A fair deal

Exploring fairness in social enterprises working with people experiencing homelessness

Research report

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Executive summary

The Fairness in Enterprise research project set out to explore how organisations that engage people experiencing homelessness in charitable trading activities can ensure that the way they operate is fair for all involved. The project worked closely with nine diverse social enterprises located across England and through a range of qualitative research methods engaged 108 participants currently involved in those enterprises or in other charitable trading. It also involved an extensive review of existing literature related to the topic and wider desk-based research.

The research revealed how social enterprises are supporting people in their move away from homelessness, often within a challenging context. Participants demonstrated an awareness of the risks of unfairness in the way they work and revealed a range of tensions that can arise in these settings. To counter this, enterprises are taking considered and proactive steps to maintain fairness and the study revealed a range of good practice.

The study findings are summarised below:

1. **Social enterprise is increasingly being used as a tool to address homelessness and wider inequality in society.**

    a. Social enterprises, particularly those offering work-based programmes, are becoming more prevalent within the UK.

    b. Social goals and business objectives are from the outset seen as competing factors; however, many of the enterprises are working to ensure that these are well aligned.

    c. Contextual factors, including austerity, increased cost of living, welfare benefits and Covid-19, have all impacted on how enterprises operate and support participants on their journeys away from homelessness.

    d. Social enterprise can work as a catalyst for supporting people on their journeys away from homelessness in the following ways:
        • developing connectedness with peers, enterprise staff, the community, customers and potential employers
        • providing activities through which participants can find structure, fill their time and understand the value of their time

- creating pathways that help participants see what opportunities are available in work and wider society
- offering access to work, participants receiving pay and subsequent freedom from benefits.

e. Social enterprises are able to achieve the above outcomes by offering participants an alternative engagement offer to traditional support work. This is due to the types of activities participants engage in, how these facilitate the creation of honest, open relationships, and the potential to work in a more holistic way due to freedom from statutory funding sources.

2. Social enterprises are likely to face tensions around fairness, which needs to be acknowledged and managed. These tensions are focused on four areas.

a. Remuneration and defining working conditions:
- How participants engage in an enterprise, whether as employees, volunteers or in other unpaid ways, can lead to tension. For many enterprises, particularly those in their infancy, there is a reliance on unpaid roles due to resource implications. Working with volunteers can also offer a meaningful opportunity to those not in a position to seek employment. In this study we found solid consideration of this and good practice in avoiding unfairness and having clarity in roles and offers for participants.
- How rates of pay are set can be an area of tension for enterprises, particularly when pay is below market rates. Tensions can also arise around how hours are allocated, particularly when enterprises use a sessional or shift-based model of employment, making planning difficult and having a knock-on effect on welfare benefits.
- Being proactive and generous in offering opportunities, out-of-pocket expenses and other benefits is an important step towards making sure participants feel valued. Due to a complex and ever-changing benefits system, working with people in receipt of benefits is a challenging but crucial consideration.
- Feelings of indebtedness can mean participants feel obliged and beholden to organisations. Within this research participants shared examples of when this had led to compliance. All the enterprises in the study were aware of both the benefits and dangers of feelings of connection, power imbalances and compliance, and were taking practical and relational steps to manage these.

b. Transitions into, within, and onward from enterprise:
- Ensuring that participants find the right opportunity and enterprises find people with the right attributes is mutually beneficial. Ensuring clarity of offer and investing in recruitment and induction processes were highlighted as key to this.
- When participants move between roles in an organisation, particularly between unpaid and paid roles, or from support relationships to engaging in trading, tensions can emerge when expectations are not clear and relationships are not psychologically re-contracted.

- A number of push-and-pull factors are at play that can prevent people from moving on from enterprises and relate to fairness. These include reliance on or investment in participants from an organisation and participants feeling indebted to an organisation.

c. The way participants are supported to engage in enterprise and to progress:
   - Defining how support is provided, how much, who can access it and who delivers it can lead to challenges, particularly when the support on offer is not clearly communicated to participants.
   - A clearly articulated approach to support that takes into consideration the experience of homelessness and related traumas was greatly valued by participants. Enterprises employed a range of different theoretical approaches, including person-centred, psychologically (or trauma) informed environments and recovery models.
   - Participants stressed the need to create supportive environments that nurture, develop and challenge participants.
   - Challenges can arise when practical or line-management support and support around personal and circumstantial issues overlap. This is particularly the case in smaller enterprises. Some enterprises have addressed this by creating distinctions in these functions; however, this could also bring organisational tensions.
   - Decisions on how support is distributed are often based on need, but for those with lower requirements who are likely to be able to contribute more, seeing another participant receiving more support can feel unfair. Maintaining confidentiality around people's needs is essential but can contribute to this challenge. Good practice was identified as having transparency in the support offer and how it can be accessed.
   - The study identified excellent examples of support provided voluntarily by either peers or mentors. The reliance on voluntary support, rather than as a part of a wider support function, can cause volunteers to feel exploited and under undue pressure, while participants do not get the support that they need.

d. Communications, sharing stories and engaging with systems change:
   - Among participating enterprises there was a strong 'anti-pity marketing' sentiment and determination for the quality of goods and services produced to be as good (preferably better) than the competition.
   - Using participant stories in a safe and impactful way was a key concern for many enterprises that participated. When stories are shared, there is a risk of further embedding stigma and exploitation. Good practice around sharing stories focuses on ensuring participants are well informed, supported and comfortable to do so. Even then, some participants can feel obliged to share their stories and reported some damaging results. A key

distinction highlighted in the research is whether the stories are used for financial gain or as a vehicle to create change.

- Through day-to-day interactions with members of the public and wider advocacy and systems-change work, social enterprise can challenge negative perceptions and drive a reassessment of how people experiencing homelessness are valued. It can also help participants to reframe their experience and to see value in themselves.

3. **Managing tensions associated with social enterprise requires organisational policies, a proactive working culture and clear, collaborative decision-making processes. In all cases these should be underpinned with honesty, consistency and transparency.**

a. Across the social enterprises involved in the research, a core approach to avoiding unfairness included formal and informal mechanisms for feedback, scrutiny and sharing decision making. Robust information from participants, acted on in a transparent way, can avoid feelings of unfairness.

b. Within enterprises there is often an individual, or small group of key people, who are managing tensions and other concerns, described by participants as "shock absorbers". These people carry the pressures of business activity alongside the personal needs of volunteers and staff and are often caught in the middle of competing priorities and interests. Participants shared the impact this can have on staff wellbeing and the need for the 'shock' to be absorbed more widely across the enterprise.

c. To maintain fairness in enterprise, the principles of transparency, honesty and consistency should be maintained. These principles transcend all stakeholder groups, starting with the participants, ensuring offers, expectations and ways of working with people are built on these principles.

d. Behind the potential to shift perspectives, practice and wider systems, and to maintain fairness while doing so, is a clear understanding by enterprises of what homelessness is, how to respond to it, and how to create change. Having a clearly articulated theory of change and clear values and beliefs were identified as crucial by participants.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been developed based on the findings of the research and with the input of people working in and around social enterprise who participated in this study. Although there is huge variation in how enterprises work, there is a need to use fairness as a lens to examine policy and practice, and to actively address inevitable tensions on an ongoing basis. We offer recommendations for social enterprises specifically, as well as for funders and commissioners. For those targeted at social enterprises, the recommendations will not be applicable to all organisations or settings, and may not be achievable within the means and capacity of some. Instead, they are to be considered as good practice steps that can be adopted based on what can be reasonably achieved within the enterprise in question.

Recommendations for social enterprises

Setting types of engagement, remuneration and defining working conditions

1. Volunteer roles should be developed to ensure a meaningful experience for volunteers. They should offer the flexibility for participants to develop individual interests and skills.
2. Wherever possible unpaid roles should add value and business activities should not be dependent on individual volunteers. Be mindful of the risks of job substitution by an unpaid role and avoid this when forming roles.
3. Clearly set out what participants will get in return for their contributions. This may be payment for time in the case of paid roles; however, for all types of engagement there may be other benefits participants can expect to get from being involved including training, support, bursaries and access to events and activities.
4. Avoid 'partially-paid' roles – where one person is doing a paid role and a voluntary role in the same organisation at the same time.
5. Individuals whether in paid or unpaid roles should proactively be given out-of-pocket expenses. Engagement should never cost participants money.
6. Create approaches to help participants develop confidence and assertiveness. This can counterbalance feeling beholden to organisations and the resultant risk of compliance identified in the research.
7. Offer a variety of ways for participants to engage in activities, including events,

travel, meeting informally, training sessions and creative workshops, while being mindful of participants taking on too much, particularly if they are in early stages of recovery.

Managing transitions into, through and onwards from the enterprise

8. Ensure clarity on expectations and what is on offer to participants. Social enterprises can communicate this in writing or verbally, checking throughout engagement that the offer, expectations and associated implications are understood.

9. Offer enhanced recruitment processes that have opportunities for people to get to know each other before a commitment is made, going beyond written role descriptions and interviews. Examples include recruitment days, group activities, taster sessions and informal learning experiences.

10. Use a thorough involved induction process, including established processes where engagement does not work out. There should be an emphasis on getting to know the person, finding out their transferable skills, and helping them feel welcome and connected.

11. Acknowledge and take steps to manage the tensions involved in changing roles and relationships, including from being a service user to a volunteer or from being a volunteer to being a paid employee.

12. Offer a range of opportunities to try out different roles, engage in the wider community, build skills and confidence, and as a window into a new world of possibilities.

13. Provide participants with supervision and formal processes for progression, acknowledging internal and external progression routes that normalise moving on without pressure and deal with potential feelings of abandonment and indebtedness.

14. Support participants to find employment that suits individual circumstance and preferences and offers fair pay and stability. Where possible enterprises can play a brokering role in finding employment opportunities for their participants and playing an active and ongoing role in supporting employers and employees.

15. Articulate how engagement with participants tapers off over time after moving on. Depending on capacity ongoing support could be more or less formal/extensive but must be transparent and consistent.

Providing adequate and appropriate support

16. Design support that compliments the model of the enterprise and responds to how participants engage in activities. At a minimum it should allow participants to engage while supporting them with any consequences of engagement, e.g. the impact of involvement on welfare benefits.

17. Develop environments of acceptance and belonging underpinned by a framework that is person centred, psychologically (and/or trauma) informed or based on a recovery model.

18. Offer voluntary support including from peers and mentors as supplementary and complementary, rather than as an alternative to it being delivered by paid workers.

19. Whether the model of support delivery splits line management and support functions within the organisation or keeps them together, there should be acknowledgement of the potential

limitations of either approach. If there is a split, workers should mediate the tensions, rather than the tensions being mediated through the person with lived experience of homelessness.

Communicating and creating systems change

20. Recognise that while participants' stories can be powerful and some will be keen to share them, using them can be exploitative and retraumatising. Participants' decisions to share their stories should be fully informed and supported and participants should be counselled on the longer-term impact of their story being made public. There should also be strict time limits for how long an organisation uses a story and the owner of the story should have control over its use.

21. Work with partners and the community to challenge perceptions of people who have experienced homelessness and recognise the value people with experience of homelessness bring to society. Social enterprises should look for creative approaches to expressing experience that are of benefit to the individuals involved.

22. Engage with local and national forums and initiatives that focus on systems change so that insights from enterprise can be used towards improving policy and practice.

Decision making and defining models

23. Business and social goals should align in business planning wherever possible. On an ongoing basis, clarity is needed in decision making on the degree to which decisions would further business or social goals. Where conflicts arise, they need to be reflected upon regularly and can be used as a framework to support organisational decision making.

24. Develop a theory of change that defines what the enterprise intends to achieve for participants individually and in terms of wider systems change. This should include an articulation of what the enterprise's conceptualisation of homelessness is, how it is using individuals' experience of homelessness and how its work responds to it.

25. The involvement of participants in decision making and coproduction should be embraced and underpinned by clear and transparent governance. Having consistent and structured approaches to ensure that information is shared, collected and utilised should be a priority.

26. Social enterprises should consider having some ongoing and periodic independent scrutiny to audit how day-to-day and strategic decisions are made, how the organisation responds to external factors and the degree to which the enterprise has created an environment that promotes honest and open communication.

Supporting staff wellbeing

27. Recognise that managing tensions can place a burden on staff, particularly those in key roles and ensure they are not overburdened. Providing spaces for debriefing and reflective practice for all staff is a step towards this.
28. Ensure staff know the boundaries of their role. Limit the number of people each person is responsible for and reduce the number of dynamics people have to manage. Ensure people are supported and have a clear framework of values, aims and intended outcomes.

Further information on the practical application of these recommendations is available in the insights for best practice guide.

Recommendations for commissioners and funders

Commissioners and funders should support social enterprises to work in a way that is fair for all parties involved. The insights for practice outlined in this document show how enterprises should be using funding to develop infrastructure and practice towards this goal. This might include the following:

1. Support social enterprise to develop systems around:
   - coproduction and shared decision making
   - support and transitions into, through and moving on from the organisation
   - defining their standpoint and response regarding homelessness
   - defining models and theory of change
   - engaging in systems change and tackling stigma.
2. Ensure key performance indicators (KPIs), expected outcomes and approaches to reach outcomes attached to funding are designed with the social enterprise. Taking the time to agree collaboratively what will be achieved and how will lead to the best possible results and help avoid mission drift, poor working relations and less valuable outcomes.
3. Create opportunities for social enterprises to collaborate, reflect and share good practice around fairness and beyond.

Introduction

Social enterprise as a response to tackling social inequality has been a growing trend over the last 30 years, with the result that there are 100,000 social enterprises in the UK, contributing £60 billion to the economy and employing 2 million people (Social Enterprise UK 2021). Employing charitable trading to respond to homelessness has been driven by several government funding initiatives (such as the Places of Change initiative) with a thrust for support providers to develop social enterprises to help prepare people experiencing homelessness for employment (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006 and 2007). Across England new enterprises are emerging and a growing number of organisations are engaging in trading activity, with diversity in structure, practice, trading activities and types of engagement for participants. To varying extents, these organisations rely on creating opportunities for people experiencing homelessness through training, volunteering or employment opportunities; however, in a world where business goals and social objectives may come into conflict, how can we ensure social enterprises working with people experiencing homelessness remain fair for all involved?

This research sets out to explore this question and to identify good practice in working with people experiencing homelessness. The approach was developed with an emphasis on engaging people who are involved in the delivery of social enterprise, particularly those who have experienced homelessness themselves. It used a range of data collection methods allowing engagement with 108 participants working in and around social enterprise. This included working with nine social enterprises who opened their doors to the research team to show the challenges they face and how fairness is being managed in these settings, and to explore the impact on individuals and wider society. The project also undertook an extensive review of existing research and good practice.

This research was conducted in the spring and summer of 2022, as the Covid-19 pandemic was drawing to a close and restrictions were being lifted, but the pandemic was still a very recent memory. Social enterprises working in hospitality had been especially impacted by the pandemic, although challenges across all participating enterprises were highlighted with most organisations having changed the way they work, adjusted methods of engagement and felt impacts on their financial situations.

The research revealed the contributions that social enterprises are making towards tackling homelessness and how in many ways they counterbalance the unfairness evident in wider society. That is not to say, however, that the findings did not also identify tensions and challenges that many enterprises are struggling with, the inevitability of these issues and how enterprises are managing these on a regular basis. We also explored the complexity of the issue, identifying how good practice in one area can have unintended (and unwanted) consequences elsewhere. There is a strong sense among participants that the issues discussed in this report are pertinent and familiar, and that wider collaboration is needed to ensure that they continue to be addressed.

Background

This research was delivered by Inclusive Insight on behalf of Homeless Link as part of the Enterprise Development Programme.
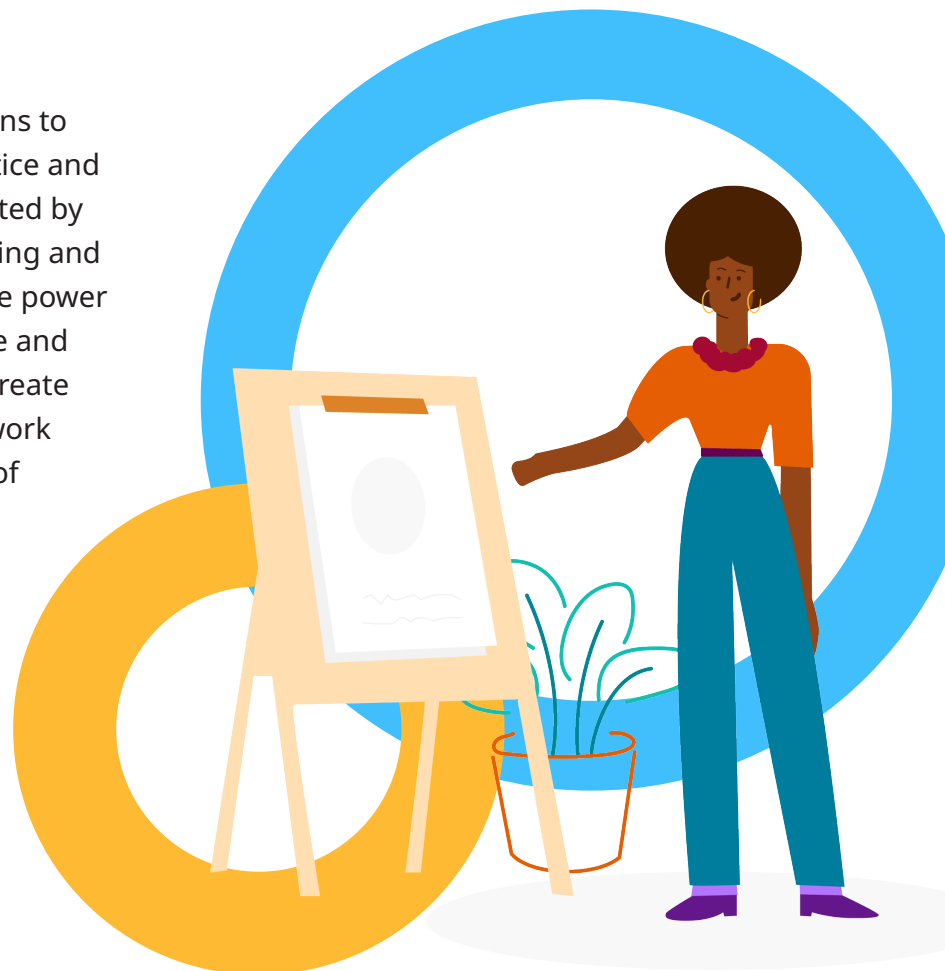
Homeless Link

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

Enterprise Development Programme

Launched in September 2018, the Enterprise Development Programme (EDP) is a five-year, £40 million programme funded by Access – The Foundation for Social Investment, managed by a coalition of partners. Homeless Link has been a partner since this time, and over the course of the programme has supported social enterprises with feasibility and development grants, in addition to action learning sets, bespoke learning programmes and peer networking opportunities.

Inclusive Insight

Inclusive Insight works with organisations to gather insight, improve policy and practice and embed the participation of people affected by homelessness in strategy, decision making and service design. It is passionate about the power of participation and believes that people and communities need to be in the lead to create meaningful change. At the heart of its work is putting people with lived experience of homelessness at the core of creating solutions to homelessness. We offer a range of services that includes designing and delivering social research and evaluation, supporting coproduction and service user participation, and training or facilitation.

Research objectives

The research was shaped by a set of research objectives and questions that were formed by Homeless Link with the input of an advisory group made up of experts working in social enterprise within the homeless sector and beyond. The overall aim of this research was to set out recommendations of good practice for social enterprise models that provide opportunities to service users through training, volunteering or employment. The core research question was: How do we ensure service users are treated fairly and transparently where they are supporting the trading activities of a charity, social enterprise or community organisation?

Within this there were key objectives that the research looked to address:
- Map the different models of client training, volunteering or employment currently in existence within homelessness social enterprises.
- Create a framework to benchmark the experiences of people at risk of or experiencing homelessness and their involvement in enterprise models.
- Gain knowledge on how different trading models and involvement levels influence the experiences and outcomes of people within homelessness services.
- Gain insight from those with lived experience of homelessness about what makes/would make trading models a more sustainable route out of homelessness and reduce any risks of exploitation.
- Make initial recommendations based on the findings – for example, what good practice looks like and implementable practice recommendations.

Approach to the project

The project was delivered across four phases: co-design and scoping, qualitative fieldwork, analysis and dissemination. The approach was developed with an emphasis on engaging people who are involved in the delivery of social enterprises in relation to homelessness, particularly those who have experienced homelessness themselves. From the qualitative fieldwork phase onwards, nine case study enterprises from across England participated in the research.

Across the four phases, 108 participants were engaged through various research methods, including a co-production workshop (five participants), key stakeholder interviews (eight participants), a survey (19 participants), focus groups (76 participants with some involved in both focus groups and interviews), and two analysis and verification

workshops (20 participants attended who had been involved in earlier parts of the research). Desk-based research was also undertaken including a rapid evidence assessment[1] (REA) of existing literature (academic and 'grey'), a review of different models of operation within the Enterprise Development Programme portfolio and the Homeless Link membership, and across other social businesses focused on homelessness in England through a web-based review. Literature identified through the REA is referenced throughout this report.

In the report, quotes from participants are attributed as follows:
- lived experience participant (those involved in social enterprise engagement activities who have experience of homelessness, including those in paid, voluntary, training and other roles)
- senior staff (senior management in paid positions)
- frontline staff (those in support, delivery or customer-facing roles)
- expert stakeholder (including those involved in the stakeholder interviews and in wider networks of case study social enterprises, including trustees and partners from the business and charity sectors
- survey participant (participants involved in the survey).

A grounded theory approach was used in the analysis and is represented through the writing of the report where the language of participants has been used to "preserve participants' meanings of their views and actions" (Charmaz, 2006). Where strong themes have emerged, these have been named using the words of participants, e.g. "shock absorbers" and "community connectors", and developed through discussions with participants, the advisory group, and analysis and verification workshops. Phrases used by participants also feature in the text to convey participants' understanding and experiences. In the report double quotation marks denote direct speech from the research data and when referring to these themes.

The response rate for the survey was lower than expected and as such quantitative data is not included. This has impacted upon the first two aims of the research: to map the different models of client training/volunteering/employment currently in existence within homelessness social enterprises and to benchmark the experiences of people at risk of or experiencing homelessness and their involvement in enterprise models. We have mitigated for this by engaging a diverse range of enterprises and participants in the qualitative fieldwork and through close analysis of the rich data that was collected through this process. We also undertook additional desk-based research to explore the various models of engagement in operation across England to further develop the typology of engagement models.

More information on the approach to the project is included in the appendix.

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[1] A rapid evidence assessment (REA) is an approach to reviewing literature about an intervention, problem or practical issue by using a systematic methodology to search and critically appraise empirical studies.

Development of the project

The initial framing of the project was around 'risks of exploitation' and mitigating these risks when involving service users in trading activities as detailed in the initial tender. Through the scoping and co-design phase it was identified that, although exploitation might be a risk, participants felt that the concept was unfamiliar to their experience of social enterprise, could find this difficult to discuss and in some cases raising the topic could prevent people from speaking openly. Through the REA and input from participants and the advisory group, it was reframed to cover 'fairness', and based on evidence from the REA 'tensions' were identified that could create the environment for unfairness to emerge. These tensions were discussed in interviews and (as in the scoping) they animated discussion and helped participants to talk about what happens in their social enterprise, and what they were doing and aspired to do to avoid resentments developing. This area was further developed through the course of the project and is summarised in the 'Where tensions emerge' section (see page 18) of the report and explored throughout the report.

Exploring the topic of fairness in social enterprise is complex and multi-faceted and through the research process insight was gleaned that sat on the borders of the original brief for the project. Much of this insight is pertinent and useful for those working in social enterprise and beyond. The writers, in collaboration with the advisory group, decided to present the wider learning from the project in this report.

The initial tender document for the project set out five research questions to be explored. Due to the complexity of the issues addressed and the broader scope of the research, the answers to these questions span across different sections of this report. To support the reader, the table below maps out where answers to the research questions can be found.

Table 1: Research questions and related sections in the report	
Research questions	**Corresponding sections in the report**
What are the range of client training/volunteering/ employment opportunities currently in existence within homelessness social enterprises?	Faireness, tensions and models of engagement
What is the extent to which social enterprises rely on service user involvement in volunteering to operate a viable business model?	Setting types of engagement, remuneration and defining working conditions
To what extent is volunteering or participating in social enterprises embedded in a holistic support journey with the organisation to move clients along a pathway away from poverty?	Social enterprise and journeys out of homelessness Managing transitions Support: crucial, contested and challenging
What impact do training, volunteering and/or employment have on service users in relation to their move on from homelessness?	Social enterprise and journeys out of homelessness Managing transitions
What is the lived experience of engagement within social enterprise roles?	This is an overarching area of exploration detailed throughout the report and captured through participant testimony.

Fairness, tensions and models of engagement

In existing literature and through this research, a picture emerges of the growth of social enterprise as a response to homelessness and wider social inequality. Increasing numbers of organisations are looking to create trading activities with a diverse range of engagement opportunities for participants. This research highlighted how this has created potentially fertile ground for unfairness and even exploitation; however, within the enterprises that participated in this study there was no evidence of exploitation in action, nor intentional or overt unfairness. That said, those working in enterprises were firmly aware of there being a risk of unfairness and tensions around this, which often have to be managed on a daily basis and taken into consideration when strategic decisions are made. In the following section we will touch on the potential tensions of having concurrent social and business goals and highlight how the experiences of people going through homelessness may create circumstances where people are at increased risk of exploitation. We will also highlight the areas where these tensions can emerge and detail the different types of engagement encountered through the research.

Social goals and business objectives

Through the research we explored how business objectives and social goals interact and whether this can lead to tensions and unfairness. In the existing literature, a significant number of authors focusing on social enterprise highlight this as a potential tension (Barton, 2021; Fergusonet al., 2008 2012, 2013, and 2018; Teasdale, 2009, 2010, and 2012; Tanekenov, 2016 and 2018; Greenwood et al., 2011; Pache and Santos, 2010; Yaari, 2020).

In this research participants reported that there are often competing priorities and tensions are often evident, but making decisions about social and business objectives is rarely about choosing one over the other. In fact, participants described how social and business objectives are intertwined and have causal links. In line with Seanor et al. (2007), although tensions can emerge when pursuing social and economic goals simultaneously, a linear view that sees a continuum between non-profit (mission) and profit (market) orientation misrepresents the complexity and changeability of social enterprise. Participants who talked about this highlighted the following points: happy, healthy people are requisite for good business; taking care of people should be built into the model; the "social brain" is the one to listen to when tensions arise; and if they are arising it might be a problem with a lack of clarity of values, objectives and decision making. Often those running enterprises had considered and articulated strategies to manage this.

> *"The way we manage that is having diverse revenue streams: it's essentially a three-way split – housing benefit, trusts and funds, income generated from our activities. (That's training contracts, products sold etc.) We don't have a project funding model – job roles and salaries aren't tied to particular projects and therefore not tied to success or failure of any particular project. That's one of the ways we avoid chasing the money rather than the best outcomes. That puts a lot of stress on the*

senior management team as it puts the onus on us to generate the income, but it helps to keep us socially focused." – Senior manager

Some participants did, however, feel that being business orientated could get in the way of socially-minded action. For example, some participants highlighted how business could be a barrier to collaboration with other organisations in the sector, particularly when an approach, product or generated resource had been developed with organisational investment. Others felt that there was a lack of forums and spaces to bring enterprises together to share practice. As one participant highlighted:

> *"There is something about sharing to a point – but not sharing everything. On the whole people are not sharing – everyone has been caught out about someone who has done a carbon copy of something."* – Expert stakeholder

Some research participants felt that this is an endemic issue across the third sector, particularly in light of the competitive tendering within homelessness support. Within this research, although there were examples of where enterprises were guarded with some resource, they also expressed the need and desire for better collaboration in the sector because ultimately this would benefit the participants they work with.

Histories of unfairness

Homelessness is an inherently unfair experience. Many of the participants in the study with lived experience of homelessness gave examples of where systems and relationships had been exploitative and in many cases getting a raw deal had become the norm. Those working in social enterprise were keenly aware of this and how it can present heightened risks for enterprises in working with people experiencing homelessness. As one participant explains:

> *"I think we are working with groups of people who are particularly vulnerable to exploitation. It's one of the issues we see when people are referred to us. People affected by domestic abuse, young care levers in particular, are really vulnerable to wanting to be part of something or be accepted and treated well. So they are very vulnerable in that sense."* – Senior manager

Participants shared examples of where people on a route out of homelessness
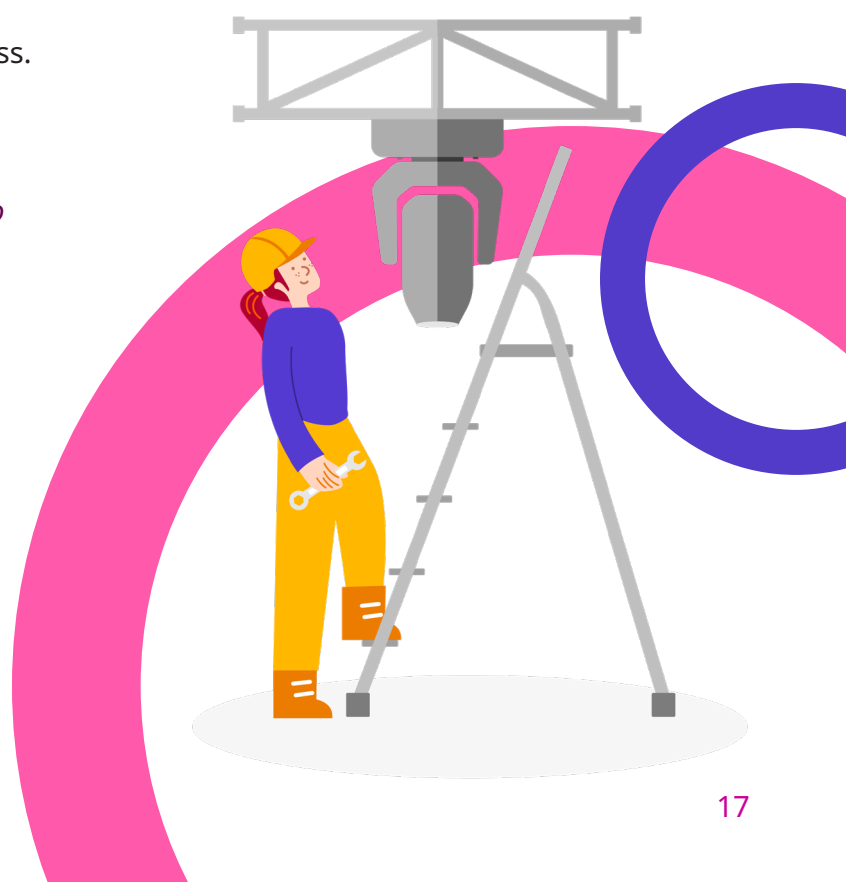
lacked the assertiveness to set out what they needed or wanted from the enterprise, or to challenge perceived unfairness more broadly. This can be complicated further when what someone gets from the enterprise is better than they have had elsewhere or fills a gap around a social need.

> *"But I find it – especially when someone is isolated like I really was before coming here. And still am, to be fair. If you want to keep coming you feel if someone asks you to do something, you've got to do it."*
> – Lived experience participant

People working in the enterprises who participated in the study were clearly aware of this factor and the adverse effect it can have. They highlighted the importance of acknowledging and creating measures to counterbalance this.

> *"Especially when they are first coming into recovery of any sort, or trying to make things better for themselves, they are in a very vulnerable situation. And they can mistake ... certain things... to take them as being a lot better than they are. And then take it... Accept that. Well, this is the way it has to be, because that is the way it was before. So, this is the only way I can better myself. And not fully realising that they are getting exploited and that."* – Lived experience participant

Where tensions emerge

The research identified seven areas where unfairness can be experienced by participants who are engaging in social enterprise. These areas were initially identified in existing literature and then further refined through data collection and analysis work with the input of participants. In any organisation, not least social enterprises working with people who are homeless, tensions can and likely will emerge. When not considered or poorly managed these can create an environment where unfairness and exploitation might occur. Even when decisions are made for the best intentions, those engaging in activities can feel something is 'unfair' and can be the root of rising resentments.

In the enterprises that participated, as in any organisation, there were tensions evident with some participants. Participants also shared how addressing these tensions was never simple, and how mitigating factors for one area of tension can lead to other inadvertent challenges, or create spaces for new tensions to arise. Some participants shared how these tensions are in many ways "inevitable" and reflected on how there is no "quick fix", rather there are areas for ongoing monitoring and reflection.

> *"I am really interested in pursuing some of those lines more. Because those are a lot of the tensions that we're feeling and seeing. And yet they are inevitable and unavoidable."* – Senior manager

Table 2: Areas where tensions commonly arise	
Areas where tensions commonly arise	**Examples**
Defining who and how you work with participants	• How participants are engaged (e.g. volunteering, employment or training models) • Setting a threshold for who you work with and 'cherry picking' participants
Remuneration and defining working conditions	• Setting rates of pay for employees and other forms of compensation for participants • Working hours and how they are allocated • Potential or actual job substitution by volunteers
Unclear offers and unrealistic expectations	• Unclear offers around compensation and support • Unrealistic expectations of roles, responsibilities and relationships • Unfounded promises about employment within the enterprise or more widely
Transitions into, through and out of organisations	• Entering enterprise including recruitment and induction • Moving between unpaid and paid roles • Moving on from organisations
Defining support	• Levels of support and who can access it • Whether support tapers, is time limited or open-ended • How participants are supported with personal development and professional progression • Managing the impacts of engagement (e.g. negative impact on wellbeing or benefits)
Unintended and unwanted consequences	• Dependency and feelings of 'indebtedness' • Participant compliance and challenges around 'speaking up' • Replicating workplace inequality by creating roles or preparing participants to move into low paid and insecure work
Reinforcing stigma	• 'Pity marketing' • 'Quality' of enterprise/product • Sharing participant stories

Through the course of this report, we will explore these areas of tension, how they have been experienced by participants and highlight some of the good practice steps implemented by enterprises involved in the research. We will also explore how different models of engagement highlighted in the next section can lead to challenges and emerging issues around fairness.

Models of engagement

The following table describes the different types of engagement found across enterprises working with people experiencing homelessness in England. This is not an exhaustive list but a log of those who interacted with the research process through qualitative fieldwork, desk-based research (existing literature and web-based review) and survey responses. Across the enterprises that participated in this study, there are examples of several of these models of engagement being used within an enterprise, including hybrids that cross this typology or where types of engagement might blur with

other models. The research did not set out to test the effectiveness of these different models, rather to see how different approaches can support people in their journeys away from homelessness and where considerations around fairness can come into play.

Table 3: Models of engagement		
Type of engagement		**Description**
Paid engagement	Paid work, full time	35 paid hours or more a week, with sick pay, maternity, paternity and adoption leave and pay, and pension opportunities and holidays.
	Paid work, part time with fixed hours (including supported permitted work)	Fewer than 35 paid hours a week with sick pay, maternity, paternity and adoption leave and pay, and pension opportunities and holidays at a rate determined by the number of hours worked. The hours may be at regular times or following shift patterns.
	Sessional paid work	Paid employment where the participant works flexibly following varying working hours. Hours are typically assigned according to the business need or when specific projects are being delivered.
	Commission-based	Payment is made to an employee based on a sale. Some employees earn commission in addition to their base income, while other employees work only on commission.
	Government-supported employment schemes	The government provides funding for organisations to increase their workforce from specific socio-demographic groups. Within the research we found examples of Permitted Work[2] and KickStarter[3]. While the Kickstarter scheme has been discontinued and Permitted Work has a lifespan associated with legacy benefits, there is a likelihood that other schemes will be created.
Employment elsewhere	Entrepreneur support	Enterprises support participants to develop a business idea and set up their own businesses by offering access to financial incentives and small business advice.
	Self-employment	Enterprises support participants to become self-employed for a particular trade or provide participants with goods for them to sell on as vendors.
	Third-party employment	Participants are recruited to work in opportunities other than for the social enterprise itself or are employed by the social enterprise and then work for another organisation, often as an entry into that organisation.
Volunteering		A participant contributes their time, skills and experience to a social enterprise without financial remuneration for their time. In return, the participant should receive a meaningful experience: work experience, learning new skills, development of new interests and becoming more involved with the community. Volunteering roles typically include out-of-pocket expenses.

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[2] Permitted Work is available to people receiving Employment and Support Allowance, Incapacity Benefit and Severe Disablement Allowance. It enables individuals to work for fewer than 16 hours each week, earn up to £152 every week after tax and continue to receive the normal amount of benefits. See: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/employment-and-support-allowance-permitted-work-form/permitted-work-factsheet.

[3] The Kickstart Scheme provides funding to employers to create jobs for 16-24 year olds on Universal Credit. It is no longer possible to apply for this scheme See: https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/kickstart-scheme.

Table 3: Models of engagement continued	
Community	Participants work in the community's social enterprise. In return participants get accommodation, food, clothing and a weekly allowance. Typically, participants will sign off all benefits, with the exception of housing benefit.
Enrichment activity	Social enterprises offer an experience where participants can develop their learning to improve or enhance their skills and knowledge, but with a focus on wellbeing. These opportunities tend to be flexible and allow participants to engage in their own time.
Training-based	A structured opportunity for developing skills, confidence and trial a type of work where participants are not directly involved in the delivery of the business activities. In this case the business activities create the material circumstances to offer training to participants. Sometimes these are delivered in classroom spaces; in others they are offering work experience type training.
Membership	Participants attend activities and training, receive support and are part of a wider community centred around the enterprise. Participants provide a pool of expertise and knowledge to draw upon for the enterprise, which in some cases is used as a saleable asset. Often participants will move onto other opportunities for engagement from this pool – commonly a more structured volunteering role.

These different types of engagement will be discussed throughout the report in relation to fairness. Further to these types of engagement there are also factors shaping the engagement model – for example, whether it is open-ended or time limited, and the variety of ways to value participants' time, which will also be discussed later in the report.

Social enterprise and journeys out of homelessness

For the enterprises involved in this study, all had in varying ways built engagement and trading models that contributed to people making a move away from homelessness. The outcomes and impacts that participants talked about were interrelated and overlapping. So much so, that at their best, social enterprises are finding ways to enable all of the impacts for most of their people. This study did not set out to measure the impact of social enterprise against other types of support from third sector and statutory sources, but participants provided plenty of examples of the differences in the social enterprise approach and the impacts it can have. The outcomes highlighted were seen as catalysts for ending homelessness, but there is also acknowledgment that outcomes have unforeseen consequences, some of which relate to fairness.

Connectedness

The degrees of 'connectedness' experienced by participants were a predominant discussion point in the research. This was an expansive concept, more than just the feeling of being connected with a group of people, but feeling safe and able to connect (the skills of making connection), and forging connections beyond the social enterprise with local services, businesses, and the wider community. The literature on the importance of connectedness, or re-connectedness, for those who have experienced homelessness is extensive (Bower et al., 2018; Manuel, 2018; Vandemark, 2007) with many authors saying it is one of the key factors for successfully transitioning out of homelessness (Groundswell, 2008; Seal, 2005 and 2008; Bevan, 1998).

Lived experience participants often found social enterprises at a point when they felt alone, disconnected, and not "normal". Some participants also shared how as a result of the Covid-19 lockdowns they had been more eager to join a group, looking for connection that they had missed, or to escape an environment that had become too familiar, and in some cases oppressive. For the most enthusiastic of participants their experience of social enterprise had provided "camaraderie", "friendship", "belonging", and a sense of feeling "needed" and "a bit more normal".

> *"And I said, 'Well I have got a part-time job and I do a bit of [work in social enterprise organisation]. That's it. And I feel normal. A bit more normal by just saying that."* – Lived experience participant

Generally, the focus was on doing things together and, as many participants shared, the type of activity was not necessarily important.

> *"It's a good way of getting isolated people together, without just like sitting in a circle saying, 'This is my problem; this is what I am going through.' It gives people a chance to come, do something in [example of social enterprise is particular activity]. And it's... I mean, the [activity] is irrelevant in a way. They could be doing any activity, but that is just to get you to... giving them something to do that's worthwhile. They can have sense of achievement."* – Lived experience participant

While the connectedness is often in the form of friendship and mutual support, it is also about making connections with people in the community and customers, and opportunities to network within the relevant industry. This can be managed by individuals or through a whole organisational approach described by some participants as "community connectors". It seems that opportunities to connect with people within a social enterprise enable individuals to develop the skill of connecting and take it outside the enterprise. Existing literature on connectedness and social isolation around homeless (Bower, 2018; Fitzpatrick, 2017; Begun et al., 2018) identifies that people experiencing homelessness can often be socially connected to each other, and to services, but lack social connections with the wider community, leading to isolation and loneliness. The findings in this study suggest that through charitable trading this connectedness can be built beyond the homelessness sector to members of the wider community and employers.

> *"Activities that basically help people to bond and make friends and do stuff and get involved in things. It's brilliant. It's exactly what people need."* – Lived experience participant

Related to feelings of connectedness are strong feelings of belonging and purpose. Feelings of 'family' were frequently mentioned. As this participant explains:

> *"They change your life! They change your life! They literally changed my life. They have been there through the bitter sweet days, all the way to the bitter end days for me, to the death of my mother. Even to my birthday. Which happened days apart. And they were there to celebrate my birthday and then days later they were there to comfort me, the loss of my mother. So, they are family. Yeah, that's what I would tell my mates, they are family."* – Lived experience participant

Although this was seen as positive by the majority of participants, there was also an acknowledgement that this could easily shift towards individuals feeling indebted and beholden to their social enterprise. The unintended consequences around this are explored later in the report. It can also mean that when things do not go according to plan, it can have a significant psychological impact on individuals.

> *"[Some participants are...] like, really loyal to [social enterprise] and say [social enterprise] has saved me, kind of. And we are just a bit uncomfortable with it. Because it can flip. Then if something is suddenly not going so well for them, and then they have put all of their energy into being loyal to [enterprise], it can be a bit devastating if it's ... if suddenly it's not working for them. Like it's slightly unhealthy."* – Frontline staff

While there is concern that powerful feelings of connection could become something close to dependency, institutionalisation, or at least "slightly unhealthy", others are rethinking their concern, as expressed by one expert stakeholder below:

> *"In all honesty, you could argue when we use the term institutionalised in that respect, the other side of that is family and community."* – Expert stakeholder

Activity and structure

Participants talked commonly about finding structure and activity as a core outcome of involvement with social enterprises and an essential part of their journeys away from homelessness. Frontline staff talked about the importance of providing "routine, structured sessions" for participants to engage with. Existing literature recognises that re-establishing routine has particular importance for people who have experienced homelessness because street homelessness in particular can destroy the notions of having a routine (Boland et al., 2021; Burns et al., 2022). Participants talked effusively about the benefits of seeing the weeks and months ahead divided into activity of some sort, establishing a routine through which they "developed skills", found purpose and "got used to being back at work" (lived experience participant). One frontline staff member shared their experience of moving from homelessness, to being a volunteer, and then on to paid employment:

> *"I just started to come in every day. Just to talk. Just like I would do with our coffee mornings, just talk, have a chat. And then I started getting more responsibility, doing more and more things. And because I was using the support system and it was keeping me sober, I was doing more and more."*
> – Frontline staff

Some enterprises prioritise physical activity and the associated health benefits. In this study, it seems that physically doing, making, and creating are a big part of the work undertaken across all the social enterprises. Activities feeling meaningful and people feeling valued in performing their roles are crucial in these instances. Furthermore, having structure and being busy are key to many individuals' recovery strategy and were felt to have significant physical and mental health benefits.

> *"All this stuff costs money, so I would not feel valued if I was being taken to a giant playgroup, which is basically what has happened at a lot of … projects. It's basically day care for adults. And remember, you can tell. And people go back to taking drugs or doing whatever else, because they get bored.*
> *… the beauty of this [enterprise] is that you are doing a proper job that makes money. You're worth something in that respect. You are a proper human adult who is doing that, even if you are vulnerable and you can't do it all the time. You're doing something that is valuable. And it teaches me a lot. I want to start a business, at some point."* – Lived experience participant

For this research participant, the activity of the job, the camaraderie, the skills, the income, being occupied, and finding structure, pathways and stepping stones would not have value if the activity itself were not valued. The participant warned that, despite their past experiences, people with lived experience recognise the difference between being valued and being patronised.

'Being busy' is not just related to work activity; many participants talked about a range of opportunities to keep them occupied, including attending events, travelling, meeting informally, training sessions, and creative workshops. Research participants highlighted examples of some life-changing experiences through activities offered.

> *"Some of these guys have never even been on holiday, right? They have never had a two-day break anywhere. So, it's a massive change in their lives, that suddenly they are getting asked and invited to go somewhere different in the country and it's a massive adventure."* – Frontline staff

Although "getting busy" and creating structure were highlighted as key positive outcomes, there was some caution regarding people becoming too busy, particularly in relation to people in recovery from substance abuse (Young et al, 2008). Paying attention to what 'too busy' looks like for different individuals and why it might be a problem is crucial.

> *"Everyone has problems now and again. [...] End up going to work, taking drugs to cope with going to work, because basically you couldn't cope with it otherwise. And it was the only way you could hang onto the job, and obviously that was counterproductive. Whereas I don't feel like I need to do things like that here because I am not being pressured or forced into this in the same way. So, this is much more productive essentially for people to be doing something like this, even if it's only part time. Because they can be productive. Everyone can be productive some of the time. But a lot of people can't be productive 40 hours a week or whatever."* – Lived experience participant

Pathways to employment

Transitioning to employment is a common approach to supporting people to move away from homelessness within social enterprises and more broadly. For the social enterprises that participated in the qualitative research, almost all of them focus on participants securing paid work, either as the main goal or as a secondary but still important priority. Some enterprises offer a very clear and direct pathway to housing and income in a specified industry:

> *"What we try and do is open up those pathways. [It] is a great opportunity to work alongside other trainees and other ... jobs. If you are interested in perhaps ... particular job roles or professions, work or something like that, but you might not know how to get into that."* – Frontline staff

Others offer something more like stepping stones to test the water and get a feel for working again, and from where people can choose to use the opportunities provided to launch into a completely unrelated area.

> *"So, this place has just been... It's the perfect stepping stone basically, because moving from being on your arse basically to working full time, it's impossible. You need some stepping stones in the way and I think it's what this place provides."* – Lived experience participant

Research participants talked about the vast range of opportunities that had given them skills and confidence, as well as a window into a new world of possibilities – from an introduction to university life to festivals and street markets.

> *"There are things we can't offer and there's things we can't do. But we are a great community connector and we will say ok... If you are an ex-veteran... blah, blah, bah, my mate Terri up the road, she runs a lovely bloody retreat place. She does this, that and the other, let me introduce you to her. Because maybe a couple of times a week you want to go over here and meet new people."*
> – Senior staff

For most of the social enterprises that were keen on forging good pathways to work, connection is not something they enable among participants, but they support them to make pathways by forging connections with employers, other services and the community. In this process, some have set milestones and others have timed approaches, of which they stress the benefits. What is key is a person-centred and flexible approach. Again, it is evident how creating connections in the community plays a key role in supporting people away from homelessness and is an area of good practice identified across many of the enterprises that participated in this study.

Work, pay and freedom from benefits

Since 2000, gaining employment has increasingly been seen as a key factor to escaping homelessness (Teasdale, 2010). This was reflected among enterprises who participated in this study, and across a large proportion of those identified through the desk-based research, where a core outcome was articulated as supporting participants towards employment. This is achieved through various models either with in-house employment or supporting people to progress to other work opportunities. As one participant explains:

> *"We offer supported employment – the people who are working are not working as efficiently as your competitors perhaps. Therefore, margins are smaller – but we manage that because we are not paying dividends. We still get some support from the charity and the charity gets broader appeal as it shows they are getting impact on people's lives by moving people into employment. We are also generating a surplus that can be fed back into the charity."* – Senior staff

Although contested by some, programmes that support people from homelessness into paid work can effectively lead to people sustaining accommodation independently and can have wider positive social outcomes for individuals (see Bretherton & Pleace, 2019; Johnsen & Watts, 2014; Clark, 2010).

Receiving an income from work, either within social enterprises or in other employment, represents more than just income: accessing paid work, particularly if it is sustainable, represents a leap in security and opportunities for people. This can help participants identify a fixed point from which to reflect on their progress:

> *"And now I think, wow, we have come from that and you've got a job with that! It's remarkable really."*
> – Lived experience participant

It is also key to finding value in yourself, as many participants highlighted:

"So, I am working particularly close with a [participant] who I would say I can see has grown in confidence... and self-esteem. Because I am feeding back to them and they can see successes like sales or whatever it might be." – Frontline staff

For those who had made this jump, and those who aspired to it, there was real value in entering the workforce; however, people working in enterprises and experts all stressed that for some people this may not be achievable or desirable.

"Having employment as a desired outcome for everyone is not going to work and it's not good for clients. You need a balance between believing in what people can do and recognising that support issues will put a blocker on this. Lots of people have work histories and lots of skills to offer. But let's not romanticise things. You need to be realistic in your planning and in how you work with people." – Expert stakeholder

This finding points to the importance of an approach based on developing honest and open relationships with participants. It also poses a warning to commissioners that setting KPIs around employment for social enterprises may undermine their progress with participants, lead to 'cherry picking' participants, and compromise the values and mission of social enterprises.

Complicated journeys

Aside from the challenges around fairness, which will be discussed later, there are many factors – personal, organisational, policy driven and structural – that obstruct enterprises from achieving their desired outcomes.

Participants stressed how emerging from the chaos associated with homelessness in all its manifestations, brought a substantive set of challenges for participants personally and for the enterprises working with them. Adjusting habits and meeting new expectations need time and flexibility from all parties involved and are well evidenced and discussed (McCarthy et al., 2020; CFE Research and University of Sheffield; 2022). Participants working in enterprise shared examples of where people were not ready and would not engage and those entering social enterprise discussed feelings of fear and issues with trust resulting from past bad experiences of employment and support.

All the social enterprises involved in this study, by working with people experiencing homelessness, are required to deal with the implications of welfare benefits, supported housing and immigration control. There was general frustration around the complexity of these systems and how they obstruct enterprises from supporting their participants to navigate them. This was particularly apparent in relation to the welfare system. Since the reforms under the Welfare Reform Act 2012, there has been a significantly more draconian approach to testing around disability and sanctioning which have disproportionally impacted on people experiencing homelessness (Veasey & Parker, 2021). Participants, both those in receipt of benefits and those supporting them, shared pointed examples of challenges with the "commitments" required by the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP), the "meaningless" work programme activities, and avoiding and appealing sanctions.

"Working with a vulnerable workforce is hugely time consuming and not cost effective. [...] Our offer works well within the remit of UC [Universal Credit] – that was prior to the change in the government's approach to putting sanctions on people who refuse work after a month. Our client group are at huge risk of being sanctioned for never being able to join the mainstream work force and it is hugely concerning." – Survey respondent

Working with people facing these restrictions and requirements means that enterprises must offer flexibility in the roles they offer and provide proactive support to create the circumstances for people to engage and respond to any resulting requirements that come from these restrictions. This is explored further later in the report.

Setting types of engagement, remuneration and defining working conditions

Participants often receive much more than material gain in return for their contribution to an enterprise, but existing literature strongly indicates that unfairness and even exploitation are closely linked to remuneration and how contributions are valued. Participants shared concerns and risks around this, as well as ways that they had found to manage this. These are explored here by looking at how paid and unpaid roles are defined, how conditions are set, and how enterprises take steps to ensure that participants, both paid and unpaid, feel valued and resist compliance.

Paid and unpaid roles

One of the key considerations in engaging people experiencing homelessness in enterprise is around whether or not they are paid for their time. In many cases, business needs and available income dictate whether people can be salaried on a project, particularly when an enterprise is in its infancy. This is a common issue across the third sector, where finances are limited and operations are often delivered by a small team of paid staff, but this can lead to concerns for participants working on a voluntary basis.

> *"I get a bit frustrated about the argument about 'aren't we going to pay people', which is lovely, but you need the business first. You need a working business. [...] It is incredibly difficult to run a start up with a labour force that has high support needs and your business will struggle. It's tough love territory. [...]. Otherwise, you are introducing instability into an unstable situation and that's not good for anyone."* – Key stakeholder

Considerations around remuneration are, however, often based on factors other than cash flow and this research saw well-considered approaches to working with people whether in paid or unpaid roles. Both types of role have impact, advantages and disadvantages. Most UK research authors (Mckenna, 2013; Teasdale, 2009, 2010 and 2012; Tanekenov et al., 2018) recognise the preponderance of volunteer roles among people experiencing homelessness in social enterprises, mainly because of barriers to employment resulting from welfare benefits. Many people moving away from homelessness choose not to or are unable to move into employment because they face systemic barriers, are struggling with personal challenges, lack the right to work, or prefer not to leave the security of welfare benefits. For the enterprises participating in the research, this also had a bearing on the 'threshold' at which they can accept people: offering supported and structured volunteer roles means that people who are not work ready can still gain work experience.

Through the research participants articulated real benefits to volunteering but all were conscious of the risks and how tensions can emerge, particularly where volunteers are performing roles that support the business or 'job substitution'. McKenna (2013) defines this as when volunteers have similar duties to paid members of staff, either where agencies directly replace a paid member of staff with a volunteer or where an agency does so indirectly by offering a service based on

volunteers, outcompeting those using paid workers. McKenna goes on to identify this as a potential challenge for homelessness social enterprises engaging volunteers. To gain meaningful engagement that prepares participants for a job, volunteers should have an experience that is as transferable as possible to a paid role (Chui et al., 2019) and the most successful volunteer opportunities in terms of progression are often those that closely match employment opportunities (McKenna, 2013; Teasdale, 2018).

Among the enterprises participating in the study, this risk was managed in a number of ways, either through time-limited unpaid and trainee roles, or by ensuring that enterprises are not dependent on volunteer time, treating the roles as supplementary and purely developmental.

> *"[We have time-limited volunteer roles] because independence and inter-dependence to us means we should be equipping people to move on and allow space for others to join and bring their ideas."* – Survey respondent

> *"Well, I think one of the ways we manage that … working in our business is not part of the progression part. So, people do work experience. Our enterprise side is there to deliver … the profit, the environment for really good-quality work experience. And a community of people who can offer support and drive… Help us to drive forward our objectives. It's not there primarily to provide employment. And I think that is probably a big difference with a lot of other social enterprises where employment is almost the main focus."* – Senior manager

Some enterprises may rely on volunteers to support their work; chances of unfairness increase when driven by business need rather than a conscious decision to offer structured and fair voluntary roles. Among the enterprises participating in this study, we found solid consideration of these factors with good practice in avoiding unfairness in voluntary roles by ensuring, as far as possible, that the roles are surplus to the functioning of the enterprise. Evidence suggests that having clarity in roles, offers and processes from the outset is not only good practice but can have a greater impact for participants.

Setting rates and hours

How much people are paid for their time can understandably lead to tensions and concerns within an organisation. Social enterprises, like the wider charity sector, are often working to tight margins and salaries have historically been below market rates. This can result in people feeling their time is not valued and runs a risk of replicating wider workplace inequality. In existing literature working conditions in social enterprises seem to be generally positive and followed good employment practice (Teasdale, 2012; McKenna, 2013). Although some academics (Gerrard, 2017 and 2018; Wirth, 2021) directly challenge social enterprise for re-enforcing workplace inequality through low pay and poor working conditions, in this study we found fewer challenges around this. This was partly because the enterprises offering an employment model of engagement ensured fair pay through mechanisms such as the London Living Wage.

"[We are...] paying London Living Wage, that doesn't include service charge. We know start-ups where the founders who work a full week don't pay themselves. Because they are paying their staff London Living Wage, they can't afford to pay themselves, because the margins are so tight."
– Senior manager

That said, tensions could arise around how hours are allocated, particularly when enterprises use a sessional or shift-based model of employment. From the perspective of those allocating the shifts there is a need to bring people onboard who were "trustworthy", "reliable" and will "get the job done". This was highlighted as an essential part of sustaining the business, but often biased towards the longstanding team members who have built this reputation. From the perspective of those who did not fulfil these criteria in the eyes of the person allocating the shift, resentment and feelings of unfairness could arise.

"Some people get angry when they are not getting the shifts. Feel hard done by. I have to say to them, 'Well, you didn't turn up to the last one did you.' It's part of the job managing that." – Frontline staff

These challenges are not exclusive to social enterprise and may arise in any shift-based employment in industries such as hospitality. Added pressure can arise if shifts are inconsistent, particularly when instable incomes and high levels of administration are needed to manage benefits like Universal Credit. This needs to be managed sensitively and supported where necessary by the social enterprise.

Ensuring people feel valued

What people gain in return from engaging with an enterprise is not always monetary and often voluntary roles can offer benefits beyond additional income. That said, ensuring that people feel valued by being proactive and generous in offering out-of-pocket expenses and other benefits is an important step towards this.

"[For volunteers] we always pay travel expenses. Lunch is covered. They will get clothes for work experience. Whether that's uniforms or maybe just a small budget in Primark for office wear. There will be ... like haircuts – graduation day is a big day, and they will be referred to places [...] And we have at times given help with digital equipment, phones ... and food bank vouchers when needed." – Frontline worker

Generally social enterprises are working with people who continue to need benefits support such as Universal Credit. Most UK authors (Mckenna, 2013; Teasdale, 2009, 2010 and 2012; Tanekenov et al., 2018) highlight challenges around inconsistency in remuneration policies across enterprises. Among the enterprises participating in this research, most reimburse travel and lunch expenses. The importance of being flexible and proactive around how this is administered was highlighted. Further to this, offering ways to value participants' time and contributions is essential but takes time to manage successfully. Providing equipment, training opportunities, vouchers, travel and event tickets are all steps that enterprises take to ensure individuals are "rewarded for their time".

"[It's important to...] be as flexible and giving as many people as many different choices as possible. [...] Whatever works for the individual. ...people want to receive things in different ways... and so we talk about person-centred approach and all this, it's about that as well when you are working with your members or volunteers. Because what one person may benefit from, another person won't."
– Senior staff

Working with people in receipt of benefits is complex and ever-changing. There are opportunities within this; some of the social enterprises had used government-supported employment schemes to increase income for participants. If a model is focused on working with people in receipt of benefits then it is key that adequate support is provided to ensure benefits are managed and paid or unpaid work does not interfere with this.

Indebtedness and compliance

Indebtedness was an issue that emerged through the research that can create problems around fairness, where gratitude from participants to an organisation or its staff means they feel beholden to it. Although this issue can arise in any support context, in enterprise specifically, where participants are fulfilling volunteer or employment roles, this has the potential to drive feelings of unfairness and even facilitate exploitation. Some participants shared that social enterprise may even be more prone to this due to the strong feelings of connectedness arising from the holistic programmes on offer in some enterprises, particularly when the offer is greater than that from other providers.

"I feel like I am indebted to them... Everything they have done for me I feel really blessed and grateful for. Because they are looking at each individual and thinking what is appropriate for this person."
– Lived experience participant

Participants shared examples of where this had led to levels of compliance: people agreeing to tasks that may be too much for them. This might be an individual covering for others, coming in on a day off, or, at worst, this can mean people accepting a raw deal, taking on too much, or doing things that might be damaging to their recovery. Participants shared examples of times when a seemingly small ask that participants felt they could not refuse had felt overwhelming.

"I got a text one Sunday... This is how bad it was... I actually started to cry. Because the thought of just doing that [task]. I didn't want to do it – on a Sunday. So, I rang them up and I said, 'Look, [senior staff member,) I can't go to work.' He said, 'That's fine – don't worry about it.' And do you know that I worried all weekend." – Lived experience participant

Examples of individuals undertaking tasks that they felt unable to do, concerns about moving on from the enterprise, or worrying about saying no or taking up other opportunities emerged across various enterprises. Adding accommodation into the mix, either as part of the social enterprise's offer or through a linked charitable provider can further complicate matters. Although not highlighted as a specific issue for the enterprises that participated in this study, there was awareness that providing accommodation inherently means a power imbalance between the individual and organisation. There was a perceived threat of losing the accommodation if the person did not give more to the enterprise – something that required careful management.

> *"And people who are engaging in the [business] there is a kind of a bit of a conflict of interest or an overlap in the relationship [...] People feel like because their accommodation or their support is... have done a lot for them, or has the power over them, they feel they have to engage in the enterprise."* – Frontline worker

All the social enterprises in the study were aware of both the benefits and dangers of feelings of connection, power imbalances and compliance, and were taking various steps to counter the potential issues. Much of this relies on personal relationships, knowing the individual and their situation, and recognising when someone is not ready to take something on. Ensuring expectations for the enterprise and participants are clear and supporting participants to understand this is crucial. Some enterprises have taken more practical steps such as running assertiveness training for participants or ensuring participants know they can back away from tasks or activities. This will be further explored in relation to support provision and the challenges around this later in the report.

The following recommendations are to ensure fairness when setting types of engagement, remuneration and defining working conditions:

1. Volunteer roles should be developed to ensure a meaningful experience for volunteers. They should offer the flexibility for participants to develop individual interests and skills.
2. Wherever possible unpaid roles should add value and business activities should not be dependent on individual volunteers. Be mindful of the risks of job substitution by an unpaid role and avoid this when forming roles.
3. Clearly set out what participants will get in return for their contributions. This may be payment for time in the case of paid roles; however, for all types of engagement there may be other benefits participants can expect to get from being involved including training, support, bursaries and access to events and activities.
4. Avoid 'partially-paid' roles – where one person is doing a paid role and a voluntary role in the same organisation at the same time.
5. Individuals whether in paid or unpaid roles should proactively be given out-of-pocket expenses. Engagement should never cost participants money.
6. Create approaches to help participants develop confidence and assertiveness. This can counterbalance feeling beholden to organisations

and the resultant risk of compliance identified in the research.

7. Offer a variety of ways for participants to engage in activities, including events, travel, meeting informally, training sessions and creative workshops, while being mindful of participants taking on too much, particularly if they are in early stages of recovery.

Managing transitions

There is extensive existing literature around the impact and risks of transitions in and through accommodation, support services and personal circumstances, particularly in relation to people experiencing homelessness (McCarthy et al., 2020). Within this research the processes of entering an enterprise, and moving through and on, were also highlighted as areas where tensions and resentments can emerge. Acknowledging feelings of connectedness is crucial, particularly in relation to the 'push' and 'pull' factors that may prevent people from moving on. In this section we will explore how journeys through social enterprises and the transition points can be triggers for actual or perceived unfairness and the steps taken by enterprises to manage these.

Clarity in recruitment processes

Participants in the study emphasised the need for well designed recruitment processes for participants to ensure that both participants and enterprises find the "right fit". Having developed well-thought out and sustainable roles for participants, they recognised the mutual benefits in the contributions of engaged and satisfied employees from the outset. Clarity in expectations, responsibilities and what is on offer, whether monetary, support or other benefits, are clearly needed to ensure that people entering an enterprise are clear on what they are getting involved with. Participants stressed the risk of unrealistic expectations and the potential for disappointment and resentment.

> *"[With...] unrealistic expectations – we do not want people who sell artworks, for example, to expect to make huge amounts of money, and we can try to emphasise this a bit more, although the earning ceiling is potentially uncapped."* – Survey respondent

This is particularly the case when participants have expectations of moving into a paid role in an enterprise after volunteering, sometimes perpetuated by staff making unrealistic job promises. Ellis (2001) identifies how if a volunteer comes on board in the hope of becoming an employee, it transforms the experience into more of an "audition", negating the freedoms of volunteering. In this situation, the volunteer is less likely to criticise and make suggestions, and will accept unwanted tasks, to try and boost their chances of employment.

Clarity from the start is key. Participants working in enterprises stressed the need to go beyond a written role description and interview, offering more involved opportunities to get to know each other before a commitment is made. This approach benefitted participants, but also made sense for the enterprises, reducing the risk of recruiting unsuitable or disengaged staff or volunteers. Examples were given of recruitment days, group activities, and taster sessions, alongside various established pathways between roles with different levels of responsibility.

"They would come here for a recruitment day. And we would show them around, we would talk a bit about the programme. We would ask them to do a bit of group work. And then stay here for lunch. And if they wanted to apply, there would be an informal interview." – Frontline staff

Developing relationships

Participants stressed that recruitment is only the start of the process, and that ongoing induction is as much a part of the recruitment process, and if the right fit is not found it is inevitable and "healthy" for people to leave. All the participating social enterprises with paid or voluntary roles had an induction process that was generally formalised and consistent.

> *"They do a full induction, risk assessment. And they will be directed and signposted to all of the support they need immediately. And then they will be offered the opportunity – once the main priorities have been addressed – [...] to then be involved with our project. So, usually from there we would then be guided on the type of support they would need."* – Senior staff

In the more formalised settings, the calendar is punctuated with information sessions, skills or competency assessment programmes, on-the-job training and mentoring, and some other ongoing engagement. There is usually some flexibility on the pathway through the stages to suit the participant. Some liked the formality of this process and its transparency, but others found it paternalistic and repetitive.

> *"It's getting a really good understanding as far as we can, as what that person is actually looking for and why they're working for us. And what they tell you they want and what they actually need are often slightly different things. So, being able to get out of people... Ok so realistically how much money do you need to make every week? Yeah, you are saying that you want to do the hours, but you are single parent, you've got a kid, you've got other commitments, where are you going to fit these 40 hours in? I think those are the kind of questions we try and ask as early on as we are able to."* – Senior staff

Some organisations have good reasons for keeping induction and recruitment processes rigid and risk averse. Others, sometimes those that are smaller and newer, choose a more flexible and 'organic' approach to induction and support. This approach and the lack of rigid oversight can be helpful (perhaps even necessary) in nurturing these more collaborative and reflective practices, but this environment does make it more difficult to maintain transparency. For example, participants shared reflections and occasional resentment due to a lack of common understanding regarding how people got promoted, why someone was offered an opportunity above others, and who in the organisation makes these decisions.

Aside from the formality or flexibility of induction processes, the process of understanding an individual and identifying and implementing a pathway for them to progress to where they want to be was seen as critical. In this report, this process is referred to as "getting to know you" because this reflects what the process feels like for organisations and participants, but it is also about people getting to know themselves. It is about listening deeply and being able to see the "rotten side of

me" and "the best side of me". It is based on establishing trust in a non-judgemental, welcoming environment or relationship and promoting honesty and openness.

> *"It's all about relationships as well. Getting to know each other. [...] When you are getting to know them, you start to understand what they are into and what they like, what makes them tick."* – Frontline staff

Building these relationships is central to the outcome of 'connectedness' discussed above. It is underpinned by a person-centred approach and takes time.

> *"Listening to the people, for real. Don't just shove papers in their hand and just go off what they put on that paper. Listen to people. And when I say listen, I am not just saying the words that are coming out of my mouth, the tone. What are they feeling today? Care. If you see someone coming in, that you know come in every day smiling, but today they don't come in smiling... pull them to the side and say, 'Are you OK today? I noticed you are not smiling today, and you are usually smiling.' It's those little things."* – Lived experience participant

Changing roles

Tensions can arise when people move between roles and their relationship with the organisation shifts. In some circumstances, participants entering an enterprise can itself be a shift in the relationship and participants shared examples of where service users had become volunteers in interconnected enterprises and how this could create tensions if poorly managed.

> *"In employment, when contracts break down it is rarely about the contract terms, like holiday or working hours, it's mostly about the psychological agreement between employers and employees. For clients who engage in a social enterprise, who move from a relationship of support with an organisation to working for them, the psychological contract changes. You need to recontract and set the boundaries again from the start."* – Expert stakeholder

Transitions from unpaid to paid roles particularly can create space for tensions. Again, clearly defined roles and responsibilities and time spent to set out new expectations and working practices is key to managing this; however, the realities of a busy enterprise can sometimes hamper this. Some participants discussed examples of where the boundaries between roles could be murky and become fertile ground for unfairness.

> *"There are examples I have seen where there are informal moves into employment, where people are volunteering, say, for three days and then they are told they can have a day of paid work. Then that means you pay them a third of their wage which is unclear and unfair. We don't have this as an organisation as we get paid to do specific roles, but where people work for four hours but spend the rest of their time volunteering [this] is really problematic."* – Senior manager

Ellis (2001) highlights that making the transition from volunteer status to that of an employee is often much harder than anticipated because it often involves longer hours and more frequent

mundane responsibilities and the same work previously accepted without comment is now criticised. Relationships between the ex-volunteer and other volunteers and employee colleagues are also likely to change, which can prove challenging.

Shifts in roles can also lead to resentments among fellow participants where an individual is moved onto a better position in the social enterprise. This is especially apparent when there is a lack of transparency and consistency into how these decisions are made.

> *"Having that definition is key because you have people in volunteer and paid roles crossing over. There is a blurry line and often it is down to one person making a decision on when someone gets promoted. Those blurred lines can lead to resentment."* – Senior manager

Moving on: pull factors

Participants moving on from an organisation into new opportunities such as employment or housing is articulated by many social enterprises as a goal, but there are a number of pull factors that can get in the way of this. As previously discussed, the feelings of connectedness and a sense of 'family' can act as a barrier to people moving on from an organisation. It is perhaps unsurprising that many people who experience such connectedness, perhaps for the first time, may be reluctant to leave such an environment. Research participants stressed that individuals need to be ready to move on successfully and in some instances time-limited programmes or enthusiastic staff may push people to move on too quickly.

> *"I think one of the mistakes we made early on was pushing people too much to go into jobs or to go into their own housing. And sort of setting them up to fail really. ...they do need a supportive environment for longer. We have learnt to be less pushy with people moving on – the reality in there is quite significant and complicated challenges and for the majority of people we work with it's not a helpful aim."* – Senior staff

Moving people out of homelessness and into work or a more fulfilling life remains a key objective, but in some cases this does not make sense from a business perspective or for the individual concerned. Although research participants working in enterprises distanced themselves from this perspective, they did highlight the potential negative impact on businesses of experienced participants moving on. Often these individuals are the reliable and skilled people who make significant contributions to the running of the enterprise so it can make sense to 'hang on to them'.

"It's an outdated attitude but in volunteering there can be an attitude that you get a good volunteer and that's right ... you would hang on to them, because they were the ones that were holding up the work." – Expert stakeholder

Participants may have a variety of reasons for not wanting to move on. Feeling competent and comfortable within an enterprise and having strong existing relationships can discourage someone from wanting to move on. Guilt and indebtedness can also be an obstacle: some participants shared internal dilemmas and guilt around not moving on and so not creating a space for the next people to come through, conflicting with the participant's desire to give back to the organisation.

"I started applying for loads and loads of different jobs. All the time worrying how [enterprise] is going to take this when I do turn round and say, 'Right, I am going now, bye.' Because I was worried about it ... because they are not just people who have helped you, they are my mates at the end of the day." – Lived experience participant

Many of the social enterprises manage this by having an open-door policy for people to stay in touch and access ongoing support, which inevitably means that there is less support capacity for people waiting for the same opportunity.

"For a lot of [participants] through childhood and into adult life, there's people always moving them on and everything is temporary. And actually ... if we consider one of our aims to be helping people find lasting stability in their lives ... then I think our support and the opportunities we offer need to be more open ended." – Frontline staff

Moving on: push factors

Alongside the factors that can keep participants tied to an enterprise, there are 'push factors' external to the enterprises that create barriers to moving on. A decade of austerity policies and increasing housing and living costs all contribute to this, as well as reducing frontline services' capacity to respond to rising levels of need. Participants shared concerns about the realities of unsupported working environments or lack of housing or work options. Some expressed that the 'real world' was not necessarily that palatable an idea.

"At the moment, I would say circumstances surrounding us would not ... 100% not ready to move on. I have worked in the past. [...] Who would want to move from this to a normal, standard job?" – Lived experience participant

These factors clearly impact on individuals, but the research highlighted how they also have an adverse effect on organisations. Participants gave examples of people living in move-on accommodation provided by an enterprise, who have secured permanent work outside the enterprise, but due to low income and high rents their options for finding alternative accommodation were severely limited. This situation raises the question of how models of working and the industries that enterprises are working within are able to provide sustainable routes out of homelessness. Indeed some social enterprises seem to be perpetuating workplace inequality, in that they prepare people for low-skilled, low-pay and insecure jobs.

"We struggle to help people into better paid roles, and this creates knock on problems with finding and keeping reasonable accommodation." – Survey respondent

There is some criticism of social enterprises for training people for unethical employment sectors such as catering and street vending, which are notoriously low paid, with long hours and casual contracts (Kelly et al., 2015; Gerrard, 2017, 2018 and 2021). An example of furthering workplace inequality is given by a participant in this study relating to the hospitality industry:

"Especially coming back from Covid where ... hospitality flexes up and down according to the business. And the flex is staff. So, in the worst cases, and we have come across this, will be people called in to work and then sent home again. Without any pay even though they have shelled out on childcare or transport. And people regularly working 50 hours even if they are on a 20-hour contract, which means that they only get the benefits and holiday and everything else based around their 20 hours contact." – Senior staff

In responding to these challenges around moving on, the steps identified previously play a large part: getting to know people, offering pathways and stepping stones into employment, and forming connections with the wider community are all clear examples. Good practice highlighted in the research was enterprises focusing on finding opportunities for participants that offer fair pay and stability and are well suited to an individual's needs, playing a brokering role in matching employment opportunities and their participants, and playing an active and ongoing role in ensuring that employers and employees fulfil their sides of the deal.

With these considerations in mind, what can we do to make life and work outside an enterprise more equitable for people moving away from homelessness? As will be discussed later, some social enterprises are taking an active approach to try and redress workplace inequality and wider systemic issues relating to homelessness.

The following recommendations are to ensure fairness in managing transitions into, through and onwards from the enterprise:

8. Ensure clarity on expectations and what is on offer to participants. Social enterprises can communicate this in writing or verbally, checking throughout engagement that the offer, expectations and associated implications are understood.

9. Offer enhanced recruitment processes that have opportunities for people to get to know each other before a commitment is made, going beyond written role descriptions and interviews. Examples include recruitment days, group activities, taster sessions and informal learning experiences.

10. Use a protracted, involved induction process, including established processes where engagement does not work out. There should be an emphasis on getting to know the person, finding out their transferable skills, and helping them feel welcome and connected.

11. Acknowledge and take steps to manage the tensions involved in changing roles and relationships, including from being a service user to a volunteer or from being a volunteer to being a paid employee.

12. Offer a range of opportunities to try out different roles and sectors, engage in the wider community, build skills and confidence and as a window into a new world of possibilities.

Support: crucial, contested and challenging

An individual's readiness to move on is to a significant degree enabled through support. Support has many facets, whether through a designated support function, member of staff or team, through to creating a supportive environment and 'on the job' guidance. In this research support in social enterprises was identified as the environment created and the actions taken to help people to sustain and make the most of their engagement with the enterprise. In general, among the enterprises participating in this study, support offers a way to address the barriers that individuals face to accessing a fulfilling life and work, including clarifying next steps and helping to smooth the transition. None of the social enterprises felt that they have got this support function right and most considered it a source of tension that can lead to resentments.

Levels of support

It would be easy to say that more support is better, but decisions on the type and intensity of support provided by a social enterprise are never that simple. Decisions on how support is delivered and the methodologies chosen can create tension and lead to unfairness. Types of support can be broken down into the following categories (Bevan, 1998; Seal, 2005, 2007 and 2008):
 • cognitive (helping people make appropriate decisions)
 • emotional (helping people face emotional difficulties and emotions related to change and transitions)
 • practical (including obtaining licences required to get work and accessing interventions).
In the research, practical help was highlighted most commonly, but with emotional and cognitive support as part of this process.

Among the participating enterprises support functions tended to centre, to varying degrees, around two pillars: creating and sustaining the circumstances and stability that allow people to engage in volunteering; and supporting their personal and professional development, including making the most of engaging with opportunities. In addition to this offer, some enterprises also provided therapeutic interventions, either in house or through a partner. Degrees of support ranged from relatively light touch through to intensive and multifaceted, often described as holistic support. Often decisions on how and whether to provide a specific support function are led by the availability of resources and are a luxury of more established enterprises. Many of the participants highlighted ways that they could and would like to offer more support through their enterprise.

> *"We are not yet bringing in enough income to provide the level of support we believe people deserve to make the role work for them. We are working with [lived experience participants] who are defining what that support would have to look like and how we could fund it." –* Survey respondent

Some participants articulated how social enterprise created the potential for support and activities to be funded through earned income rather than statutory contracts, allowing them to expand their support offer as a result. This was discussed particularly in relation to a wider system where

many support services have faced years of austerity, competitive tendering and have rigid outcome frameworks (Dees, 1998; Buckingham, 2008).

> *"So, I think our holistic support [is what makes us different]. We are not government funded so we don't have ridiculous KPIs. [...] And that our offer is consistent and ongoing support and working with our employer partners to get people into jobs where they are happy, they are getting paid well, we support with the transition off benefits, because that can [be...] so difficult and people can get really stuck. So, yeah, it's like a full wraparound support service."* – Frontline staff

Teasdale (2012) noted that if an enterprise steps back from providing a support function, particularly when in a position to do so financially, this can be seen as unfair on individuals and potentially exploitative of the wider support system. This is particularly the case because getting involved with an enterprise can mean that participants have resulting support needs such as traumatisation or issues with benefits.

> *"Support seems to be missing from a lot of social enterprises – that understanding that people can, and should, get support in-house. People get left in a no-man's land because they are moving away from homelessness and the support they had, to employment, but then when things aren't going well, they might not have the same access to support. When they do, it can be the case that the enterprise itself is putting extra pressure on the system."* – Expert stakeholder

The other side of the spectrum is where an enterprise's offer is greater than that available from other providers of support such as statutory services. People who are escaping homelessness, particularly those who have a long history of exclusion, are likely to have extended networks of support providers, with multiple touch points and workers addressing different needs. In this context, enterprises run the risk of duplicating support when it is not delivered in a coordinated way. This links to a wider concern that is discussed throughout this report, where participants, having found an organisation that works for them, put all of "their eggs in one basket" (frontline staff) and the enterprise becomes everything to them, from a support service to a family, further embedding indebtedness and disappointment when things do not go well, and preventing people from moving on. In response to this issue, some enterprises have worked to develop links with existing support networks to ensure participants are not getting all their support from one source and have boundaries around the enterprise's offer.

Finding the right level of support can be a challenge, but what came across strongly from all the participating enterprises was the importance of using an approach to support this that is matched to the other facets of the enterprise, including how people engage and the attributes of the target population. There was evidence of good practice around the key facets of this: supporting people to be able to engage, to manage any resulting issues from their engagement (such as benefit issues) and to make the most of the opportunity for their own professional and personal progression. Wherever possible, having a considered and fully costed support function that fits into the business model seems to be good practice. Participants also stressed that it makes good business sense to invest in support to help create a stable and engaged group of participants who want to engage with the enterprises' business activities. From the outset, letting participants know what support is on offer, how to access it and what to expect is common sense.

Frameworks for support

There were several frameworks for support employed across the enterprises in this study, with different theoretical underpinning, for example, participants talked about person-centred, psychologically (or trauma-) informed environments and recovery models. Employing these frameworks takes into account the journey participants have been on, that they have likely experienced exploitation in the past, and the ongoing risks they face of being retraumatised. This is crucial, as one staff member with experience of homelessness said:
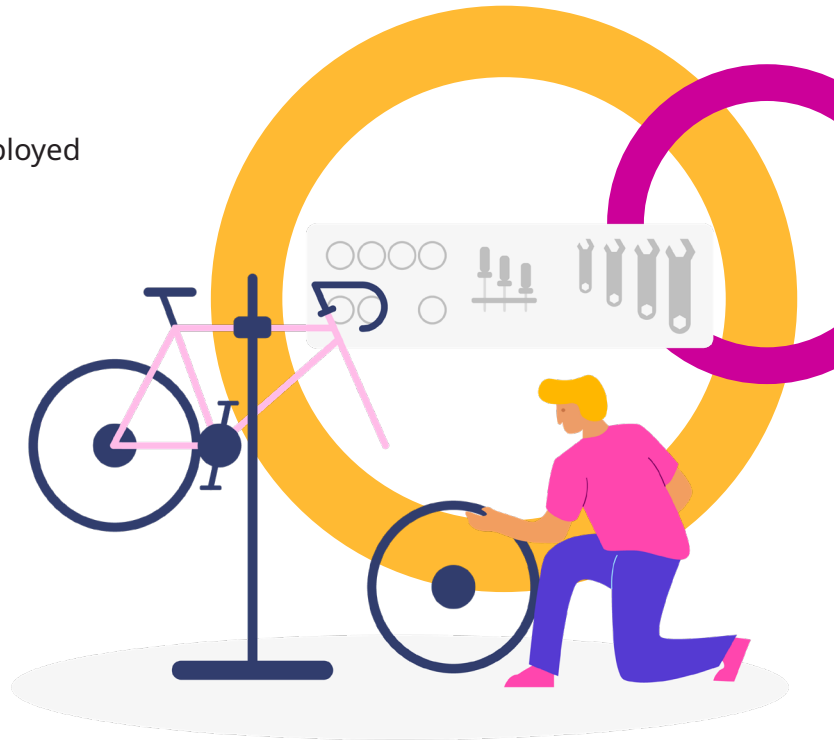
> *"They're [lived experience participants] trying to get out of that cycle where they are being exploited. And then you go to a charity or a place where you feel you are safe. And then you are exploited … through the same people who support you … where you feel you are safe. That could be very damaging. Worse than what has happened to you outside. Being exploited by people that you trust. Very dangerous."* – Frontline staff

This staff member went on to say that this may well not be intentional, arising instead from misunderstanding the journey of homelessness and the trauma that may accompany it, and also that where a person may be in terms of their recovery needs to be taken into account. As highlighted previously, the important thing for participants was that enterprises are explicit about the approach they use because often participants on their journeys out of homelessness will be clear on what works for them.

> *"We are very reliant on the expertise of the individual, in terms of what they need, the expertise of our staff and that relationship. And we don't have any form of assessment process. [...] We have kind of boundaries of what we offer and what we won't offer. [...] What we try and do is steer away from that kind of institutionalised assessment process. We are not a hostel; we are not a day centre. We are all about getting people into work."* – Senior manager

Supportive environments

Through the study support was identified as far more than having support workers or a designated support function. Participants stressed the need to create supportive environments that nurture, develop and challenge people; however, some struggled with how the environment could be supportive and at the same time could prepare people for the "real world", where job opportunities are unlikely to have the same levels of support. For some, there was a contradiction in creating a

supportive environment and moving people on to an environment that might be significantly less so.

> *"There is a sort of reality check here. You know, I earn a salary and I am struggling to find anywhere that's sensible rent at the moment. So, they need to experience outside life. But, yeah, we don't want to chuck people out into a horrible environment."* – Frontline worker

Contradictions can also arise between the needs of the business (and those working in it) and the needs of the participant.

> *"There may be some pressure from our side to engage with the project. For example, a member of staff whose job it is to manage the social enterprise needs clients to engage with it to meet the requirements of their job and they will likely do anything that they can to involve clients (and keep their job) and may not consider what is in the client's best interests, but rather what is in the best interests of the social enterprise and their own continuing employment."* – Survey respondent

Another enterprise staff member with lived experience also recognised this phenomenon and put it down to not being person centred.

> *"People will quite happily say, 'Yes, I am at this place, I am ready to do this.' When probably having a good conversation with them, you would probably see that that was not really the case. So, they've taken somebody at face value because they have not got that person-centred approach. Somebody has pushed themselves forward because they feel that is where they need to go. That is what society is telling them they need to do."* – Frontline worker

Who provides the support?

Within the idea of creating a supportive environment, participants often drew a distinction between support to fulfil a role in a practical or line-management sense and support around wider personal and circumstantial issues. Challenges can arise where these functions overlap when personal support is also provided by a line manager. This was more common in smaller enterprises with smaller teams and less diversified roles. Several participants talked about the tension of having their manager also being responsible for their personal support.

> *"From experience, not everyone wants to call up their boss [when they need support and saying] I am really struggling with x, y and z. So having somebody who is demonstratively experienced, but perhaps not that much senior is a really nice way to get over those challenges."* – Lived experience participant

Recognising this issue some enterprises have chosen to separate the support function so that it is distinct and, in some cases, provided by an arm's length or separate organisation. It was noted, however, that this can cause tensions where the support required may be related to a business function (troubles in a team or with a manager) and when the outcomes of the support – 'take the day off', for example – have business implications. What seems important, if there is a separation, is that the support workers mediate the tensions, rather than the tensions being mediated through the person with lived experience of homelessness.

"It's really difficult, because there is conflict. It's like a natural dichotomy between what the social enterprise manager wants and what myself as a support manager wants. If I want to take people out to do training and things like that, I have to take them away from their rotated role. And that can have a real impact on the social enterprise. So, it is like this balance and a dance that myself and the social enterprise manager – and the whole team in fact – have to play out each day." – Frontline staff

Getting the whole picture of a person

One interesting dimension to who provides the support was that, when the support function was separate, staff working on the enterprise side got a very different picture of the participant to those providing the support. One interviewee on the enterprise side described comparing their experiences of a certain volunteer with the person's support worker and they had very different pictures of that person. The support worker saw the individual as a lot more chaotic and with severe needs, but this was not the enterprise worker's experience:

"Maybe I am seeing better sides of … they have generally been fairly nice to me, they try and be helpful, they bring me stuff and I am always trying to be supportive and give them some feedback. And be on a level and stuff. But so maybe they don't … you know want to show that to me." – Frontline worker

This can be seen as an argument for more 'whole organisational thinking', with support workers and enterprise workers sharing their experiences of a person so that they get a more holistic picture of the individual. Some authors (Smith, 2010; Seal, 2005) challenge this idea of information sharing because it may not reflect the person accurately and it takes away their autonomy to navigate how they present themselves in different contexts to meet their needs. One support manager recognised that people will present differently in different circumstances, and that this in itself can be part of the process of recovery.

"We have people with really high needs – but they are doing well in that part of their life [engaging in the social enterprise]. It is really important that they can compartmentalise their mental health into their private time, and they can still feel like a professional and I think that is really important. I think we all have an element of that where we can go out and be someone else. And that's really good." – Frontline worker

The key finding from these discussions is that all staff need to recognise that the picture they get of an individual is partial and will depend on the context in which they see that person with lived experience of homelessness. Secondly, it should be recognised that chasing the whole picture of a person may be a fruitless and limiting exercise and that reserving some sides of ourselves should be seen as the right to privacy.

Confidentiality and equity

Another way support can manifest into feelings of unfairness relates to who receives the support and to what level. When support is part of the social enterprise 'offer' to participants, decisions on how it is distributed can cause tensions. Examples were given of how participants with higher needs might need greater levels of support, while people in more stable circumstances are likely to need and receive less. Alongside this, people in more stable circumstances may be able to contribute more to the enterprise creating an imbalance between levels of motivation and contribution and what participants receive from enterprises in terms of support, renumeration and other benefits. Participants discussed how other participants might be getting away with not working or not turning up to shifts; from the perspective of a participant who has made a longstanding and sustained commitment this can seem deeply unfair.

> *"I have to admit that some of the other people, participants, on my course … were just, er… they weren't giving it their all. They were here for different reasons to get out of the place where they were, it was something new for them to do. […] So, in that way, it can be exploitative from the other side as well, if you see what I mean."* – Lived experience participant

Managers and workers talked about the tension of knowing about individual circumstances that need to be kept confidential and that this can create resentments about what some individuals receive in terms of support and what they 'get away with' in the running of the business. Positively, people with lived experience of homelessness themselves often recognised this situation and made a distinction between when people were skiving and when there might be other issues that they were not aware of. They made a call for compassion around this.

> *"I think though some people have issues that nobody knows anything about. And I don't think people should be made to tell their issues to others. So, I think if you are having … they might just think you are having a bad [day], they don't know what it's about, they don't know what happened. So, I wish there was a bit more compassion, but people tend to assume the worst of people."*

Again, good practice here relies on having a clear offer that articulates how people are supported and when this might come into action, acknowledging that participants enter enterprise in different positions and circumstances and that support needs to respond to this.

Voluntary and informal support

As discussed, setting levels of support and how it is delivered should closely align and compliment the business model and the way that participants engage. Through this research it is clear that while it can be costly to provide a support function, it is crucial and therefore a necessary investment. Within the study there were excellent examples of where voluntary support was provided by peers or mentors, and there is wide ranging evidence that this type of support is effective, when done well, and benefits both mentor and mentee (Teasdale, 2012; Seal, 2018).

"Yes, it's really supportive, the environment we have in here. We all support each other and we are all seen as equal. And the fact that somebody believes in you, to tell your story and to give you the confidence. In here it's a safe space to actually be yourself and not be afraid of who you are and to be accepted. And to be respect for yourself." – Lived experience participant

Participants shared examples of where peer support particularly was formalised into programmes, or happened informally within organisations, and stressed the importance of recognising where informal peer support is happening.

"One of the things that has sort of surprised us in a way is the peer-to-peer support between clients. So, they all come to us for that help. But you put them into a situation where they work together and they start to talk, then they start to share their experiences with each other and then suddenly they are supporting each other. And we can supervise that. And we can sort of guide the conversation." – Senior manager

The important role that support plays in all its guises should be acknowledged, structured and resourced, and developed, because it is effective for participants rather than because it can be cost effective. The research highlighted challenges that can emerge when peer or volunteer support mechanisms are relied on too extensively. In these instances, support can feel and look like job substitution – where a critical role of the social enterprise is carried out on a voluntary basis, potentially adding a burden to an individual who has their own struggles or one who does not have the skills, framework or time (nor the expectation) to manage that function properly.

The following recommendations are to ensure fairness through providing adequate and appropriate support:

13. Design support that compliments the model of the enterprise and responds to how participants engage in activities. At a minimum it should allow participants to engage while supporting them with any consequences of engagement, e.g. the impact of involvement on welfare benefits.

14. Develop environments of acceptance and belonging underpinned by a framework that is person centred, psychologically (and/or trauma) informed or based on a recovery model.

15. Offer voluntary support including from peers and mentors as supplementary and complementary, rather than as an alternative to it being delivered by paid workers.

16. Whether the model of support delivery splits line management and support functions within the organisation or keeps them together, there should be acknowledgement of the potential limitations of either approach. If there is a split, workers should mediate the tensions, rather than the tensions being mediated through the person with lived experience of homelessness.

Communicating and creating change

Social enterprise has the potential to have a powerful impact beyond the personal impacts it has for participants engaging in activities. In many cases social enterprises are already addressing the systemic issues that cause homelessness. This research identified how enterprises are tackling misconceptions and stigma associated with homelessness both in terms of individual interactions and through wider communications. Some have this function inherently built into their model. There are also challenges around this and with the stresses of business upon them social enterprises do not always get it right. This section explores how social enterprise is engaging with stigma and how participant stories are used, and reflects on the potential for even greater impact by asking: what is enterprise doing to create systems change in relation to homelessness?

Engaging with stigma

The dangers of stigma are familiar territory for the social enterprises participating in this study highlighting risks for participants and perpetuating negative connotations more broadly. Participants shared examples of where stigma had been enacted by individuals, in policy, practice and the media, often relating to longstanding conceptions around a divide between the "deserving" and "undeserving" (Pleace, 2000).

> *"When you are a social landlord as well as working with DWP and there are certain… a lot of different… the conditionality basically. The conditionality of arrangements. […] I felt like that has a basis in stigma. And it's quite a Victorian notion if kind of whether it's deserved. […] But I think there are a lot of challenges for people when they are setting up programmes dealing with those type of in-built practices within organisations and assumptions that have existed for so long within institutions."*
> – Frontline worker

Participants working in enterprises were often battling with how best to manage and avoid further embedding these notions. Within related literature, several authors (Hibbert et al., 2005; Roy et al., 2017) emphasise the positive positioning of people experiencing homelessness as employees as opposed to being objects of charity. Similarly, others (Cook & Willetts, 2019; Rotz et al., 2015) write about the importance employees themselves attach to developing a sense of utility through their work. This can be detrimental, however, when the product is sold on the basis of the enterprise employing marginalised employees rather than the product itself. Such obvious promotional messages make the employees more keenly aware of their disadvantaged status; as a result, this can reinforce their self-prejudice that they are not able to be competitive in the labour market (Lee et al., 2018).

Mostly, among participating enterprises there was a very strong 'anti-pity marketing' sentiment and determination for the quality of goods and services produced to be as good (preferably better) than the competition. Demonstrating a clear understanding that providing quality products or services

helps show the worth in people experiencing homelessness and can give participants themselves a sense of pride in what they do.

> *"Essentially our mission, if you like, is to be really good at what we do, on a commercial level. We want to provide a service that's at least as good as the market expects. And actually, one of our main ambitions is to be the best at what we do. And we have got a hard-won reputation, commercially, for being a quality provider."* – Senior staff

Telling stories

All the social enterprises market themselves as doing good for people experiencing homelessness and use their participants' stories in some way. Some of the participating enterprises ensure that they only show positive stories and many have come up with methods of garnering those stories and publishing them in a way that feels safe and fair. While there is plenty of good practice (and good intensions) around making certain that participants publicly share only what they are comfortable with and have total freedom to choose whether they share their stories at all, some participants gave examples of where they had felt obliged to share stories due to loyalty to an organisation despite feeling uncomfortable in doing so. Sometimes this could have damaging effects on the individual.

> *"What I wasn't prepared for was the extent of the campaigning, the marketing. To life-sized cut outs of [myself] posted around [city]. And every single banner on the emails for the next three years would have a picture of me on it. [...] Personally, when I was trying to move away from that and rebuild my life, I am still being haunted with these images."* – Lived experience participant

There are dangers in storytelling for those who have experience of homelessness. It can pander to a deficit view, and retraumatise and pigeonhole people whose situation has changed, while the web presence of their story follows them adversely (Seal, 2022). Alongside the distinct risk of retraumatising people, safeguarding risks are also significant (Hollins, 2019; Panda et al., 2021; Regan et al., 2022).

On the enterprise side, staff reported often struggling with how to present information in a way that does not further embed damaging misunderstandings around homelessness. Busy enterprises need to share stories quickly and occasionally things slip through the net or fall into familiar traps.

> *"Sometimes comms put out a case study or a story and I just cringe. I think about the person whose story is being shared and I just think ... is that the right thing for them? Have they taken the time to really explain the consequences of it."* – Frontline staff

This aligns with a 2018 report by Crisis, which gives us insight into the challenges of communicating around homelessness where "individualistic framing" is "dominant" and "unchallenged". This results in charities and the media telling "stories reinforcing individual choice as a primary force in homelessness", so that "we also fail to describe the systemic causes of the problem or its consequences for society" (Crisis, 2018). Many of the enterprises recognised how difficult it is to write a story in all its complexity and acknowledged a desire from customers to see the worst parts of participants' stories to understand the extent of the situation being addressed through their investment.

Many of the participants, however, wanted to tell their stories as a way to "give back" and "make a difference". It felt as if their stories were not used for this purpose but as a way to leverage donations and increase sales.

> *"You have to put those labels on to get that money. And that is sad because, just like he said, we are humans. Right? We all go through problems, but don't try to take my problem to exploit for your gain. [...] And everything is always, you know, voluntarily, if you want to give this information or whatever. But a lot of us, like myself... It's not the reason I am giving information to you guys, to help you out. I am helping someone else that has been through what I have went through. I am trying to get my story out to more people that went through what I went through, to let them know they can come out still on top."* – Lived experience participant

The lesson learnt is that when stories are shared, they not only run the risk of further embedding stigma, but also of being exploitative. When participants are beholden to an enterprise, a participant's story is part of the currency they can pay back with and they may feel unable to say no despite feeling apprehension about sharing the story. We saw examples across different enterprises of creative methodologies being used to tell stories and expose the realities of multiple disadvantage such as podcasts, videos, art and poetry. The key factor is why stories are being used: is it to increase sales or to create change?

> *"I think about the way [enterprise] talks about homelessness. I think we could definitely work on that a little bit. Because there is still lots of assumptions over homelessness and what it is. I would say that the majority of [customers], probably still have an image in their head of homelessness as people sleeping rough. I think people in the office will also still have that image. So, I think we have a lot of work to do internally to educate, with awareness."* – Frontline staff

There is a need for ethical guidelines on storytelling that emphasises participants being able to analyse their stories, and those of others, enabling themselves and others to tell them in a different way, and draw out learning from them for all. When people do tell their stories, they should be supported and counselled on the longer-term impact of their story being out in the world.

Changing perceptions

How stories are told can help address stigma and wider structural challenges, but this is only a small part of ensuring a social enterprise is not perpetuating stigma around homelessness and is instead

changing the conversation altogether. Social enterprise, at its core, through doing business and highlighting the contributions that people experiencing homelessness can make, has the potential to shift how homelessness is perceived. As one participant succinctly phrased it:

> *"[It's] reassessing how we value people and what they are 'worth' and insisting that others see this."* – Senior staff

At the minimum, members of the public, who often have limited access to traditional homelessness spaces such as hostels and day centres, suddenly see people in another light. People with experience of homelessness engaging with customers in day-to-day interactions creates a new standpoint and can shift perceptions.

'Working' to counter stigmatised ideas about homelessness is not new, but these findings indicate a refreshing shift, one that openly and clearly refuses to accept the stigma, turns it on its head and makes palpable advances. The research revealed examples of lived experience of multiple disadvantage being used as a saleable asset and clear statements around participants' value. For example, in one enterprise their staff are not support workers, but 'talent scouts'.

> *"We have had a different partnership with [universities]. So, we work with their sort of big research unit [...] which is really, really academic, serious sort of research. But since they have been working with [name] and the team on that, they have learnt so much from us and especially how they are writing their papers, how they are writing their bids, how they are writing their final research articles. [...] And they have learnt from that and actually they thrive on that: 'Oh, we would never have thought of that. We would never had done it that way.'"* – Senior manager

This can not only challenge stigma in widely held views, but can help participants to reframe their experiences, try new things and feel empowered. Research participants gave examples of participants writing chapters of books, delivering training for professionals and generally creating opportunities that might have been out of their reach previously. When enterprises reveal value, act as 'community connectors' and offer stepping stones, it can be transformative for those involved.

> *"The guys love it actually … being introduced to university life and all. Because none of them, or a lot of them, would never have had that opportunity years ago. But they are getting that opportunity now to walk in and be a part of the campus and be a part of the university life. But also, most importantly getting paid for their time to be in there as well."* – Senior manager

Sadly, while there were fantastic examples within the participating enterprises, the general feeling was that these were still the exception in the wider charitable world. One participant with more than 20 years' experience working in homelessness services still felt that people treated him differently as a result of coming through homelessness services himself, albeit briefly.

> *"Stigma attached to experts by experience. [...] You have that lived experience, it might not be academic, certificates, but I have gone through that experience and my skill set is very different. But it's very unique as well. When you look at the paid rate compared to somebody who has a certificate to somebody who has lived that experience … there is difference between it."* – Expert stakeholder

Social enterprise has the potential to drive systems change, beginning with tackling the misconceptions and stigma associated with homelessness both in terms of individual interactions and through wider communications. The research highlights, however, that there is still work to be done to ensure the maximum impact is achieved and to reduce the risk of unfairness for those involved.

The following recommendations are to ensure fairness in communicating and creating systems change:

17. Recognise that while participants' stories can be powerful and some will be keen to share them, using them can be exploitative and retraumatising. Participants' decisions to share their stories should be fully informed and supported and participants should be counselled on the longer-term impact of their story being made public. There should also be strict time limits for how long an organisation uses a story and the owner of the story should have control over its use.
18. Work with partners and the community to challenge perceptions of people who have experienced homelessness and recognise the value people with experience of homelessness bring to society. Social enterprises should look for creative approaches to expressing experience that are of benefit to the individuals involved.
19. Engage with local and national forums and initiatives that focus on systems change so that insights from enterprise can be used towards improving policy and practice.

Aspirations and realities in managing fairness in enterprise

If tensions around fairness are likely, if not inevitable, within social enterprises working with people experiencing homelessness, then what are the organisational and cultural implications of managing these? The report has presented the ongoing steps and systems that are employed to manage fairness in enterprise, but the research also highlighted how organisation-wide approaches around decision making are an essential part of managing these issues. The research also shows how there is often a single person managing these tensions, but there is value to creating a culture where the responsibility is spread across the organisation. Shared principles and an articulated model for creating change are key.

Defining a model for change

Behind the potential to shift perspectives, practice and wider systems is enterprises having a clear understanding of what homelessness is, how they respond to it, and how they create change. Participants shared examples of where these elements could become unclear, missions could drift and unfairness could appear on the horizon.

> *"[With some enterprises] there tends to not be such an identified need. They tend not to have mapped out their impact. Perhaps they are not being clever enough about their mechanisms for creating change. They throw the charity branding on top of the enterprise and it feels a bit lazy."* – Expert stakeholder

Having a clearly articulated model or theory of change, alongside clear values and beliefs, is a core part of avoiding mission drift and ensuring that enterprises have the desired impact for participants and more widely. Some enterprises identified how models can ebb, flow and adapt based on business needs, but values and principles in making business decisions should stay firm.

> *"Don't forget about the people who you are doing it for. [...] Do it with the people you are doing it for but don't ever forget why you are doing it. And who it's for."* – Senior manager

Within this, being clear and able to articulate how homelessness experience is understood and valued is key, as is sharing this among all stakeholders, including participants, customers, partners, funders and commissioners in a consistent, honest and transparent way. One participant made the point, and others agreed, that enterprises should not be "chasing the money" with funders and should be standing their ground in these instances.

> *"I am having talks with funders, I am saying look if you are going to fund it like this, don't fund it. I don't want your money."* – Senior manager

Who decides: collaborative approaches and scrutiny

Among the participating social enterprises there are a number of formal and informal mechanisms utilised to get ideas and information from participants regarding the shape of the enterprise and its day-to-day running. This is a core mechanism to mitigate unfairness and exploitation and, as some participants expressed, is just "good business".

All of the participating social enterprises ensure that their participants have some degree of choice regarding day-to-day activities – for example, joining the organisation, remuneration, activities, and how a job is completed (managing the stock room, preparing food, workshop set up etc). One senior staff member noted that it was well known that "autonomy is really important in work satisfaction" and many other research participants agreed.

The bigger challenge is around strategic decisions and, more broadly, understanding how the business works. This challenge goes to the core of the enterprise regarding its values and goals, and how they are prioritised. Managing this relies on a well-devised and structured approach to involving people in decision making, underpinned by clear and transparent governance. Mechanisms to achieve this seen in the research ranged from ad-hoc meetings and suggestion boxes to discuss and gain input on new projects through to structured sessions and consistent approaches to ensuring that information is shared, collected, used and fed back.

Interestingly none of the studies identified in the REA foregrounded the importance of coproduction or client involvement in social enterprises, although several (Teasdale, 2009, 2010 and 2012; Mckenna, 2013) talked about the importance of flat line management and non-hierarchical and bureaucratic structures. Nevertheless, many authors writing about participation and homelessness (Groundswell, 2010; Seal, 2009 and 2018; Homeless Link, 2018) emphasise the importance of coproduction and note that its absence curtails related goals such as participants feeling empowered and having a sense of agency. This was strongly felt among some participants in the study who highlighted how coproduction could be a mechanism to avoid unfairness, with some even saying that when these mechanisms are not in place, this could be a sign of unfairness in itself.

> *"[A sign of unfairness is] the people you are taking on ... have no influence over the shape or nature of the organisation itself."* – Expert stakeholder

Collaborative and inclusive approaches depend on getting good information and acting on it. Whether through meetings, workshops or surveys it takes time and all the participating enterprises were struggling to meet their aspirations, with some candidly saying they were "not there yet" or that this was something they would like to work towards or a process that should continually be improved. As one participant highlighted:

> *"We've got all the ideas ... it's actually fitting it into the day to day."* – Frontline staff

Running a busy enterprise and having a hierarchical structure ultimately means that someone needs to make a decision and often that person is the one with adequate oversight and information to base

a decision on. Even where there are good examples of collaborative decision making, someone has to make the decision in the end and this may lead to disappointment.

A certain level of independent scrutiny is important because people are fallible. Some enterprises were talking about unionisation and others were employing external providers to perform this role. One larger and more established organisation has a built-in framework that they choose to employ to its capacity. Who makes decisions is not always within our control; processes for scrutiny, making decisions day-to-day, and responding to external factors all require constant tweaking and are thus dependent on establishing an environment that promotes honest and open communication in general.

Staff managing tensions and wellbeing

The research highlighted the important role that staff working in enterprises play in ensuring that the way they work is fair and how this can also place a burden on staff. In participating enterprises, tensions, alongside a host of other concerns, were typically managed by one (particularly in the early days of an enterprise) or a small group of 'key' staff, who often due to their frontline or senior position in the enterprise are aware of these tensions and work hard to resolve them in real time and for the future. One participant coined the term "shock absorber" to describe their role, which caught the imagination of other participants through the analysis workshops as echoing the situation in their enterprises.

Participants described colleagues in this position as "passionate" and "indispensable", and "carrying the risk" of the business. These individuals are responsible for delivering on the expectations of their team alongside funders, senior management and customers; making things work; and managing "disappointments" and stresses arising from the needs of participants, customers and clients. As enterprises grow, more staff take up this responsibility spanning across frontline and senior roles. In many ways, all people working in enterprises will have to manage "shock"; however, participants stressed that often there are a few people who "hold things together". One participant shared their experience of observing someone in this role in action:

> *"Because they are in … difficult situations where they have to make decisions … they have to handle people's disappointment. They have to deal with issues and there might be customers involved in that sort of thing."* – Frontline staff

Because of their unique position or "ability", they can "see" something in people and have a strong sense of how to get the most out of opportunities, and often they alone have an overall picture of the functioning of the social enterprise. In a couple of cases there was a personal element to their engagement with the enterprise, with it being "really close to their heart", which had the effect of making participants feel confident about the entire endeavour – "so it's obvious it's going to do well".

> *"I think it's something that [name] must see … in the people that express an interest. There has got to be something there that they want to give, that they want to do, that they want to turn their life around and either work or get meaningful employment. Or they want to get some more training or*

build their confidence in a whole variety of ways. [Name] must see something in that person... and wants to take them on and give them a chance. So, I suppose, yes, there is probably something there that he sees, but there is a wide range of people we have got working here and they are all different characters, got different qualities, different experiences." – Senior staff

Although this sentiment is supportive and favourable, does it intensify the pressure being experienced by staff? There is no doubt that these staff members are paying attention to where the pressures are and how to accommodate them – frequently absorbing those pressures themselves.

"So, it's really learning to be... a piece of grass, you know. That's what is critical... you need to bend. Always. So, the enterprise has to flex and that is really challenging, so I take on that stress... Because my targets don't change, just because I don't have any people in today! So, I think the stresses for us... we try not to pass that down the line. [...] As far as that intersection between myself and them, I am, like, 'Ok, no worries, I will see you tomorrow, or next week or... hope you recover.' And then in the office I am like, 'Aaarrggh!' So, we just try not to pass that down." – Senior staff

"A fraying piece of string, just being pulled and pulled... tauter and tauter, about to snap under the pressure of demands pulling in different directions." – Frontline staff

It does not help that these staff members often feel isolated, either without enough support around them, often due to the size of an enterprise, or because they may be in positions where they are working independently, managing business activities and/or the personal needs of volunteers and staff.

"The fact that I am trying to be that... that 'shock absorber' as you will, I am trying to be that person who tries manage what the volunteers do to make sure they aren't doing too much. And or if they are people like [name] who ... needs to be kept busy, making sure that their diaries are filled. It's a lot to think about and it's just me doing the job." – Frontline staff

Concerns around wellbeing and resilience were highlighted by participants for those in these key roles, but also more broadly for staff. Participants shared what they felt was a common issue across the charity sector, where support for participants may be forthcoming, but less so for staff,

"So, yeah, there will be a really big divide in terms of, ok, it's my job to support the people that work for [enterprise]. So, they get this entire package [but] the level of support that I get is not the level of support that I give to people. But that's part of my job... I am ok with that, because I don't have the needs that they do. There are ways we can improve, particularly on the wellbeing side of it. We need to practise what we preach as workers and as staff and we don't. And I have pushed that a lot." – Frontline staff

In the analysis workshops, many participants recognised the presence and impact of managing tensions in enterprise and, looking at the pressure of decision making specifically, went on to describe how they try to spread out the shock and encourage flexibility. Other participants shared how the consideration around this had been identified and was a part of their business model.

"Through either staff we recruit, through the way we support them, our staff. Through the framework and understanding that we have of what those roles are. And helping people understand [...] where the limitations of the expectations on them as a shock absorber are. To say, like, actually you don't have to deal with that. One of the decisions we have made, which perhaps links to this... in social enterprise we try to stick to ... the business-to-business approach, rather than business to customer. So, that's reducing ... the number of dynamics that people have to manage, [...] trying to stick to big orders for one customer rather than 1,000 customers ordering one [product]. I think we are really trying not to make people feel like any one person is isolated as the shock absorber. I think that's definitely something to avoid." – Senior staff

Participants shared how these key members of staff who are managing the tensions exist in all social enterprises, but in many cases they have not been identified as such. If they are the individuals handling the sorts of tensions that could tip over into unfairness and exploitation, they must be identified and supported to protect their own wellbeing.

"The shocks in social enterprises aren't going way. They are always going to be... fairly turbulent operations by their nature. And maybe as organisations they... at least can be monitored. And measured and celebrated. As they are... those shocks are worked through. And maybe that kind of culture shift would be a positive thing for the organisations." – Frontline staff

Transparency, honesty, consistency

Through the research and this report, it is clear that the way to maintain fairness in enterprise is to address the tensions that emerge through social business based on the principles of transparency, honesty and consistency.

"So how do we communicate what we are doing as a business to the people who work for us? How do we help them to feel involved in the business? If they are left in the dark, they might feel like things are happening to them that they don't understand. And I think that is where they get resentment, isn't it? So, it's just needing that communication there. But yeah again, do we have the capacity for that? Because that is mainly on [senior manager] and he is just one man. And that is really difficult. So again, a challenge." – Frontline staff

Although maintaining these principles can be a challenge, to be a fair enterprise these principles must be implemented and managed. These principles transcend all stakeholder groups, starting with the participants of the enterprise, ensuring offers, expectations and ways of working with people are built on them, but also with colleagues, customers, partner organisations and funders. All stakeholders need to have integrity, honesty and self-scrutiny. Participants stressed the importance of reflective practice, robust data and feedback, and effective analysis and actions to avoid resentment and maintain trust. It is also clear that areas of tension need to be viewed through the same principles, by collaboratively reflecting on and managing them.

"If these tensions are inevitable, [there is] value in holding the tensions together. And actually, rather than trying to resolve or avoid them, actually looking at [them] and seeing the value in that."
– Senior staff

The following recommendations are to ensure fairness in regard to decision making, defining models and supporting staff wellbeing:

20. Business and social goals should align in business planning wherever possible. On an ongoing basis, clarity is needed in decision making on the degree to which decisions would further business or social goals. Where conflicts arise, they need to be reflected upon regularly and can be used as a framework to support organisational decision making.

21. Develop a theory of change that defines what the enterprise intends to achieve for participants individually and in terms of wider systems change. This should include an articulation of what the enterprise's conceptualisation of homelessness is, how it is using individuals' experience of homelessness and how its work responds to it.

22. The involvement of participants in decision making and coproduction should be embraced and underpinned by clear and transparent governance. Having consistent and structured approaches to ensure that information is shared, collected and utilised should be a priority.

23. Social enterprises should consider having some ongoing and periodic independent scrutiny to audit how day-to-day and strategic decisions are made, how the organisation responds to external factors and the degree to which the enterprise has created an environment that promotes honest and open communication.

24. Value, acknowledge and encourage staff, particularly those in key roles and ensure they are not overburdened. Providing spaces for debriefing and reflective practice for all staff is a step towards this.

25. Ensure staff know the boundaries of their role. Limit the number of people each person is responsible for and reduce the number of dynamics people have to manage. Ensure people are supported and have a clear framework of values, aims and intended outcomes.

Conclusion

Social enterprises engage people experiencing homelessness in a variety of ways, from employment to training-based models with diverse approaches to compensation and support. The different models shape participants' journeys out of homelessness through building connectedness, providing activity and structure, offering routes into employment and helping people to secure work and not be dependent on benefits. Whatever the model, there are challenges inherent in working with people experiencing homelessness resulting from contextual factors and individual personal circumstances. Other issues and tensions result specifically from organisational and business-related considerations including how people are engaged, what people get in return for their time and how support is delivered.

Within existing evidence and among those who participated in this study, there was an acknowledgment that inequality, whether structural, driven by policy or more recent factors such as the Covid-19 pandemic, was shaping the environment in which social enterprises were working and creating the social challenges that they were having to address. Social enterprise has the power to move people away from homelessness and, although tensions can be an obstacle, there is plenty of good practice in place to manage these tensions and ensure enterprises offer sustainable routes out of homelessness. Enterprises are also going beyond achieving change for individuals to creating tangible systems change. Successful systems change means having a clear conception of what homelessness is and how the enterprise is addressing this. As part of this, there is some good practice in managing the emerging tensions from outward communications, such as how participants' stories are portrayed, but there is still work to be done to ensure this is achieved effectively and safely.

As highlighted in this report, dealing with tensions around fairness is an inherent part of social enterprise, but if not managed well, these tensions can lead to resentment and feelings of unfairness. The key is how enterprises deal with these issues; often this relies on key people in an organisation absorbing these "shocks", often in isolation. This study highlighted the need for cross-organisational approaches to responding to tensions to avoid undue pressure on individual staff members. This requires organisational and cultural shifts within enterprises, particularly around decision-making processes.

The issue of fairness in social enterprise is complex and multi-faceted. As participants stressed through this research, this is not something that can be fixed, but is an issue that takes ongoing consideration and appropriate responses. Transparency, honesty and consistency are essential within organisations and among all stakeholders in responding to this issue.

Appendix 1: Approach to the project

This section outlines the approach that Inclusive Insight took to delivering the project, which was developed with an emphasis on engaging people who are involved in the delivery of social enterprise in relation to homelessness, particularly those who have experienced homelessness themselves. It was delivered across four phases: co-design and scoping, fieldwork, analysis, and dissemination, guided by a steering group with representatives in social enterprise working directly and indirectly with people experiencing homelessness.

Co-design and scoping

Phase 1 of the project focused on the set-up and initial scoping activities for the project, generating initial insights and informing the development of a research plan.

Desk-based research: We completed desk-based research including a rapid evidence assessment (REA) of the literature (academic and 'grey'). Literature identified through the REA is included throughout this report. Further to this, we conducted a review of different models of operation within the Enterprise Development Programme portfolio, the Homeless Link membership, and across other social businesses focused on homelessness in England through a web-based review. This enabled us to start to map the different models of client training, volunteering and employment currently in existence within homelessness social enterprises and to draft a typology as the basis for the mapping survey.

Service user coproduction workshop: We delivered one workshop that focused on exploring the perceptions of fairness and exploitation among people with experience of homelessness involved in social business activities. The workshop was held online with five participants with lived experience of homelessness who were current or previous volunteers and employees of social enterprise. Discussions focused on experiences of working and volunteering in enterprise, perceptions of fairness and identifying areas where unfairness has been felt and experienced.

Expert stakeholder interviews: We conducted in-depth interviews with five expert stakeholders identified by Homeless Link. Interviews explored experiences of working in social enterprise, reflected on topics highlighted in the REA and discussed practical considerations for planning the research process including risk, sampling and good practice examples. A further three expert stakeholder interviews took place later in the project.

Mapping survey: Based on the above, we drafted a mapping survey designed to capture existing social enterprise and trading activities across England working with people experiencing homelessness, particularly the different models of client training, volunteering and employment.

The mapping survey was collected via the Alchemer platform[4] using Homeless Link branding. Unfortunately, despite numerous attempts to recruit participants, including several mail-outs, blogs, a prize incentive, a dedicated seminar to encourage participation and employing a person to recruit participants via telephone, in total there were only 19 responses that could be included in the study. As a consequence, this data was insufficient to draw meaningful quantitative conclusions. The qualitative data from the survey was incorporated and analysed alongside the data collected in the qualitative fieldwork. Quotes taken from the mapping survey are attributed as 'survey respondent'.

This impacted upon the first two aims of the research: to map the different models of client training/volunteering/employment currently in existence within homelessness social enterprises and to benchmark the experiences of people at risk of or experiencing homelessness involved in enterprise models. We have mitigated for this by engaging a diverse range of enterprises in the qualitative fieldwork, engaging a significant number of participants through this fieldwork and close analysis of the rich data that was collected through this process. We have also undertaken additional desk-based research to explore the various models of engagement in operation across England to further develop the typology of engagement models.

Advisory group: We met twice with the advisory group in the first phase of the research, firstly to provide guidance and advice around the shape of the coproduction workshop and expert stakeholder interviews. Having collated the information gathered we met again to review insight gathered so far, define methods of engaging experts in social business and service users in the research, as appropriate, and to input into the formation of the research plan.

Qualitative data collection

Phase 2 involved a deep-dive exploration of nine social enterprises and charities with income raising activities enabling us to explore practice in depth, identifying what works, for whom and when, as well as challenges and learning. Through engaging with a diverse range of enterprises we were able to identify good practice in specific settings, as well as exploring challenges, trends and learning across the different sites.

Defining social enterprise and charitable trading: The desk-based research revealed the diversity of social enterprise and charitable trading work with people experiencing homelessness across England. Based on scoping, we estimate there are more than 300 enterprises across the UK that are specifically working with people experiencing homelessness with diversity in structure, practice, trading activities and types of involvement. For the purposes of this project, we agreed with the steering group to use the following definition of social enterprise:

> *"A business with primarily social/environmental objectives, whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or community rather than mainly being paid to shareholders and owners." – DTI, 2002*

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4 Alchemer is an online survey software tool: www.alchemer.com

Scoping revealed that some charitable organisations describe their organisation or their activities as 'social enterprise', but in fact do not engage in trading activities to generate a surplus. We therefore aimed to involve organisations who have trading activities and provide a service or sell a product where the surplus generated is reinvested in the organisation or community towards its charitable aims. In the research we use the term 'trading activities' as a catch all.

Sampling of case study enterprises: With the significant differences between social enterprises and other organisations with trading activities in mind, we engaged a diverse group of enterprises in the qualitative fieldwork. A sampling frame was developed with the input of the advisory group to capture a range of characteristics that influence how enterprises operate and work. These included the type of engagement opportunity for people experiencing homelessness (e.g. paid or unpaid roles etc); organisational and governance structure (e.g. community interest company (CIC), charity, and with or without an arms-length trading body); origins of the enterprise – whether started from a charity, by an entrepreneur or led by people with lived experience; types of products or services; size of enterprise by income; and location (geographically across England. With these characteristics in mind, a group of enterprises were selected to participate in the study that would capture diversity around all these factors, as far as possible. The nine participating enterprises had the following characteristics:

Organisational structure	Region	Paid or unpaid engagement for participants	Type of product or service
Charity (4)	North-East	Mixture of paid and unpaid	Manufacturing
	West Midlands	Paid	Professional services
	East Midlands	Unpaid	Agriculture
	South-West	Unpaid	Commerce
Charity with arms-length trading bodies (3)	South-West	Unpaid	Commerce
	Yorkshire and the Humber	Mixture of paid and unpaid	Commerce
	London	Unpaid	Hospitality & events
Community Interest Company (2)	London	Paid	Events
	North-West	Mixture of paid and unpaid	Consultancy

Introductions were made through Homeless Link, with staff from Inclusive Insight meeting with representatives from prospective case study enterprises to discuss the project and agree approaches to collaboration. Lead contacts at enterprises were also asked if there were specific topics, areas of interest or areas that they felt were good practice so that the questioning in the interviews could be targeted, and anonymised feedback given to the enterprises.

Interviews and focus groups: For each case study, members of the Inclusive Insight research team visited the enterprise to conduct face-to-face fieldwork. We explored the views and experiences of the project manager or coordinator and those of staff and volunteer teams, including service users involved in trading activities, through 39 in-depth interviews, seven focus groups and observation undertaken during visits by the research team. In total, 76 participants were involved in the qualitative fieldwork, with two-thirds (67%) having personally experienced homelessness. Of the participants, 63% identified as male (or trans man), with the rest identifying as female (including trans woman). The majority of participants identified their ethnicity as 'White British' (78%), with 11% from other white backgrounds, and the remainder identifying as Mixed Race, Asian, Black British or preferred not to say.

Participants had a diverse range of roles and relationships within the enterprises. Over half (56%) were currently in paid roles, whether part time or full time, with the remainder in unpaid roles of various types. Of participants 24% currently had paid roles but had previously performed unpaid roles within the same organisation. Within the enterprises, participants were identified using a range of terms, including companions, graduates, trainees etc. As many of the terms were specific to individual enterprises, to ensure the anonymity of participants, in this report we attributed quotes using generic terms according to their roles (see page 14).

The topics in the interview guides were based on insight gathered in the scoping and co-design phase. Informed consent was sought from all participants using an information sheet and consent form. All participants who were in voluntary or unpaid roles were given a £20 voucher for their time. All focus groups and in-depth interviews were audio recorded and professionally transcribed.

Analysis and dissemination

With the data collection complete, the Inclusive Insight team analysed the data with collaboration and guidance from participants and coproduction of the practical recommendations. The process is set out below:

Preliminary analysis: Initial analysis of raw data (in-depth interview and focus group transcripts, pen portraits written by researchers and qualitative survey responses) was undertaken by the Inclusive Insight team using Nvivo.[5] Data was analysed thematically, both within and across cases study enterprises. Differences and similarities in approaches and experiences between case study projects and individuals were explored. This was shared at analysis workshops.

When labelling themes through analysis, the language of participants was used to "preserve participants' meanings of their views and actions" (Charmaz, 2006) following a grounded theory approach. Working in this way also provides some transparency through the analysis because participants could see how what they had said was being used and hopefully felt that they were being heard through the research. Where strong themes emerged, these have been developed in this way and referenced through the report. For example, the concepts of "shock absorbers", "inevitable tension" and "community connectors" emerged early on in the analysis and were developed and expanded through discussions with participants, the advisory group, and analysis and verification workshops.

Analysis and verification workshops: Workshops were designed and delivered that bought together research participants to review and scrutinise the data collectively. Two workshops were delivered online via Zoom, which brought together staff, volunteers and service users. In total 20 participants attended (12 at the first workshop and eight at the second), all of whom had been involved in the earlier stages of the project. Participants were presented with a summary of findings to date and were invited to comment and seek clarification. The workshops then explored four areas, holding four discussion groups within each workshop, digging deeper into the issues, identifying good practice and forming recommendations. Workshops were audio recorded and professionally transcribed. Transcripts were then added to the broader qualitative data analysis and insights gathered used for further analysis through Nvivo.

Steering group: A final steering group was held as an opportunity to gather feedback on the findings and to plan for the dissemination of the report and good practice toolkit.

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[5] NVivo is a software programme used for qualitative and mixed-methods research. Specifically, it is used for the analysis of unstructured text, audio, video, and image data, including (but not limited to) interviews, focus groups, surveys, social media, and journal articles.

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Homeless Link

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

homeless.org.uk

INCLUSIVE**insight**

Inclusive Insight works with organisations to gather insight, improve policy and practice and embed the participation of people affected by homelessness in strategy, decision making and service design. It is passionate about the power of participation and believes that people and communities need to be in the lead to create meaningful change.

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