	21
North West	11.4%	18
Yorkshire and the Humber	11.4%	18
East of England	9.5%	15
West Midlands	7.0%	11
East Midlands	6.3%	10
All England	6.3%	10
North East	2.5%	4
Total respondents:		158

Figure 1. Services provided by respondents since pre- and post-COVID
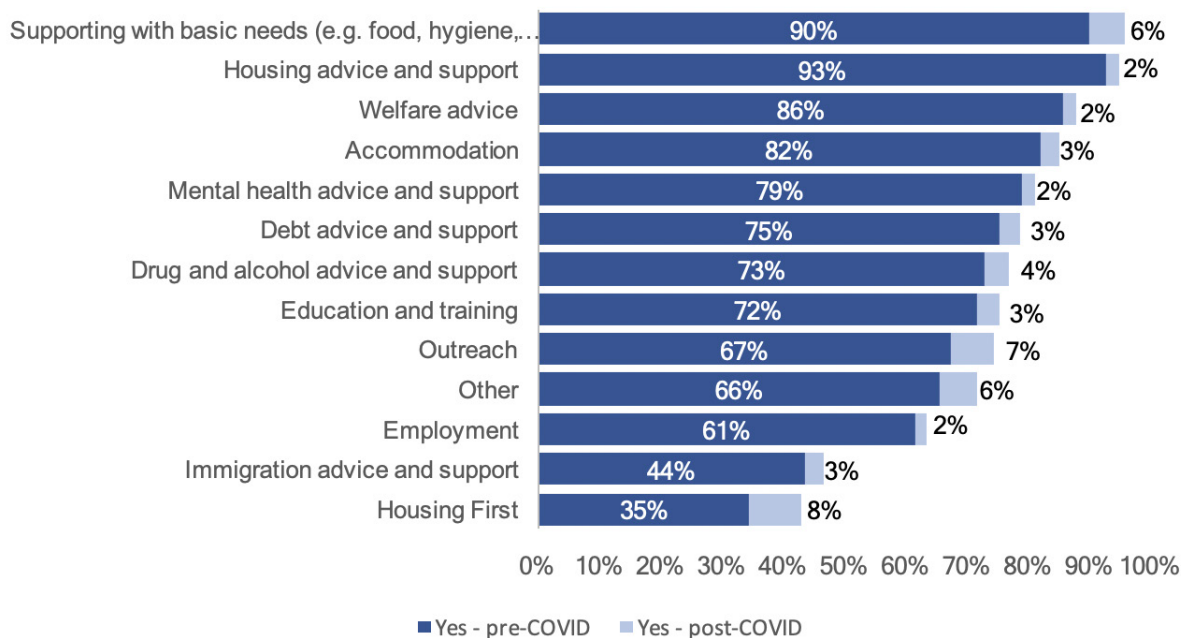
Service	Yes - pre-COVID	Yes - post-COVID
Supporting with basic needs (e.g. food, hygiene,...	90%	6%
Housing advice and support	93%	2%
Welfare advice	86%	2%
Accommodation	82%	3%
Mental health advice and support	79%	2%
Debt advice and support	75%	3%
Drug and alcohol advice and support	73%	4%
Education and training	72%	3%
Outreach	67%	7%
Other	66%	6%
Employment	61%	2%
Immigration advice and support	44%	3%
Housing First	35%	8%

■ Yes - pre-COVID   ■ Yes - post-COVID

3. National Housing Federation. (2021) Partnership Working Around Homelessness: Lessons Learnt and Action for the Future. NHF. Available from: https:// https://www.housing.org.uk/globalassets/files/lga-event-report-final.pdf (Accessed 5 August 2021).
4. Boobis, S. & Albanese, F. (2020) The Impact of Covid-19 on People Facing Homelessness and Service Provision Across Great Britain; Fitzpatrick, S., Mackie, P., et al. (2021) The COVID-19 crisis response to homelessness in Great Britain; Whitehead, C. et al. (2021) Homelessness and rough sleeping in the time of COVID-19. Available from: https://blogsmedia.lse.ac.uk/blogs. dir/119/files/2021/05/homelessness-reportfinal-1.pdf (Accessed 10 June 2021); Fitzpatrick, S, Watts, B., & Simms, R. (2020) Homelessness Monitor England 2020: COVID-19 Crisis Response Briefing. London: Crisis

A total of eight interviews were conducted with CEOs and other senior leaders from the homelessness voluntary sector, as well as housing providers and local authorities, enough to achieve data saturation.[5]

Additional information has been gathered through Homeless Link's work with over 850 member organisations, including the National Advisory Council (NAC) meeting in June of 2021 with 60 members and through Homeless Link's practice and partnership work.

As a variety of research has already been conducted into the homelessness sector's experiences over the course of the pandemic, methods aimed to prevent duplication, while drawing and expanding on current findings. Previous research has also been used to inform the findings and emergent themes described within this report.

Ethics & Limitations

Due to the nature of the sampling strategies, it is not possible to generalise out findings to the entire homelessness sector. A variety of methods were, however, used to ensure that findings were as representative as possible. These included using multiple avenues to identify potential interviewees, including through a variety of formal and informal networks and using purposive strategies to target smaller organisations and those that may be able to provide important perspectives that might otherwise be missed.

Additional biases were also considered and accounted for in research design and analysis, including the anonymisation of responses and neutral wording of questions, as well as the use of note taking during and after interviews and a focus on broad themes to minimise the reliance on quotations.[6,7]

5. Interviewees are identified by their location – North West (NW), West Midlands (WM), South West (SW), London, North East (NE) or national, and their function: housing provider (HP), local authority (LA) or resource / day centre (RC). Where there are two organisations with the same location and service provision, a number has been used to differentiate (i.e., NW HP1 and NW HP2).
6. Kaminska, O. & Foulsham, T. (2013) Understanding Sources of Social Desirability Bias in Different Modes: Evidence from Eye-tracking. Institute for Social & Economic Research
7. Back, L. (2007) The Art of Listening. Oxford: SAGE.

Chapter 2
The sector's response to the pandemic

The homelessness sector and government's rapid response to the COVID-19 outbreak in England likely prevented thousands of infections and saved hundreds of lives.[8] It is no small feat that, within a matter of weeks, almost no one was rough sleeping in England and, in adherence with social distancing guidelines, nearly all of those who had been sleeping on the streets or in communal night shelters now had a private room to stay in.

By May 2020, just over a month after the start of Everyone In, **14,610** people had been provided emergency COVID-19 accommodation.[9] Despite this incredible initial response, however, the sector continued working to meet the needs of an unending stream of people in need of safe housing. At a time of national and international crisis, with many other statutory services shut or only available over the phone, they also faced the challenge of needing to meet all the needs of the tens of thousands of people housed under emergency provision without any clear sense of how long these measures would last.

Everyone In and initial measures

It has now been well-documented that, alongside the work of the voluntary sector, the rapid steps taken by national and local governments helped to save the lives and dramatically reduce the hospitalisations of those experiencing homelessness in England. Across interviewees and survey respondents, the government's commitment to Everyone In was widely viewed as a hugely positive step, with **37,430** people supported through the scheme as of January 2021.[10] Along with the numerous other pandemic-related initiatives and funding avenues, Everyone In enabled an almost immediate end to nearly all rough sleeping in England, as one London housing provider explained:

> "Street sleeping has all but ceased during the pandemic. ... It's shown everybody... that where there's a will, there's a way. .... They were told, bring everyone in on a Friday night and, by the Monday, everybody was in. I mean, it's just incredible!"

Everyone In was the initiative survey respondents were most likely to agree had helped during the pandemic to reduce homelessness in their local area (94.8%, 120). Recent research with frontline homelessness workers also found that a majority (68%) felt that government's commitment to preventing and relieving homelessness had increased since the pandemic.[11] Survey respondents and interviewees commonly described the programme as a dramatic shift in central government's response to homelessness, including an acknowledgement of the vital links between homelessness and health.

> "One of the things that has come out of the pandemic is the realisation that homelessness is a public health problem." (WM HP)

The nature of the intervention, as a response to a public health pandemic, necessitated conversations and collaboration with health services, while requiring the near-immediate enacting of public health guidance around the use of PPE, social distancing and other preventative measures. Not wanting to cause delays in service provision at a time of potential vulnerability for clients, organisations had to act incredibly quickly to design and deliver new and adapted services. Difficulties in accessing sufficient PPE and sanitisation equipment meant that this often came at extreme risk to frontline workers.

For emergency accommodation providers and day and resource centres, this commonly meant shutting down overnight. Where housing providers were able to stay open, they had to rapidly work to ensure they followed the latest guidelines.

> "Using a space that was originally used for one of our rough sleeping services, … we converted that into a COVID safe … place for people to sleep at night. …. That was a huge amount of work that went into it, but that was something that for these people, it meant that we were able to prevent death. Ultimately, those people didn't need to sleep out at night when it was bitterly cold over the winter." (SW LA)

After Everyone In, the pause on evictions was the government intervention survey respondents were most likely to agree had reduced homelessness in their area (87.6%, 113). Recent research by Crisis also found that, amongst local authorities surveyed, 87% described the suspending of evictions as very important.[12] This was followed by the lifting of restrictions on supporting those with no recourse to public funds (78.3%, 101), with the pause on evictions from asylum accommodation also viewed positively (60.5%, 75).

8. Lewer, D. et al. (2020) COVID-19 among people experiencing homelessness in England: a modelling study. The Lancet Respiratory Medicine. 8 (12), 1181–1191.
9. Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government (2020) Coronavirus (COVID-19) emergency accommodation survey data: May 2020
10. Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government (2020) Coronavirus (COVID-19) emergency accommodation survey data: January 2021
11. Boobis, S. & Albanese, F. (2020) The Impact of Covid-19 on People Facing Homelessness and Service Provision Across Great Britain. Available from: https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/244285/the_impact_of_covid19_on_people_facing_homelessness_and_service_provision_across_gb_2020.pdf (Accessed 1 June 2021).
12. Fitzpatrick, S., Watts, B., et al. (2021) The homelessness monitor: England 2021. Available from: https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/244702/crisis-england-monitor-2021.pdf (Accessed 4 June 2021).

Figure 2. Survey respondents' agreement that government measures had helped reduce homelessness locally

Measure	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
Everyone In	94%	5%	1%
Pause on evictions	88%	10%	2%
Lifting of NRPF restrictions to support people through Everyone In	78%	19%	2%
Furlough	77%	17%	6%
Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) funding	71%	26%	3%
Increasing LHA rates to the 30th percentile	68%	26%	6%
£20 UC uplift in Universal Credit	68%	24%	8%
Pause on evictions from asylum accommodation	60%	35%	5%
Exemption from the Shared Accommodation Rate to under 25s	58%	36%	6%
Nest Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP) funding	44%	47%	10%
The closure of shelters and other forms of communal..	28%	29%	43%

The furlough scheme (77.0%, 97) was perceived as having been more effective at preventing increased homelessness ahead of other measures addressing welfare reform, through the £20 Universal Credit uplift (67.7%, 88), increase to the Local Housing Allowance (67.7%, 86) and the exemption from the Shared Accommodation rate to under 25s (58.9%, 73) were also seen as having a positive impact by most respondents. New and existing funding streams made available during the pandemic were also identified as helpful, including Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) funding (70.5%, 91) and, less positively, NSAP funding (43.7%, 55). The closure of night shelters and other forms of communal accommodation was the only area that fewer respondents agreed had helped (28.4%, 36) than those who were unsure or disagreed (42.5%, 54).

The next stage: 'Nobody out'

After successfully achieving 'Everyone In' within a matter of days, organisations and local authorities were faced with a new challenge – preventing further street homelessness or a return to rough sleeping amongst those accommodated. Despite the numerous interventions employed by central government and local authorities, a steady stream of people presenting to services was described across the country.[13]

Most survey respondents reported seeing an increase in the number of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness accessing their services since the start of the pandemic (60.0%, 81) and since the end of March 2021 (59.3%, 80). Whilst this speaks to an increase in support demand amongst those already experiencing homelessness and the rising to the fore of typically more hidden populations, such as sofa surfers, between March and December 2020 110,620 households were owed a relief duty, a 7% increase on the same period the previous year.[14]

Figure 3. Change to number of people accessing services
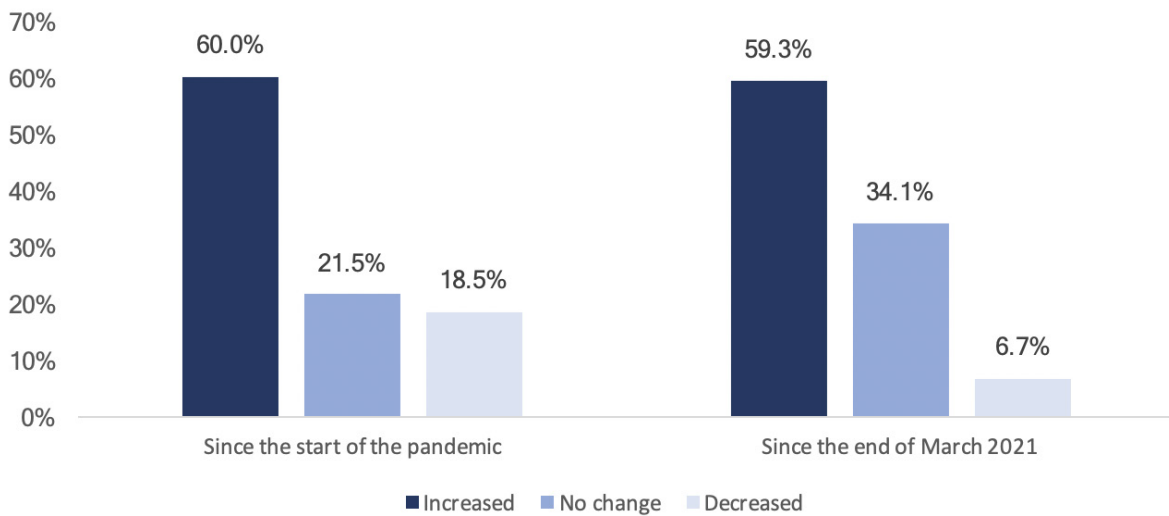
The large disparity between estimates of people rough sleeping in England has meant that, while Everyone In was hugely successful in its initial aim to provide COVID-secure housing for those who were rough sleeping, organisations and local authorities had to continue expanding to find accommodation and to support the steady stream of new people presenting for services.

> "The local authority is still surprised by the continuing number that kept presenting and I think there was a sense [that] once we got everybody in, it will be all 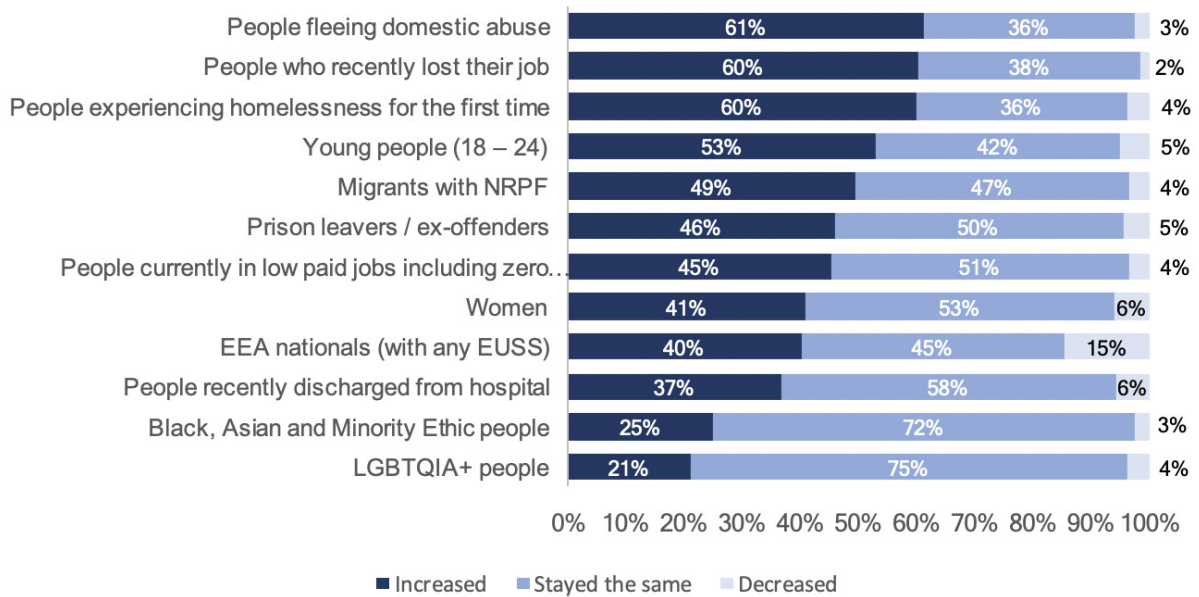right. … I've spoken to lead elected members in the city who are quite surprised … and it's like, well, we've got a massive hidden problem of homelessness. … And this was one time when you suddenly saw that all come out. … So, I think there's been a sense of understanding around complexity and numbers and scale." (WM HP)

A positive of this experience has been the greater recognition and visibility of the diversity amongst those experiencing or threatened with homelessness, including 'hidden' groups, such as those living in precarious housing or 'sofa surfers'.[15] In service provision, respondents most commonly reported increases in those who were experiencing homelessness for the first time (59.8%, 76), had recently lost their job (60.3%, 73), were fleeing domestic abuse (61.3%, 68) or were 18 to 24 years-old (52.9%, 63). This also supports Crisis' recent research, which identified an increase in first-time homelessness over the course of the pandemic.[16]

13. Boobis, S. & Albanese, F. (2020) The Impact of Covid-19 on People Facing Homelessness and Service Provision Across Great Britain. Available from: https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/244285/the_impact_of_covid19_on_people_facing_homelessness_and_service_provision_across_gb_2020.pdf (Accessed 1 June 2021).
14. Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (2020) Statutory Homelessness live tables: England
15. Fitzpatrick, S., Mackie, P., et al. (2021) The COVID-19 crisis response to homelessness in Great Britain. Available from: https://housingevidence.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/12544_UoG_CaCHE_Covid_Homelessness_Report-Final.pdf (Accessed 20 April 2021).
16. Boobis, S. & Albanese, F. (2020) The Impact of Covid-19 on People Facing Homelessness and Service Provision Across Great Britain. Available from: https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/244285/the_impact_of_covid19_on_people_facing_homelessness_and_service_provision_across_gb_2020.pdf (Accessed 1 June 2021).

Figure 4. Reported changes to groups experiencing homelessness in local area

Group	Increased	Stayed the same	Decreased
People fleeing domestic abuse	61%	36%	3%
People who recently lost their job	60%	38%	2%
People experiencing homelessness for the first time	60%	36%	4%
Young people (18 – 24)	53%	42%	5%
Migrants with NRPF	49%	47%	4%
Prison leavers / ex-offenders	46%	50%	5%
People currently in low paid jobs including zero…	45%	51%	4%
Women	41%	53%	6%
EEA nationals (with any EUSS)	40%	45%	15%
People recently discharged from hospital	37%	58%	6%
Black, Asian and Minority Ethic people	25%	72%	3%
LGBTQIA+ people	21%	75%	4%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

■ Increased ■ Stayed the same ■ Decreased

> "Our real challenge has not been Everyone In. That was a real opportunity, and we were able to do some really good stuff about getting some people in and offering stuff around that. It was, the key thing was nobody out, making sure nobody started to rough sleep again." (WM HP)

One key feature of Everyone In was its universal nature, overriding policies preventing homeless prevention and support services for those with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) and/or without a priority need. This therefore presented the first time that many organisations were able to support and work with these groups. Respondents widely described this as a positive step.

> "Lifting of NRPF restrictions has been really helpful." (survey respondent)

Local authorities managing Everyone In accommodation and support had to grapple with not only how to support a growing population, but how to ensure that their services met the diverse needs of these individuals. This also meant acknowledgement of the large number of women and young people experiencing homelessness, who may be more likely to reflect 'hidden homeless' populations and thus be less widely known to services and less commonly reflected in government data.

> "The spike of 16-25 year olds presenting as homeless and/or rough sleeping at local authority and our own services is particularly worrying given also the lack of accommodation options for this demographic. We are seeing more young people with mental health difficulties, more young women, and more young people in the lower age groups (18-20). We are also noticing that black young people are now even more at risk of homelessness in London than they already were pre-pandemic." (survey respondent)

Throughout the pandemic, at a time when many other types of services or support had stopped or moved to entirely remove provision, the homelessness sector experienced rapid expansion and enormous new challenges. When asked about particular challenges they experienced during the pandemic, difficulties with accessing services or support for clients was one of the most prominent responses.

> "Practically all of those [other] services shut in the city, you know, day services, from week one. So that was a real challenge. … And that really hasn't abated." (NW HP2)

The Frontline Network's research found that a majority of frontline workers surveyed described challenges in accessing support for clients during the pandemic, including: mental health needs (80%); employment, training and education support (69%); and benefit issues (62%). Amongst this group nearly a third (31%) also stated that they experienced an increase in the number of people they were supporting who were affected by the Benefit Cap.[17]

Creative solutions to new and old challenges

Amidst this wide array of challenges, the sector responded with an enormous variety of new and adapted services, finding creative and innovative approaches to adapt to the changing environment and needs of clients. One of the main challenges, though, remained finding that they now needed to fill in the gaps where other services were no longer available or accessible.

> "At the centre, we had every service, … so the nurse, … the drugs team, the alcohol team, the mental health team would all come into the centre once a week and do surgeries. They all withdrew on day one of lockdown and haven't come back." (WM RC)
>
> "We kept our day centres open during COVID as everywhere else was shut." (survey respondent)

Many providers were facing, as one interviewee described, a population where "a number of people quite severely declined in that time" (NE RC).

> "As much as COVID was a risk, actually there were people at very immediate risk of relapse, self-harm, even suicide." (NE RC)

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17. Marshall, Rachel. (2021) Annual Frontline Worker Survey 2020. The Frontline Network. Available from: https://www.frontlinenetwork.org.uk/media/2472/annual-frontline-worker-survey-2020-full-report.pdf (Accessed 6 August 2021).

In interviews, providers commonly discussed adapting so that they could continue to offer face-to-face services and activities, either during the first lockdown or as the pandemic continued. Most respondents (71.7%, 99) stated that they had increased the level of support they were providing during the pandemic, while only 8.7% (12) reported decreasing their provision. Increased support needs were most commonly experienced with clients in regard to mental health needs (90.8%, 119), meeting basic needs (74.4%, 96), drug and/or alcohol services (69.2%, 90) and digital exclusion (65.1%, 94). Mental health was also the most popular area mentioned when asked what respondents felt had worsened during the pandemic (16.9%, 15). This reflects areas highlighted by Crisis' research, which identified mental health, loneliness, isolation, a lack of food and digital exclusion as the four biggest areas of concern in the early stages of the pandemic.[18]

Figure 5. Clients' changes in support needs during the pandemic
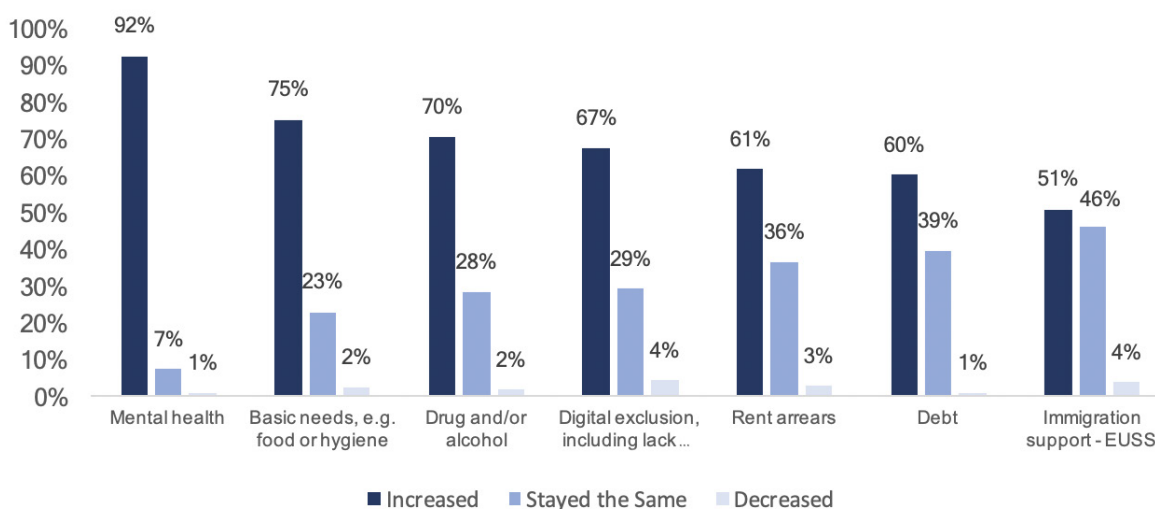
Thus, in addition to addressing clients' existing needs, organisations were facing new support needs that had emerged or been exacerbated during the pandemic. This included: being able to support those they had previously struggled to engage with or who they had not been able to legally support previously; meeting clients' needs for stimulation, a sense of purpose and socialisation; providing technology (particularly as more services became phone-only or moved on-line); closing or transforming night shelters; restructuring spaces to be COVID safe; organising food delivery services; transitioning to digital or remote trainings or services; and more.

> "Our actual service delivery changed completely. … We've redesigned the centre three or four times in response to COVID, but we've … remained opened, remained doing things, remained achieving the same things, just in a slightly different way." (WM RC)

18. Boobis, S. & Albanese, F. (2020) The Impact of Covid-19 on People Facing Homelessness and Service Provision Across Great Britain. Available from: https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/244285/the_impact_of_covid19_on_people_facing_homelessness_and_service_provision_across_gb_2020.pdf (Accessed 1 June 2021).

While some were able to adapt their existing spaces and services, some responded to emergent needs by creating entirely new services to meet basic needs (e.g., food delivery or remote cooking courses) or needs for socialisation or meaning (see Chapter 4 in <u>Homelessness Provision for the Future</u> for best practice and case studies of these approaches). Yet, despite the many challenges and the need for rapid adaption and creativity, as one survey respondent stated: "Everyone In has showed we can do better."

The incredible resiliency and creativity demonstrated by the homelessness sector did not come without cost. Many described challenges around communication from government, including a lack of clarity and decisions being made suddenly with very little or no notice.

> "[We] didn't really get any guidance from the local authority or the government on what we did. So, you know, I mean we are an independent charity. I'm Chief Exec, so I expect to be making these kind of decisions, but I was a bit surprised that we weren't getting other guidance really, so we just did a lot of [other] stuff [to get the information we needed], you know, constantly going on webinars." (London HP)

Many described the need to turn to their networks for support and shared learning, particularly through free webinars and group events run by Homeless Link and other organisations. One interview stated that, without Homeless Link's communications, "we'd be lost" (NW HP1).

Funding pandemic provision

In order to meet the increase and changes in demand and need, organisations had to take on significant costs. However, this often required paying for initiatives before funding could be secured.

In interviews, many organisations described having to take on high levels of financial risk, responding to emergent needs and determining how they could provide services while adhering to COVID-19 regulations before then applying to fund the work.

> "There were loads and loads of extra costs that we were taking on and we were … bulk ordering PPE and food supplies and so on. So, we were doing a lot of things at [financial] risk." (London HP)
>
> "We just gave the support we felt was needed and then got the money to fund it where we could and used our reserves where we couldn't." (WM RC)

Despite this increase in service provision and demand, only 44.2% (34) of providers projected seeing an increase in their income over the next year, with 33.8% (26) projecting a slight or significant drop in income. Many felt that the funding opportunities that had enabled them to meet the increased need were now disappearing and that they could be in an even more

precarious financial situation than they were pre-pandemic.

A sector accustomed to adversity and uncertainty

When many other areas were limiting or eliminating services, the homelessness sector worked through incredible adversity to continue providing services and expand their provision. While needing to adapt to an international pandemic was a new experience, the need to adapt and respond to a continuously changing environment and funding opportunities was a much more familiar challenge for the homelessness sector. For a sector accustomed to working amidst challenges in linking clients with other resources, accessing housing and making long-term plans when most funding comes from short-term grants, this was a new but familiar experience.

The challenge that was most mentioned in data collection was the nature of funding, what one survey respondent referred to as "short termism". Participants described grant opportunities that lasted for months or a year, often with extremely tight deadlines and extensive applications and reporting requirements that could be extremely difficult to meet.

> "There's always a lack of clarity around exactly what is going to be awarded until the point at which you're awarded it from MHCLG. It's like a guessing game. … I think in terms of long-term sustainability, … I don't think we can operate on these one-year funding streams much longer. And I'm starting to hear … services saying: Oh, maybe we just won't participate in [applying for MHCLG funding] next year, because it's just too traumatic. … I think the way those funding streams work really needs to change." (SW LA)

When struggling to secure funding for more than a year at a time, it can be challenging for organisations to make long-term plans, secure and maintain high-quality staff and to support their own well-being. As such, organisations have had to develop working processes that allow for high levels of uncertainty, where an ability to creatively use limited resources to meet clients' needs, coupled with an ability to quickly respond and adapt to new opportunities and challenges, can be key to not only an organisation's success, but its ultimate survival.

> "You have to be reasonably brave around [accessing funding], I suppose, but you need to also know that, if it did go wrong, … that you'll be okay at the end of it. You're expected to almost keep delivering services even when you've no guarantees that you're gonna get that funding." (NW HP2)
>
> "It's any long-term commitment of funding, that's what really makes a difference in terms of the size at which we can operate and the amount and the sort of depth of support that we can provide as well." (NE RC)

The influx of new funding opportunities during COVID-19 – NSAP and RSAP, and the continuation of the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI), likely contributed to the increase in reliance on grant funding described by most organisations surveyed (53.0%, 71). Encouragingly, most organisations also described themselves as financially resilient coming out of the pandemic (81.6%, 111), though the majority felt that their funding was insufficient to support the needs of people experiencing homelessness in their area (64.7%, 86). Furthermore, only 40.3% (54) agreed that government funding had been sufficient during the pandemic to meet the demand in need, while 45.3% (58) described local authority funding as sufficient to provide the support needed.

Coupled with the challenges around accessing funding opportunities, organisations described the lack of affordable housing and issues with the private rented sector as key inhibitors in their work, challenges that, in many ways, COVID-19 presented opportunities to address. Crisis also found that, in their survey, 61% of local authorities stated that the lack of long-term housing in their area meant that they were inadequately prepared to deal with the crisis.[19] With the nation in lockdown and Everyone In mandating the housing of all rough sleepers, regardless of priority need or immigration status, local authorities worked with the voluntary sector and housing providers to secure hotel suites and B&Bs and to create housing and service hubs around the country for those experiencing or at risk of homelessness. This also presented an opportunity to improve the standard of accommodation, which, in contrast to communal night shelters, was generally higher quality, including being private, cleaner and safer.

As the weeks and months went by and clients remained in temporary accommodation with no clear end to the pandemic, the sector then had to work to access move on accommodation and support. The lack of properties was described as contributing to people remaining in temporary accommodation longer than would have otherwise been necessary, while a lack of services and an influx of need meant that accessing necessary support continued to be an issue for providers. Many interviewees described a lack of "affordable and decent housing" (NW HP2) as one of the main challenges coming into and throughout the pandemic. Amongst survey respondents, this was also the most commonly cited challenge, with 40.6% (43) mentioning accommodation when asked about the biggest challenges in their local area.

Nonetheless, given the enormous cost of housing tens of thousands of people in temporary, Everyone In accommodation, local authorities and voluntary sector organisations were able to come together and focus on not only moving people on from emergency provision, but finding new ways to ensure they were moved on to the right type of provision. The work that has been done in securing move on accommodation for tens of thousands of people (26,167 people as of January 2021)[20] experiencing or at risk of homelessness across the country is unprecedented

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19. Fitzpatrick, S., Mackie, P., et al. (2021) The COVID-19 crisis response to homelessness in Great Britain. Available from: https://housingevidence.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/12544_UoG_CaCHE_Covid_Homelessness_Report-Final.pdf (Accessed 20 April 2021).
20. Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government (2020) Coronavirus (COVID-19) emergency accommodation survey data: January 2021

and was described as one of the great successes of the pandemic. This has also presented a key opportunity for organisations and local authorities to trial and assess their services on a much larger scale than was previously possible, leading many to seek new paths forward that build on their prior knowledge and the successes of their pandemic provision.

Chapter 3
An opportunity to re-think and re-prioritise

The national response to COVID-19 demonstrated on a large scale the unnecessary nature of homelessness and rough sleeping. This also presented an opportunity for organisations and local authorities to reflect on their own work and the implications of ending nearly all rough sleeping across the country in a matter of days.

> "I think the main [lesson] is that we can end rough sleeping. There's no reason for anyone to sleep rough and if the resources are provided and the agencies work together, no one needs to be on the street. And that's not just true in a pandemic, that's true always. So, we know it can happen. There's no excuse for it not to happen and we need things to change so that we can make sure no one has to sleep rough." (WM RC)

Interviewees described "quite a lot of opportunity to do things and [to] think differently" (NW HP2). For many, this included strengthening relationships and collaboration across the areas they were serving.

Working in partnership

The joined-up partnership work established during the pandemic was the most common theme to emerge in interviews and surveys, widely described as one of the greatest benefits of the pandemic (see Chapter 5 in Homelessness Provision for the Future). This was also highlighted in Crisis' 2020 report and a forthcoming report by the National Housing Federation (NHF).[21,22] More than two-thirds of survey respondents (69.2%, 90) stated that partnership working in their local area had increased, with 53.2% (66) also stating that partnership working between the voluntary sector and local authorities had increased.

21. Fitzpatrick, S., Watts, B., et al. (2021) The homelessness monitor: England 2021. Available from: https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/244702/crisis-england-monitor-2021.pdf (Accessed 4 June 2021).

22. National Housing Federation. (2021) Partnership Working Around Homelessness: Lessons Learnt and Action for the Future. NHF. Available from: https:// https://www.housing.org.uk/globalassets/files/lga-event-report-final.pdf (Accessed 5 August 2021).

> "It does feel hugely different. I think what I've noticed is … a lot of barriers coming down where originally providers were quite happy working in their silos, whereas … [what] I'm seeing is a lot more genuine partnership working between organisations. There are still challenges, but it feels a lot better, and it feels like [people recognise] … we're in a crisis. This is an emergency situation. Let's just roll up our sleeves and get on with it. … It feels like we're a lot more focused on achieving positive outcomes and, actually, since the pandemic we've been part of jointly commissioning a lot of really exciting new ventures." (SW LA)

As local authorities were faced with the large task of achieving Everyone In, voluntary sector organisations commonly described feeling that their expertise had come to be more highly valued as they were relied upon for guidance and support.

> "We've had strong recognition that the VCS is greatly appreciated. LAs have been recognising the power and value of volunteers and have sought help from the sector in ways I've not witnessed over 22 years." (survey respondent)

Interviewees described the establishment of new working groups that included local authorities and the voluntary and health sectors, where processes that previously had been accomplished independently were rapidly transformed into new approaches. Many described much closer working practices across their local councils, as they strived to meet the exponential increase in demand and service provision and the new COVID-19 health and safety regulations. Benefits also included what many perceived as a lessening of administrative barriers, with the NHF's report describing greater flexibility to provide more tailored provision.[23]

> "With our colleagues in public health and adult social care and the CCG, so now we actually have weekly meetings. … We rarely spoke to them before COVID, whereas now we've established really, really strong links with them and now it feels it's a lot easier to achieve stuff. I think before COVID you'd think: Oh, we're going to try and commission this new thing, but we'll just never get it done. There just isn't enough time; there just isn't enough resource. But, actually, when the system flexes around the individual, you achieve better outcomes for the individual." (SW LA)

The shift in framing presented by Everyone In also facilitated collaboration, with central government describing a need to support people's health through addressing homelessness, instead of discussing homelessness in isolation from health provision, as had previously been the norm. According to the NHF's summary report, across the sector many felt that the shift in framing and ways of working meant that the health sector had a better understanding of health-related issues for those with experience of homelessness.[24] For some, where they already had close relationships with their local authority, this was primarily focused on streamlining processes to improve efficiencies and joint working approaches.

> "[We now have] a much more systematic process around how we identify the most at risk and how we work with [them], ... in terms of getting the outcomes that they really need. ... I wouldn't say it's perfect, but it's moved on quite a lot. (NW HP2)

For others, where relationships with local authorities were less developed, the necessity of the situation could present an opportunity to rebuild trust and new partnership practices across local government and the voluntary sector.

> "We were really wary as a faith-based organisation of some of the interactions with statutory organisations pre-pandemic, ... so we kept things kind of at arm's length, trying to do what we could separately. ... From that context of the [Everyone In] hotel, we started working much more closely with our local authority. They realised that we had some really good stuff to offer; we realised that they aren't actually like a lot of other local authorities." (WM HP)

Relationships with the health sector also improved for many, with a common theme being around the speed and high levels of support in accessing COVID-19 testing and vaccine services.

> "The Public Health team have been our local link. ... If I ring or email, I will get a response by the end of the day if we need advice. That's been incredible. I mean, we were really struggling to work out how we could open our shelter ... and it really meant for us to get the numbers back in and to be able to support them, that we needed really good advice from Environmental and Public Health, and we got that." (NW HP1)

However, while partnership working was described as a positive by many respondents, some felt that they had not had opportunities to collaborate, with 14.6% (14) stating that local partnership working had decreased in their local area. When asked about areas that had worsened locally, 14.6% (13) of survey respondents referred to their relationship with their local authority.

> "In the early months of the pandemic, the local authority shut out most of the local voluntary sector, although they did work very closely with us as the primary homelessness charity in our town. While this has improved a little now, it has had long term ramifications for relationships between the LA and the local VCS." (survey respondent)

As discussed in the previous chapter, while some sectors became easier to access and collaborate with, the shift to remote working and the many challenges of COVID-19 meant that

23. National Housing Federation. (2021) Partnership Working Around Homelessness: Lessons Learnt and Action for the Future. NHF. Available from: https:// https://www.housing.org.uk/globalassets/files/lga-event-report-final.pdf (Accessed 5 August 2021).
24. National Housing Federation. (2021) Partnership Working Around Homelessness: Lessons Learnt and Action for the Future. NHF. Available from: https:// https://www.housing.org.uk/globalassets/files/lga-event-report-final.pdf (Accessed 5 August 2021).

some service areas could be harder to reach. Survey respondents indicated that, while increased collaboration was most likely with primary care services (36.4%, 47), it was less common in other areas, including with: mental health services (30.2%, 39), social care services (25.0%, 32) and hospitals (17.5%, 22). Some also described local authorities continuing to work in isolation or an absence of opportunities to improve streamlining and partnership working, as one survey respondent stated: "Partnership work has definitely decreased, with more organisations working in silo."

Figure 6. Reported changes in local collaboration since the start of the pandemic
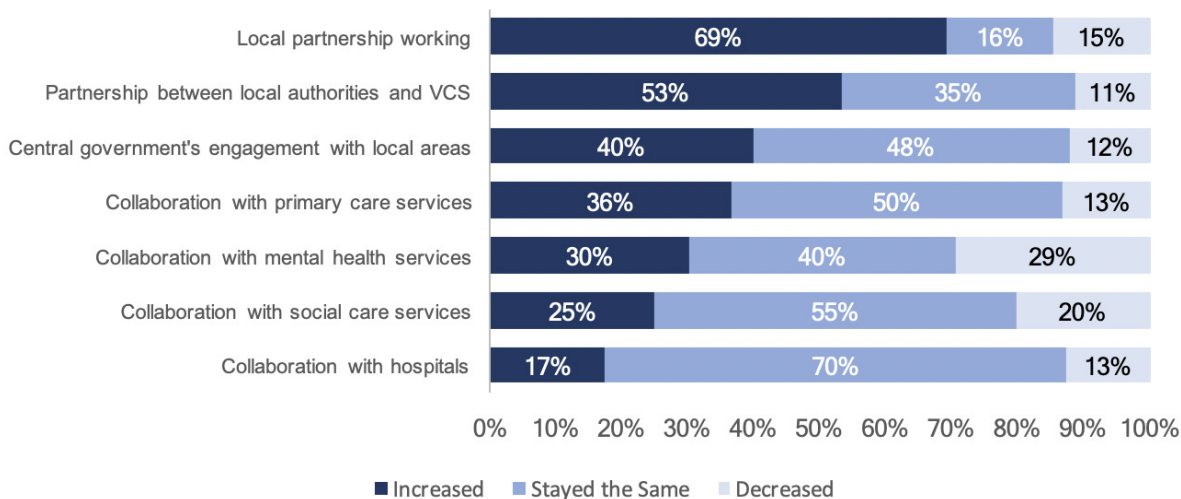
At the NAC meeting, a common theme amongst organisations was struggling to link up or receive support from social services, creating a feeling that homelessness organisations are seen to be solely responsible for meeting clients' requirements, particularly amongst those with more complex needs. A backlog in health services was also described as challenging, leading to an emphasis on short-term care, rather than long-term support.

While joint working and increased partnership was commonly described as "the biggest opportunity … to ensure great support continues" (survey respondent), maintaining these new ways of working into the future presents a significant challenge.

A shift from short to long-term strategies

After the initial success of Everyone In, local authorities were faced with the task of supporting hundreds or thousands of people during a national health crisis and government-mandated social distancing. Combined with the closures and remote working of many other sectors, ensuring that clients' basic, social and psychological needs were met during what was an undefined period led to the centralisation and streamlining of many types of service provision and, for many, an opportunity to think strategically about their local provision pre- and post-pandemic.

> "When the pandemic hit, and we started doing multi-agency work, … you had literally everybody who might have had any kind of stake in [homelessness services] … at the table. … Out of this has really developed a wider context for

> looking at health inequalities across the city and ... how we can put things in place ... so that it doesn't replicate itself again. ... The level of partnership working ... is really intense right now." (WM HP)

Local authorities also faced the reality that meeting clients' basic needs (e.g., housing and food) was not sufficient for many with more complex needs, including those with mental ill health, NRPF status and/or a history of substance or alcohol dependency.

> "We've got a lot of people who maintain their recovery from drugs or alcohol by getting involved in their local boxing gym or volunteering at a charity shop. All of that ... positive stuff stop[ped], but the local drug dealers are still knocking on their door. That side of it doesn't stop. ... It became really hard for people to find positive outlets." (SW LA)

As discussed in the previous chapter, the voluntary sector found creative ways to address not only clients' need for food and shelter, but their wider psychological and social needs. This included opportunities to transform initial, emergency measures into strategic, long-term initiatives. For instance, one organisation described how their initial development of a door-to-door delivery service was also an opportunity to provide some level of social interaction for clients experiencing extreme isolation. The need to be creative and develop entirely new services was, however, also an opportunity to reflect more on the long-term sustainability and impact of these types of interventions.

With the advent of new working groups that bridged the voluntary and statutory sectors to support those experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping, there were more opportunities to share learning. As service providers worked to provide pandemic provision by establishing new systems and adapting old ones, there were also opportunities to reflect on local practice and the future of homelessness provision in England.

Reprioritising for the future

In many ways, the experiences of COVID-19 and Everyone In dramatically reshaped the ways of working and priorities across national initiatives to support those experiencing or at risk of homelessness. One opportunity came in the closing of communal night shelters at the start of Everyone In, which nearly all interviewees highlighted as one of the greatest positives (see Chapter 2 of Homelessness Provision for the Future).

> "The other big success, apart from getting everybody in, of course, is the sort of effective ending of night shelter, dormitory-style accommodation." (London HP)

Across survey respondents, however, perceptions of the closure of shelters and other forms of communal accommodation were more mixed, with 28.4% (36) agreeing that this helped to reduce

homelessness in their local area, while 42.5% (54) disagreed and 29.1% (37) were unsure. In particular, this is likely to reflect the variety of different opinions on the most effective strategies for ending homelessness and rough sleeping in England, in addition to the specific local contexts and approaches to Everyone In.

For those who did not view the closure of night shelters positively, this could be due to their experiences with pre-pandemic and pandemic provision. Those who had run night or communal shelters or worked positively with them pre-pandemic may have felt that previous systems had more effectively met clients' needs than the local, quickly established Everyone In accommodation. One interviewee described the importance of reopening their night shelter, which served young people in their local area:

> "We [re-]opened our night shelter in mid-December of last year, because young people were really struggling without the provision that we could provide. ... The day we opened the night shelter and the day centre, there was a young person, ... he just said words to the effect of: 'Thank god. I haven't had a shower for nine weeks.' And that was quite telling in terms of the kind of support that we provide and what was happening across the borough." (NW HP1)

Everyone In was, ultimately, an emergency measure that was rolled out rapidly on a national scale, with varying levels of quality, success and VCS involvement. If local Everyone In provision failed to adapt from emergency to long-term provision, individuals may have been left wondering at the benefits of closing long-established communal shelters that already had developed relationships and opportunities for service linkage. One interviewee described difficulties in engaging with those in the local Everyone In accommodation, describing "high turnover", where, "by the end of it, really not much has changed in their situation" (NE RC). Another interviewee described "some major health and safety concerns" in their local Everyone In hotel:

> "Where Everyone In happened so quickly, what may be suitable as an emergency response isn't suitable for a 15-month response. ... Across the country, the situation that I've just described [of unsafe housing] is probably not a unique situation." (London HP)

Within the survey and interviews, some criticised Everyone In and the other strategic approaches taken by central government as continuing to focus on short-term, emergency measures – generally targeting rough sleeping rather than homelessness more generally, without consideration of long-term impact or needs.

> "Many of the initiatives [by central government] have had a short term effect on homelessness but not necessarily long term duration, e.g.: when eviction bans are lifted, and if UC levels fall again, the positive impact will reverse." (survey respondent)

Nonetheless, though originally planned as a short-term intervention, Everyone In and other pandemic-related interventions clearly demonstrated the need for a long-term, preventative approach. In particular, the huge volume of people supported through the provision brought to light the enormous variety amongst those with experience of homelessness, particularly through greater recognition of 'hidden' homelessness. The need to support such individuals, who include 'sofa surfers' and others in precarious housing who may be less likely to be known to or access services, emerged as a key component of ending rough sleeping and addressing the continuing stream of new people presenting for services.

Everyone In has presented a valuable opportunity to consider current and future homelessness provision across England, including the challenges of needing to adapt short-term approaches to long-term provision and the incredible diversity in types of provision and need. For many, one of the greatest benefits was the demonstration, on a national scale, that providing, clean, safe and private housing to people facing or at risk of homelessness can have an enormous impact.

> "Definitely ending night shelters is fantastic. ... Everyone In showed that ... you could get people off the streets. All the people that people used to say, 'They'll never come in'. They all came in. And if you provide them with something decent, they will come in. ... The fact that it encouraged us all to work much more closely together and to be able to reimagine what we're able to do was really positive." (WM RC)

Everyone In granted many organisations and new working groups the chance to reflect on the future and shift focus from addressing immediate, short-term needs to the long-term goal of ending homelessness in England. The future was described positively by many, a chance to expand on the work started in the pandemic.

> "It's been a really good chance to rethink everything and refocus. There's a lot of quite exciting and fresh ideas that have come out of having to rethink. And things that will definitely continue." (NE RC)

> "As a local authority, I think we're in a really good position to challenge how systems are working, how people are working in systems and really championing that kind of change." (SW LA)

The primary obstacle in achieving this vision of future homelessness provision remained around funding, both the nature of funding opportunities – generally short-term, with quick turnaround times, and the difficulty in finding funders for long-term, strategic provision.

> "Everyone In has shown very clearly that if you provide decent single-room accommodation with appropriate support that you can end rough sleeping. And if that funding isn't provided to put that kind of provision [in place], then rough sleeping won't end." (WM RC)

Still 'picking up the pieces'

As the urgency of the pandemic response ends and the world moves forward, the homelessness sector faces the challenge of continuing the learnings and new ways of working from the past year and a half, at a time when accessing sufficient funding is becoming increasingly difficult and the proportion of the population at risk of homelessness may continue to remain high or even increase further.

Continuing need

With 59.3% (80) of survey respondents indicating that the number of people accessing their services has increased in the two to three months following the end of March 2021 and only 6.7% (9) describing a decrease, many within the sector have expressed concerns that the impact of COVID-19 will continue and potentially worsen for the next two or more years.

One of the greatest concerns was around what one survey respondent referred to as the coming "cliff edge" after government emergency measures end. This includes the conclusion of the evictions pause at the end of May and the ending of the £20 Universal Credit uplift and furlough scheme at the end of September. The return of evictions was a common theme amongst survey respondents and interviewees, with many believing that this was likely to lead to a substantial rise in those facing homelessness.

> "The stay on evictions has only 'kicked the can down the road' on the sea-rising of homelessness that we're going to be facing with this group (in particular) over the coming months/years." (survey respondent)

While over the course of the pandemic those experiencing homelessness due to evictions dropped dramatically,[25] those in rent arrears have increased, with some now months or even a year behind on rent potentially facing eviction now or in the near future. Research by LSE found that arrears in London had roughly doubled, at six to seven per cent, while those who are unemployed in private rented accommodation has also doubled to one in ten.[26] One housing provider described the large increase of those in arrears and now at risk of eviction:

> "Arrears are now bobbing on at around 5.5% gross, very high. ... That's about 1.5% higher than it was pre-pandemic. ... Some people will sadly be evicted. And, yeah, some of these people have just given up paying, so that debt it is just going

25. Fitzpatrick, S., Mackie, P., et al. (2021) The COVID-19 crisis response to homelessness in Great Britain. Available from: https://housingevidence.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/12544_UoG_CaCHE_Covid_Homelessness_Report-Final.pdf (Accessed 20 April 2021).
26. Whitehead, C. et al. (2021) Homelessness and rough sleeping in the time of COVID-19. Available from: https://blogsmedia.lse.ac.uk/blogs.dir/119/files/2021/05/homelessness-reportfinal-1.pdf (Accessed 10 June 2021).

up and up and up and getting bigger and bigger. ... So, our debt has gone up."
(National HP)

Provision for those with NRPF

Another area of concern was around those still in temporary Everyone In accommodation, particularly those with no recourse to public funds (NRPF), where the end of emergency provision under health grounds means a return to rough sleeping and no basis to receive support from the state or voluntary sector. Many across the sector have worked incredibly hard to prevent this from happening, assisting those with NRPF status in applying for asylum and Settled and Pre-Settled status under the EU settlement scheme (see Chapter 3 in Homelessness Provision for the Future). However, respondents described significant barriers in submitting these applications for those without the necessary legal documents, combined with the additional challenges presented by the pandemic. As a result, there were concerns that many would not be able to submit their applications before the 30 June deadline.

As the HCLG Committee wrote in their recent report, the prohibition on supporting those with NRPF status is therefore 'irreconcilable' with the goal of ending rough sleeping.[27] Reflecting on the end of Everyone In, one interviewee stated:

> "There is no option for how to support [people with NRPF status]. ... For the people that can't get their settled status and can't work, then there is no option until we get a change in national government policy." (WM RC)

In the initial call by central government to house everyone at the end of March 2020, the wording clearly indicated that legal status should not be a factor in whether an individual receives housing. However, later statements in May and June clarified that support should only be provided where "there is a risk to life".[28] This led to what some referred to as a 'postcode lottery', where some local authorities continued to house those with NRPF status under section 138 of the Local Government Act 1972 and Section 2B of the NHS Act 2006, while others interpreted government messaging as the end of supporting these individuals.[29]

In December of 2020, the Ncube v Brighton and Hove Council case determined that the two powers were sufficient in justifying the accommodation of those with NRPF status. However, even after this ruling, some respondents stated that their local authorities continued to deny support to these individuals.

27. Fitzpatrick, S., Mackie, P., et al. (2021) The COVID-19 crisis response to homelessness in Great Britain. Available from: https://housingevidence.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/12544_UoG_CaCHE_Covid_Homelessness_Report-Final.pdf (Accessed 20 April 2021).
28. Whitehead, C. et al. (2021) Homelessness and rough sleeping in the time of COVID-19. Available from: https://blogsmedia.lse.ac.uk/blogs.dir/119/files/2021/05/homelessness-reportfinal-1.pdf (Accessed 10 June 2021).
29. Shelter (2021) High Court rules councils can lawfully accommodate street homeless people with 'No Recourse to Public Funds' – will the government now provide proper guidance?. Available from: https://blog.shelter.org.uk/2021/03/high-court-rules-councils-can-lawfully-accommodate-street-homeless-people-with-no-recourse-to-public-funds-will-the-government-now-provide-proper-guidance/ (Accessed 28 June 2021).

> "NRPF asylum seekers were not directly accommodated by the LA." (survey respondent)

While the lifting of restrictions to support those with NRPF status was one of the most positive measures cited by respondents, the removal of these measures was also identified as one of the greatest areas of concern moving forward, particularly given the variety in local authority approaches exhibited over the course of Everyone In.

A changed funding landscape

The variation in relationships between voluntary organisations and their local authorities was also visible in discussions of funding opportunities. While survey respondents generally indicated that they were coming out of the pandemic more financially resilient (81.6%, 111), with enough funding to support people experiencing homelessness in their local area (84.7%, 86), respondents were unlikely to indicate that local authority funding was sufficient to provide the support needed in their local communities (45.3%, 58). Furthermore, only 40.3% (54) of respondents felt that government funding during the pandemic had been sufficient to meet the demand in need.

Figure 7. Respondents agreement with funding statements
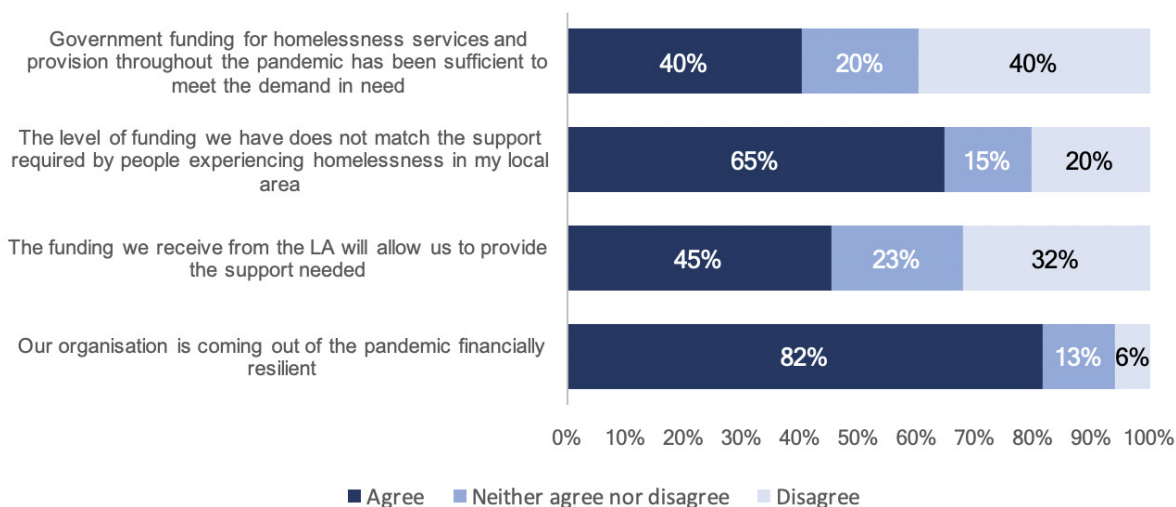
Over the course of the pandemic, funding opportunities from central government generally occurred as one-off payments that covered a short time (e.g., a few months or a year). Some of these, such as Next Steps Accommodation (NSAP) and the Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme (RSAP), specifically targeted the development of more long-term and supported accommodation.

Many within the sector described barriers in accessing these funding opportunities, which often had very short application windows and periods by which funding had to be spent, with some even having to return funding that they were unable to spend quickly enough. When asked,

most survey respondents either disagreed or were unsure if NSAP funding had helped to reduce homelessness in their local area (56.4%, 71). While one survey respondent specifically cited RSAP funding as having been useful in their local area, they qualified that this was only the case "where it is possible to meet the completion deadlines". One interviewee explained:

> "Practically everything that came in during the pandemic season had to be spent by the end of March and there was very little to apply for, for this financial year, so we're starting to feel the strain of it now, more so than we did during the pandemic itself." (WM HP)

While grant funding had increased for a slight majority of survey respondents over the past year (53.0%, 71), income from fundraising was more than twice as likely to decrease (42.5%, 57) than to increase (19.4%, 26). Health regulations around COVID-19 meant that events previously used to raise funds (e.g., sponsored walks or stalls at festivals) were no longer possible. However, funding from individual donors increased (32.3%, 43) for nearly twice as many organisations as those for whom it decreased (16.5%, 22), while increases in local authority commissioned contracts were nearly three times as likely to increase (26.1%, 35) as they were to decrease (9.7%, 13).

Figure 8. Changes to income for respondents over the last year
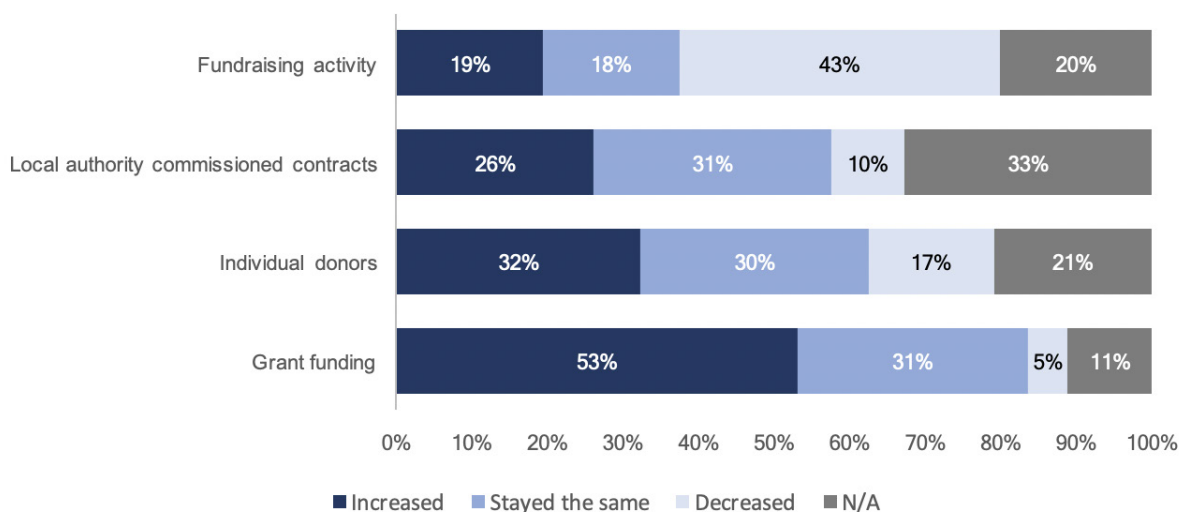
What was in many ways a period of greater abundance, with unprecedented levels of government support and individual donors keen to provide funds during a period of national and international emergency, has allowed organisations to expand to meet the increasing needs of the communities they serve. This has also helped at a time when many organisations experienced a decrease in the number of volunteers supporting their work (44.7%, 59), compared to only 16.7% (22) who experienced an increase.

Figure 9. Reported changes to size of workforce since the start of COVID-19
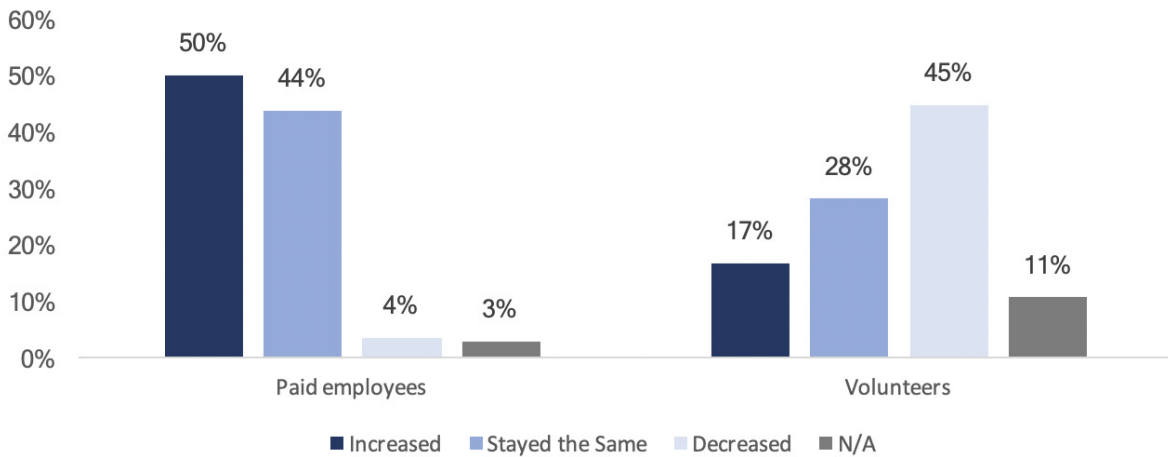
With 50.0% (71) of organisations increasing their paid workforce, organisations expressed concerns about their futures, as the emergency response is seen to end and government and individual support dry up.

> "[We had a] significant amount of unsolicited fundraising. We literally had people phoning us up and giving us money. … It will be a difficult next couple of years, I think, once it all settles down. We can see that already in the funding environment. … I think my biggest concern will probably be in two years' time, when things settle down." (NW HP2)

Continuing financial strain and uncertainty

When asked about the upcoming year, survey respondents provided a mixed response, with 36.8% (50) expecting their income to grow compared to pre-pandemic and 33.8% (46) expecting it to drop. Interview discussions and open response survey answers suggest that those working in the homelessness sector may be most concerned about the following period, potentially the next two to five years, when reserves have been more heavily depleted due to a lack of funding opportunities and the likely continuing high level of demand.

> "My main priority … is to get us through financially this year, without too much demand or strain on our reserves." (NW HP1)

As organisations and local authorities look to the future and strive to continue their strategic partnerships, concerns remain about difficulties in making long-term plans without long-term funding opportunities.

> "The MHCLG grant that we got … was fantastic and that really helped us grow our services, … but I guess what would then help more is if that was three-year funding

or five-year funding to then sustain that growth rather than just being a one-off. … Going back to these projects like ours where we've grown our services using that funding and actually saying, … we want to sustain that and sustain the positive outcomes for years to come. That'd be great." (NE RC)

A common theme amongst respondents was the challenges experienced trying to obtain and maintain high-quality staff when reliant upon precarious funding opportunities. Interviewees described challenges in hiring experienced staff on short-term contracts, while staff wellbeing could be negatively impacted by ongoing concerns about whether funding would be available to continue their contracts.

"The short termism of the funding means [a] lack of job security in our sector and although we've always prided ourselves on our staff retention, I can see this suffering. Staff burnout is an issue after the hardest of years." (survey respondent)

Organisations commonly described staff working incredibly hard over the pandemic to meet the changing and growing demand in provision, often without certainty of future employment. Interviewees also described the huge toll this uncertainty and constant scramble for funding had on their own wellbeing.

"I had a lot of sleepless nights at the time about, oh, how are we gonna fund these posts? And it was kind of like, well, how about we take a bit out of this pot and put it there and that would do for maybe two months and then we'd see what happens. … We need all our staff, so how do we keep them all? You know, how do we pay the bills at the end of the month?" (NW HP1)

Looking to the future, many expressed concerns that staff turnover would increase, while they continued to struggle to secure small, short-term pots of funding.

"There's far less emergency funding around now and, of course, the knock-on impact of all these trusts and foundations making all these COVID funds available is that they've depleted their resources for their normal funding rounds. … I think this year is gonna be a much harder fundraising ask than last year." (London HP)

"We're stepping into the unknown. … We're gonna have to keep finding that funding, because that demand keeps growing. … If funders say … this is over, we can move on, actually … we're still seeing the sort of devastating impacts of lockdown on people's lives and we're still seeing increased demand and still picking up the pieces from that." (NE RC)

"This year, I'm nowhere near as optimistic. … I think this year is going to be a lot harder. … People thought, let's get them through the year of the pandemic. … I

> think this year people are suffering from COVID fatigue. I think in terms of the donations that we're getting, those have really quietened off and I think people thought: Oh, we helped them last year, we don't need to help them this year. And there aren't the small pots of funding that were available. … We've been doing this for donkey's years and we're very good at it, but there aren't those pots of funding available this year and that's why I think that's going to be harder." (NW HP1)

> "My gut feel[ing] is that charities serving the homeless sector did quite well in FY20-21 provided they delivered, remained open and stepped up etc financially. The challenge will be in FY22-23 onwards as grants and the fallout of the pandemic becomes clearer." (survey respondent)

A focus on long-term, holistic solutions

In the face of continuing challenges and concerns about the future, however, the prevalent tone was one of persistent resiliency and a determination to find creative solutions to carry on the learnings and new approaches developed during the pandemic. As one interviewee observed: "We're an incredibly adaptable sector" (NW HP2).

Some housing providers have been able to respond to the challenge of continuing financial uncertainty by creating a financially sustainable model (see Chapter 6 in <u>Homelessness Provision for the Future</u>), as one interviewee explained:

> "There's an element to which our model and our approach becomes financially self-sufficient as it grows." (NE RC)

For others where this not an option, the future remains more uncertain and opportunities to respond to emergent needs remain more limited.

> "We were approached recently by a private organisation, and they wanted to open a project for us and … we would take up the liability of the lease. … This year, I wouldn't dream of taking on a project like that and recommending it to the Trustees and taking on liability like that. I think it's curtailed our creativity, which is for us is really hard, because we are very innovative in what we do here." (NW HP1)

In the face of these challenges, respondents commonly expressed their concerns about losing all that had been gained. Organisations need to juggle providing sustained, strategic provision that applies learnings from before and during the pandemic with the reality that they have few or no guarantees for future funding. One prominent theme was around the clear impact of housing (almost) everyone and a feeling that the sector could not forget what it had learned and return to old ways of working that many now feel are inadequate or even counter-productive to the goal

of ending homelessness in England, including the over-reliance on communal and temporary accommodation.

> "[We] just went to people and said, ... 'Why aren't you inside?' And they just basically said they didn't want to come into hostels and if they had different places, they would." (WM RC)

Everyone In presented a unique opportunity to replace all communal, temporary housing with private accommodation. The simple provision of housing could be transformative and, for some, the opportunity to live in safe, clean, private housing was an experience they had never had or not for some time.

> "Actually, the starting point for solving ... rough sleeping in particular, but homelessness generally, is housing. ... We're trying to move away, as much as possible away from short-term, temporary accommodation. ... Even if you say, 'We've got you', people still don't believe it until they think: Actually, I won't have to move again." (NW HP1)

While the shift many described from temporary housing was a key part of the look toward a long-term, holistic solution, there was also the widespread reality that not all clients had thrived in Everyone In accommodation. Through this the sector embraced the need to provide clients with opportunities for meaningful activities and to find purpose, while ensuring access to necessary support services and socialisation, particularly for those with multiple and complex needs (see Chapter 4 in Homelessness Provision for the Future).

> "There's no simple fix of just giving someone somewhere to live. Actually, they need support and community and activity around them. ... We can't risk compromising on that. ... There is actually a very high cost to reducing mental health services to phone calls. ... There's a high cost to taking away the volunteering and the activities that ... vulnerable people are trying to engage with ... and we need to sort of prioritise that." (NE RC)

One of the potential avenues for moving forward expressed by many was a focus on Housing First approaches, where individuals with more complex needs would have access to long-term housing and support. This was also the most popular area for survey respondents to indicate they had newly started providing provision since the pandemic (8.4%, 9) (see Figure 1, p. 7). However, funding and a lack of accommodation remained prominent issues in being able to deliver long-term, holistic approaches to supporting those at risk of or experiencing homelessness. One interviewee described the focus on short-term KPIs and outputs in funding applications and reporting as prohibitive of engaging in preventative and long-term work, where impacts could take longer to be visible.

The homelessness sector coming out of the pandemic faces a crossroads. On one side, many within the voluntary sector and local authorities have seen the impact of their enormous efforts to create more holistic, long-term homelessness provision for everyone, regardless of legal status and building on streamlined, joined-up approaches. However, the continuation and expansion of this vision is hampered by short-term funding focused on rough sleeping, rather than homelessness more broadly, in conjunction with a continuing lack of affordable, safe housing.

Chapter 5
A precarious but resilient sector

The findings outlined in this report present the story of a sector accustomed to working in unrelenting uncertainty and extreme adversity to address complex, challenging situations and needs. Drawing on their experience and resilience, the sector was able to showcase its talents and skills throughout the pandemic, adapting and expanding quickly to meet the many challenges over the past year and a half.

Yet, moving forward, the sector may be in a more precarious position than seen in recent history. As they continue to address growing and changing needs, many have also come out of the pandemic with the opportunity to think more strategically about what a preventative and long-term (rather than emergency) approach to ending homelessness in England truly looks like. Without greater security in the ability to fund staff and services, however, the sector will continue to struggle to meet the complex, long-term needs of clients and truly transform the state of homelessness in England.

Concerns and uncertainty about the future

While the experiences of the pandemic presented many new and unfamiliar challenges, having to quickly adapt to an emergency was a familiar experience for many.

> "We were very reactive, but that's because we are structured in a way that we can be like that anyway. We are always set up for [a] worst-case scenario and I think when COVID did hit us, because of the way all our projects are structured and staffed, that then that made it easier for us." (NW HP1)

Moving forward, though, significant uncertainty remains, particularly for those who were housed and supported through the pandemic under the Everyone In provision. As of January 2021, 11,263 people still remained in emergency accommodation, the majority of whom have no recourse to public funds or do not possess a statutory duty to housing.[30] For them, the end of the pandemic likely means the end of safe, secure housing.

> "There is a coming cliff edge for destitute asylum seekers who have NRPF. If and when the home office evict them from "everyone in accommodation", ... there is likely to be a sudden wave of people forced into street homelessness with NRPF, no right to work, and no accommodation options. The voluntary sector does not have capacity to deal with a sudden surge in numbers. In [our city], we have no idea how many people in the Home Office hotel accommodation have been refused asylum and are likely to be evicted, which makes it impossible to plan for their eviction." (survey respondent)

The projected increase in need, potentially exacerbated by the end of government support through such measures as the pause on evictions (now ended as of 1 June 2021) and the furlough scheme in September, could mean that, at a time when many think the need for measures to address the impact of the pandemic has passed, the homelessness sector faces a growing need in those at risk of homelessness.

> "We have a ticking time bomb of homelessness. A tsunami of people." (survey respondent)

> "Furlough and [the] pause on rent evictions [have] kept many from being homeless, but as these initiatives unwind, the real situation is yet to be evident. These initiatives are no more than deferring the problem until a later date rather than actually solving an underlying problem." (survey respondent)

When asked about particular groups they were concerned about going forward, survey respondents were most likely to refer to those with NRPF status (27.3%, 18), followed by women and those facing eviction (15.2%, 10 for each), young people and children (12.1%, 8) and those with mental ill health (9.1%, 6). However, the huge range in additional responses reflects the enormous diversity within communities at risk of or experiencing homelessness, particularly as we move forward post-pandemic. These included those who have experienced domestic violence or assault or with experience of the criminal justice system (7.6%, 5 for each), from the EU or with complex needs (6.1%, 4 for each), a history of substance misuse (4.6%, 3) and more. Four respondents (6.1%) stated that they are concerned about all people at risk of homelessness, as one person explained:

> "Being honest, all of them- I feel like it's going to take time for the true effects of COVID to be felt."

30. Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government (2020) Coronavirus (COVID-19) emergency accommodation survey data: January 2021

**Figure 10. Respondents' agreement with statements on
government's work to end rough sleeping**
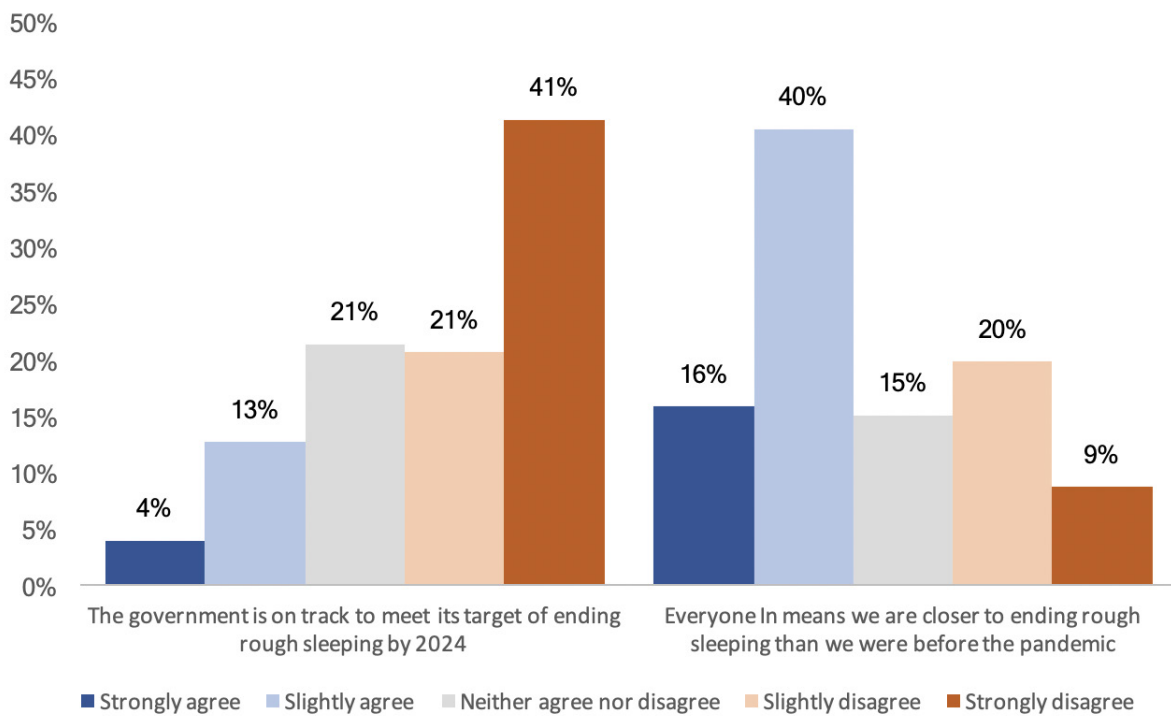
Survey respondents were extremely unlikely to agree that the government is on track to meet its target of ending rough sleeping by 2024 (16.7%, 21), though remained optimistic about the potential of Everyone In, with 56.4% (71) agreeing that the intervention means that we are closer to ending rough sleeping than we were pre-pandemic. Only 28.5% (36) disagreed with this statement. Similar findings have also been found by the Frontline Network's recent research, with 68% of frontline workers agreeing that the government's commitment to preventing and relieving homelessness had increased since the pandemic, while only 6% felt confident in the government's response to homelessness prevention and relief going forward.[31]

Unrelenting optimism

Despite the challenges and concerns about staff experiencing extreme trauma and burnout, many within the sector have been able to maintain a sense of optimism and hope for the future. When asked how they felt about the future, one interviewee simply responded: "Really positive" (WM RC).

> "The biggest thing I'll take out of [this experience]: You can do it! I know lots of people got quite cynical and I think that was right, saying Everyone In didn't solve rough sleeping and didn't solve homelessness. No, it didn't, … but, actually, in the last few months we've recognised that if you put a public safety net that reduces the need of rough sleeping than you can by and large break that cycle of homelessness. So, I'm fairly optimistic. But, how we can build on it is gonna be a test, given we're still reliant on quite short-term funding." (NW HP2)

In the survey, respondents generally expressed a high level of confidence not only in their own abilities, but in their aptitude for continued learning and growth. More than three-quarters of respondents (85.3%, 140) felt that their organisations have the necessary skills to support people experiencing homelessness, while 89.2% (133) felt that they could access the necessary training to continue this work. Some described the pandemic as an opportunity not only for local learning, but for greater learning across the sector.

In spite of the many challenges faced by the sector during the pandemic, there have been incredible opportunities for learning, collaboration and refocusing for the future. While the long-term solutions are still being refined and reworked, the question of whether homelessness in England can end has largely been answered.

> "It's possible. In a matter of weeks, people worked together to get everyone in. If that's possible, it can happen another way." (survey respondent)
>
> "Even through this, we've done it and after this we'll do it and we'll continue to do it, because it's what we do. We do what it says on the tin! … And that's what I'm optimistic about. … We'll get through this. We make such a massive difference in [our clients'] lives and, sometimes, it's only that, but sometimes that's enough. So, I'm eternally optimistic." (NW HP1)
>
> "We've learned to adapt. We've learned to live in times of uncertainty, … so, yeah, bring it on! But, … it's having an eye on the long-term funding, making sure we're as robust as possible. Yeah, I'd like to have more confidence in where that money's coming from." (NE RC)

31.   Marshall, Rachel. (2021) Annual Frontline Worker Survey 2020. The Frontline Network. Available from: https://www.frontlinenetwork.org.uk/media/2472/annual-frontline-worker-survey-2020-full-report.pdf (Accessed 6 August 2021).

Chapter 6
Conclusions

COVID-19 has been an international tragedy of incredible proportion. At the same time, the early and extensive action taken both by central and local government in supporting those who were rough sleeping not only saved hundreds of lives, it gave the sector an opportunity to support and house tens of thousands of people in a way that may not have otherwise been possible.

Over fifteen months, the sector experienced unprecedented transformation, housing nearly everyone who was at risk of rough sleeping in a matter of days, before then rapidly transitioning from emergency to temporary to long-term provision. What is vital from this period is that the lessons and opportunities gained are not lost and that organisations can enact key learnings to provide homelessness provision that is not only suitable for today, but that is able to achieve the government's goals of ending rough sleeping by 2024.

Actions taken by central and local governments demonstrated the potential of homelessness provision in England, with those in the sector widely viewing many policies and programmes to reduce rough sleeping positively, particularly Everyone In and the pause on evictions. Through this opportunity, the sector found ways to act with creativity and flexibility to establish, expand and adapt services to meet clients' ongoing and emergent needs, aiming to help people regain their independence and find purpose and meaning in their lives.

The national focus on rough sleeping also enabled opportunities to streamline provision across health, mental health, substance misuse, criminal justice and other areas of provision. Joined-up ways of working through new and expanded partnerships enabled the sector to address the underlying causes of homelessness and provide tailored approaches to meet individual needs and circumstance through timely, streamlined provision.

In addition to the opportunity to rethink and reprioritise, the pandemic has also been an opportunity to reflect on the challenges inherent in the use of short-term provision to support and house individuals throughout their lifetime. As of January 2021, 11,263 people still remained in emergency accommodation, the majority of whom have no recourse to public funds or do not possess a statutory duty to housing.[32] They are likely to be left destitute once emergency government provision ends.

While organisations have worked incredibly hard to secure Settled and Pre-settled status for many EU citizens, the barriers in submitting these applications for those without the necessary legal documents, combined with the additional challenges presented by the pandemic, have meant that many have not been able to do so. Staff members who have built relationships with individuals for more than a year will have no choice but to shut their doors on them once the pandemic officially ends. In support of previous findings,[33] this research demonstrates the

incompatibility of NRPF regulations and the government's goal of ending rough sleeping by 2024.

Many across the sector have expanded to meet increasing needs, while working diligently to improve and tailor services to changing client populations and pandemic-related impacts. Nonetheless, without the ability to obtain a sufficient supply of affordable housing and without access to long-term funding opportunities, organisations will likely struggle to continue meeting clients' needs, particularly as we have yet to see the full impact of COVID-19.

However, across the homelessness sector there is hope: hope that we have seen that we can do better and the knowledge that, whatever barriers exist, we will continue to do better in the future for our clients.

32. Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government (2020) Coronavirus (COVID-19) emergency accommodation survey data: January 2021
33. e.g. House of Commons (2021) Protecting the homeless and the private rented sector: MHCLG's response to Covid-19. Available from: https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/5342/documents/53217/default/ (Accessed 15 May 2021).

Full survey text and response frequencies

1.   Please confirm that you have read and agree to the information on this page.

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	99.52%	206
No	0.48%	1
	Answered	207
	Skipped	0

2.   What is the name of your organisation? [Open Response]

Answered	151
Skipped	56

3.   What is your role within the organisation?

Answer Choices	Responses	
Frontline Worker	17.31%	27
Operational manager or supervisor	18.59%	29
Director or CEO	64.10%	100
	Answered	156
	Skipped	51

3.   Where are you based?[34]

Answer Choices	Responses	
All England	6.33%	10
North East	2.53%	4
North West	11.39%	18
Yorkshire and the Humber	11.39%	18
East Midlands	6.33%	10
West Midlands	6.96%	11
East of England	9.49%	15
London	17.09%	27
South East	20.25%	32
South West	13.29%	21
	Answered	158
	Skipped	49

34.   Some organisations work across multiple regions, though national organisations are not included in proportions representing each region.

5. **What is the main or primary purpose of your organisation (e.g. supported accommodation, day centre, night shelter, etc.)? [Open response]**

Answered	155
Skipped	52

6. **What are the key areas of support you provide and did you provide this prior to the COVID-19 pandemic?**

	Yes - provide since pre-March 2020		Yes - since March 2020		No - don't currently provide		Total
Accommodation	81.95%	109	3.01%	4	15.04%	20	133
Housing advice and support	92.81%	129	2.16%	3	5.04%	7	139
Welfare advice	85.71%	114	2.26%	3	12.03%	16	133
Drug and alcohol advice and support	73.02%	92	3.97%	5	23.02%	29	126
Mental health advice and support	78.95%	105	2.26%	3	18.80%	25	133
Debt advice and support	75.40%	95	3.17%	4	21.43%	27	126
Education and training	71.79%	84	3.42%	4	24.79%	29	117
Employment	61.47%	67	1.83%	2	36.70%	40	109
Supporting with basic needs (e.g. food, hygiene, etc.)	90.00%	126	5.71%	8	4.29%	6	140
Immigration advice and support	43.56%	44	2.97%	3	53.47%	54	101
Housing First	34.58%	37	8.41%	9	57.01%	61	107
Outreach	67.26%	76	7.08%	8	25.66%	29	113
Other	65.67%	44	5.97%	4	28.36%	19	67
Please describe any other services indicated above:							54
						Answered	150
						Skipped	57

7. **Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, how has the size of your organisation changed?**

	Increased		Stayed the same		Decreased		Not applicable		Total
Paid employees	50.00%	71	43.66%	62	3.52%	5	2.82%	4	142
Volunteers	16.67%	22	28.03%	37	44.70%	59	10.61%	14	132
							Answered		146
							Skipped		61

8. Thinking about your organisation's workforce, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

Strongly agree		Slightly agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Slightly disagree		Strongly disagree		Total
We have the necessary skills to give people experiencing homelessness the support they need										
76.19%	112	19.05%	28	1.36%	2	2.72%	4	0.68%	1	147
We can access the necessary training to ensure we can best support people experiencing homelessness										
56.85%	83	34.25%	50	5.48%	8	2.74%	4	0.68%	1	146
								Answered		146
								Skipped		61

9. Looking ahead over the next year, are there any particular areas of training and development that you anticipate needing across your organisation?

Answered	96
Skipped	111

10. Over the last year, has the level of support you are providing to people experiencing homelessness changed?

Answer Choices	Responses	
Increased	71.74%	99
Stayed the same	19.57%	27
Decreased	8.70%	12
	Answered	138
	Skipped	69

11. And over the last year has the income you receive from any of the below sources changed?

	Increased		Stayed the same		Decreased		Not applicable		Total
Local authority commissioned contracts	26.12%	35	31.34%	42	9.70%	13	32.84%	44	134
Grant funding	52.99%	71	30.60%	41	5.22%	7	11.19%	15	134
Individual donors	32.33%	43	30.08%	40	16.54%	22	21.05%	28	133
Fundraising activity	19.40%	26	17.91%	24	42.54%	57	20.15%	27	134
Other (please specify)	19.35%	12	17.74%	11	11.29%	7	51.61%	32	62
Please describe any other income streams indicated above:									39
							Answered		137
							Skipped		70

12. Thinking ahead over the next financial year, which of the following statements best applies to your organisation?

Answer Choices	Responses	
We are expecting our income to grow compared to pre-COVID levels	36.76%	50
We are not expecting our income to change compared to pre-COVID levels	29.41%	40
We are expecting to see a slight drop in income compared to pre-COVID levels	25.00%	34
We are expecting to see a significant drop in income compared to pre-COVID levels	8.82%	12
	Answered	138
	Skipped	69

13. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

Strongly agree		Slightly agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Slightly disagree		Strongly disagree		Total
Our organisation is coming out of the pandemic financially resilient										
46.32%	63	35.29%	48	12.50%	17	5.88%	8	0.00%	0	136
The funding we receive from the LA will allow us to provide the support needed										
14.84%	19	30.47%	39	22.66%	29	13.28%	17	18.75%	24	128
The level of funding we have does not match the support required by people experiencing homelessness in my local area										
36.09%	48	28.57%	38	15.04%	20	15.04%	20	5.26%	7	133
Government funding for homelessness services and provision throughout the pandemic has been sufficient to meet the demand in need										
8.96%	12	31.34%	42	20.15%	27	24.63%	33	14.93%	20	134
								Answered		137
								Skipped		70

14. Have you seen a change in the number of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness accessing your services?

	Increased		Stayed the same		Decreased		Total
Since the start of the pandemic	60.00%	81	21.48%	29	18.52%	25	135
Since the end of March, 2021	59.26%	80	34.07%	46	6.67%	9	135
					Answered		137
					Skipped		70

15. And have you seen changes in the number of people experiencing homelessness amongst the following groups?

	Increased		Stayed the same		Decreased		Not applicable		Total
Young people (18 – 24)	49.61%	63	39.37%	50	4.72%	6	6.30%	8	127
People fleeing domestic abuse	53.54%	68	31.50%	40	2.36%	3	12.60%	16	127
Migrants with NRPF	34.43%	42	20.49%	25	7.38%	9	37.70%	46	122
EEA nationals (with any EUSS)	25.42%	30	28.81%	34	9.32%	11	36.44%	43	118
People experiencing homelessness for the first time	58.02%	76	35.11%	46	3.82%	5	3.05%	4	131
People who recently lost their job	57.94%	73	36.51%	46	1.59%	2	3.97%	5	126
People currently in low paid jobs including zero hours contracts	41.46%	51	47.15%	58	3.25%	4	8.13%	10	123
Women	38.84%	47	50.41%	61	5.79%	7	4.96%	6	121
Black, Asian and Minority Ethic people	22.95%	28	66.39%	81	2.46%	3	8.20%	10	122
LGBTQIA+ people	18.33%	22	65.83%	79	3.33%	4	12.50%	15	120
People recently discharged from hospital	31.15%	38	49.18%	60	4.92%	6	14.75%	18	122
Prison leavers / ex-offenders	40.50%	49	43.80%	53	4.13%	5	11.57%	14	121
							Answered		132
							Skipped		75

16. Are there any particular groups that you are worried about? [Open Response]

Answered	96
Skipped	111

17. **And over the last year have you seen any change in the support needs of the people who access your service?**

	Increased		Stayed the same		Decreased		Not applicable		Total
Mental health	90.84%	119	6.87%	9	0.76%	1	1.53%	2	131
Drug and/or alcohol	69.23%	90	27.69%	36	1.54%	2	1.54%	2	130
Digital exclusion, including lack of digital technology and access to internet	65.12%	84	27.91%	36	3.88%	5	3.10%	4	129
Basic needs, e.g. food or hygiene	74.42%	96	22.48%	29	2.33%	3	0.78%	1	129
Immigration support – EUSS	36.21%	42	32.76%	38	2.59%	3	28.45%	33	116
Debt	57.94%	73	38.10%	48	0.79%	1	3.17%	4	126
Rent arrears	57.48%	73	33.86%	43	2.36%	3	6.30%	8	127
Other (please specify)	22.86%	8	5.71%	2	0.00%	0	71.43%	25	35
Please describe any other support needs indicated above:									17
							Answered		131
							Skipped		76

Homeless Link - Working together: the homelessness sector's path beyond COVID

18. **To what extend do you agree that the following interventions have helped to reduce homelessness in your local area?**

Strongly agree		Slightly agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Slightly disagree		Strongly disagree		Total
Everyone In										
62.99%	80	31.50%	40	4.72%	6	0.00%	0	0.79%	1	127
Increasing LHA rates to the 30th percentile										
26.77%	34	40.94%	52	25.98%	33	2.36%	3	3.94%	5	127
Pause on evictions										
53.49%	69	34.11%	44	10.08%	13	1.55%	2	0.78%	1	129
£20 UC uplift in Universal Credit										
35.38%	46	32.31%	42	23.85%	31	3.85%	5	4.62%	6	130
Exemption from the Shared Accommodation Rate to under 25s										
29.37%	37	28.57%	36	35.71%	45	3.17%	4	3.17%	4	126
Pause on evictions from asylum accommodation										
40.32%	50	20.16%	25	34.68%	43	1.61%	2	3.23%	4	124
Furlough										
46.03%	58	30.95%	39	16.67%	21	5.56%	7	0.79%	1	126
Lifting of NRPF restrictions to support people through Everyone In										
58.91%	76	19.38%	25	19.38%	25	0.78%	1	1.55%	2	129
The closure of shelters and other forms of communal accommodation										
12.60%	16	15.75%	20	29.13%	37	17.32%	22	25.20%	32	127
Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP) funding										
22.22%	28	21.43%	27	46.83%	59	3.97%	5	5.56%	7	126
Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) funding										
46.51%	60	24.03%	31	26.36%	34	1.55%	2	1.55%	2	129
								Answered		133
								Skipped		74

19. **Are there any of the above interventions that you think have had a particular impact on homelessness in your area?**

Answered	47
Skipped	160

20. **And since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic have you seen any changes in the following:**

	Increased		Stayed the same		Decreased		Total
Local partnership working	69.23%	90	16.15%	21	14.62%	19	130
Collaboration with social care services	25.00%	32	54.69%	70	20.31%	26	128
Collaboration with mental health services	30.23%	39	40.31%	52	29.46%	38	129
Collaboration with hospitals	17.46%	22	69.84%	88	12.70%	16	126
Collaboration with primary care services	36.43%	47	50.39%	65	13.18%	17	129
Partnership between local authorities and VCS	53.23%	66	35.48%	44	11.29%	14	124
Central government's engagement with local areas	39.84%	49	47.97%	59	12.20%	15	123
					Answered		137
					Skipped		70

21. **Are there any areas of practice in your local area that you think have improved during or because of the COVID-19 pandemic? Do you think these ways of working will continue going forward?**

Answered	98
Skipped	109

22. **And are there any areas that you think have got worse?**

Answered	89
Skipped	118

23. **Looking ahead – what do you see as the biggest opportunities to end rough sleeping and homelessness in your local area?**

Answered	100
Skipped	107

24. **What do you see as your biggest challenges to end rough sleeping and homelessness in your local area?**

Answered	106
Skipped	101

18. **To what extend do you agree that the following interventions have helped to reduce homelessness in your local area?**

Strongly agree		Slightly agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Slightly disagree		Strongly disagree		Total
The government is on track to meet its target of ending rough sleeping by 2024										
3.97%	5	12.70%	16	21.43%	27	20.63%	26	41.27%	52	126
Everyone In means we are closer to ending rough sleeping than we were before the pandemic										
15.87%	20	40.48%	51	15.08%	19	19.84%	25	8.73%	11	126
								Answered		126
								Skipped		81

26. **Is there anything you think we should know about, but haven't had a chance to say yet?**

Answered	43
Skipped	164

27. **Based on your answers above, Homeless Link may want to follow-up with you to understand more about your organisation and the work you've been doing. If you would be happy for Homeless Link to contact you about this, please provide your contact details below.**

Answer Choices	Responses	
Name:	100.00%	107
Email:	100.00%	107
Phone:	88.79%	95
	Answered	107
	Skipped	100

homeless link

About Us

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