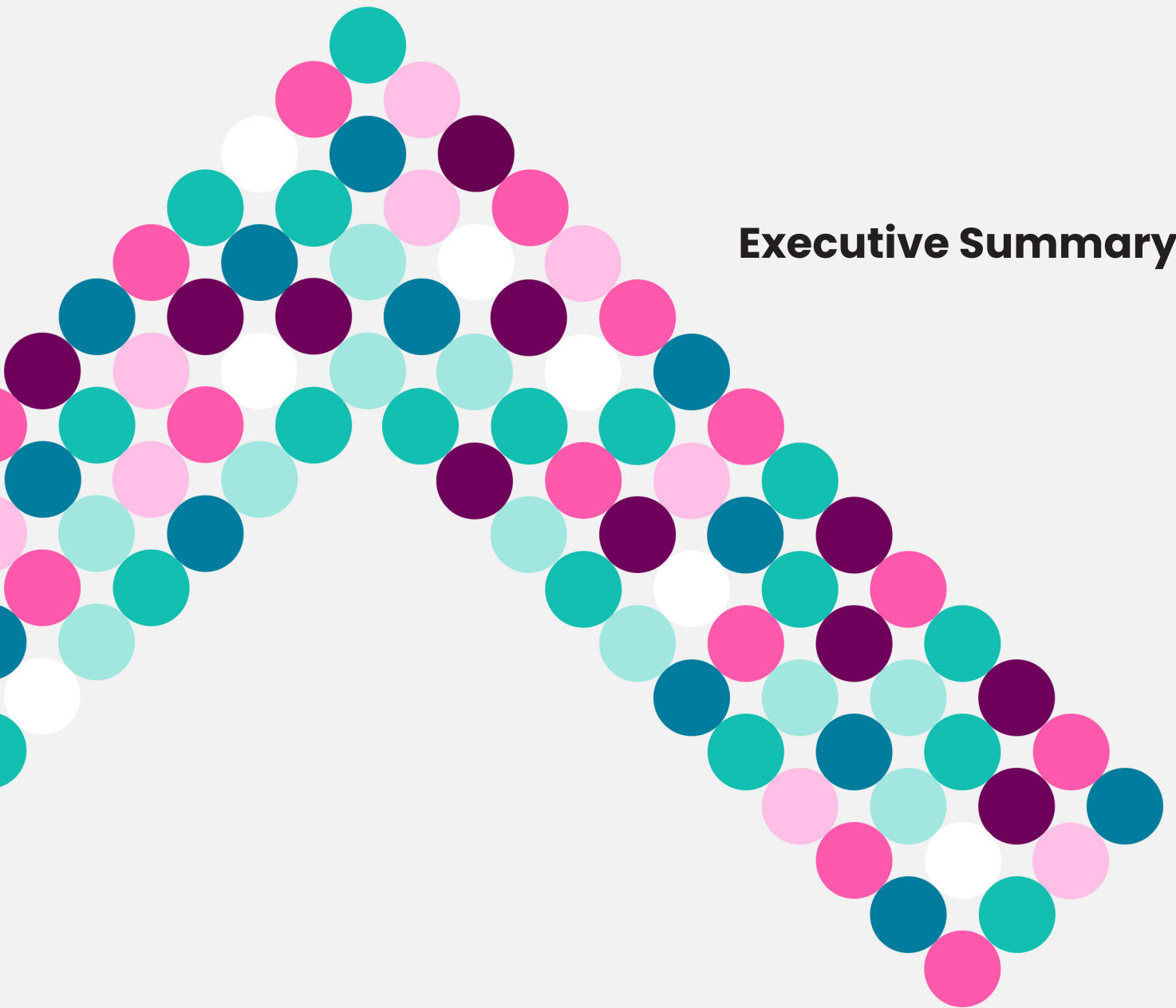




Unlocking the door

A roadmap for supporting
non-UK nationals facing
homelessness in England

Executive Summary



Non-UK nationals are more vulnerable to homelessness than people with UK citizenship, and those with restricted or undetermined eligibility for public funds even more so.¹ This challenge is driven by complex factors at national and local levels. In this report, we present findings from research and consultation with local authorities, voluntary sector stakeholders and people with lived experience of restricted eligibility and homelessness in England. We offer a roadmap to tackling this challenge at the local level and highlight the national policy changes needed in order to end rough sleeping and homelessness for everyone, for good.

Building services that work for all

Our findings provided insights into the design and delivery of homelessness services that work for non-UK nationals with restricted eligibility. Research participants highlighted the remarkable benefits for services and individuals delivered by a stable, universal accommodation offer, including expediting immigration cases and improving engagement in support. Local authorities should act more confidently to fully utilise available powers to accommodate this group and work in partnership with the local voluntary sector to unlock additional options. Rent-free 'assessment beds' within rough sleeping pathways are one example of a model that could be more widely adopted, to facilitate immigration resolutions and move people on.

Access to quality immigration and welfare benefits advice was crucial to resolving non-UK nationals' homelessness and should be core to local authorities' multi-agency support offer. Restricted eligibility is rarely a fixed state and should be treated as a support need to be assessed and addressed. Increased commissioning and embedding of independent immigration advice improved access in homelessness settings; however, challenges around access, capacity, complexity and quality persist. In addition to continuing to improve models, local authorities and Government must tackle the shortages of funding, staffing and capacity across the immigration advice and legal aid systems. The value of meaningful partnerships between local authorities and homelessness and immigration advice organisations at both operational and strategic levels was also highlighted, as a key way to improve case management, better understand community needs, find joint solutions and unlock local resources.

To address intersecting health and drug and alcohol issues, our research underlined the applicability of lessons we have already learned from other groups facing multiple disadvantage, with some adaptations. Multi-agency, person-centred support, facilitated by stable accommodation, quality immigration advice and a trauma-informed understanding of cultural and immigration backgrounds, delivered impressive success. However, it was important that this was facilitated by measures to address language barriers, including access to quality interpreters and native language staff.

Providing equitable and accessible services also meant addressing the fear, distrust and discrimination that have sometimes characterised non-UK nationals' experiences. Closure of in-person services, lack of onward referrals for those refused support and knowledge gaps among homelessness staff all served to compound access barriers and reinforce individuals' reluctance to seek help. Our research highlighted the need for staff training, targeted prevention work, and local authority leadership to embed a welcoming, solutions-oriented and anti-racist culture in frontline services.

1. Boobis, S., Jacob, R., and Sanders, B. (2019). *A Home For All: Understanding Migrant Homelessness in Great Britain*. London: Crisis

Creating the foundations for inclusion

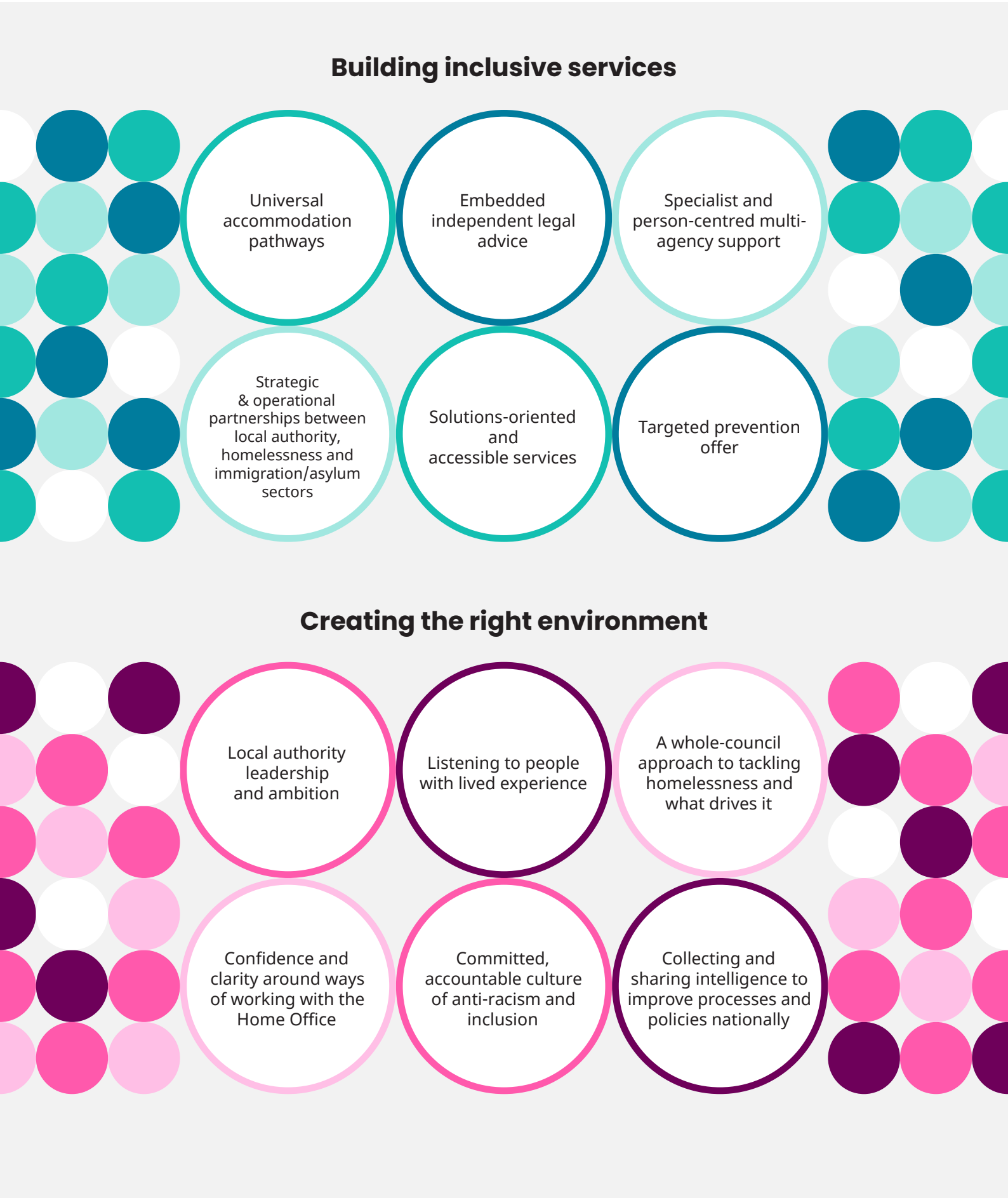
Overarching local authority commitment and leadership was crucial to building trust with local partners and creating the right environment for inclusive services. Setting explicit ambitions and commitments around the inclusion of non-UK nationals with restricted eligibility within local strategies had concrete knock-on benefits for services and staff. Local policy and practice development in this space should be informed by lived experience, and confront the risks of racism and discrimination in services. Homelessness teams must also take account of the shared responsibility for non-UK national homelessness and vulnerability across council functions, especially social care. In order to rationalise budgets and improve consistency, local authorities should aim take a corporate approach to commitments to inclusion.

The development of transparent local authority policies and procedures around the sharing of service user data with the Home Office is also crucial, both to ensuring the integrity of services and availing of valuable opportunities to progress immigration and asylum cases. Local authorities should ensure policies emphasise transparency and informed consent and prioritise the involvement of immigration advisors.

Facing the national challenge

In a number of key areas, Government policy has hampered local efforts to tackle non-UK national homelessness. To end rough sleeping, we must begin to balance the funding gap left by immigration-based restrictions on welfare benefits, frequently patched over by local authorities and the voluntary sector. We must address the vulnerabilities created by asylum and immigration policy, improve access to early legal advice and continue to work towards effective and efficient ways of working within and between the Home Office and homelessness systems, so that people can move on from homelessness as quickly as possible.

Figure 1 – Elements of an inclusive local homelessness system



Recommendations for change



Local authorities should:

1. Integrate **commitments to the inclusion of non-UK nationals** into homelessness strategies and corporate strategies in order to set the direction for collaborative, person-centred joint-working both across local authority teams and with the voluntary sector.
2. Explore all possible avenues to **unlock access to accommodation** for non-UK nationals with undetermined or restricted eligibility up to the limits of the law. Consider where the local authority may have a funding role, as well as a facilitative role in partnership with the voluntary and faith sectors.
3. Facilitate operational and strategic **partnership-working** with the immigration advice sector, migrant community organisations and homelessness organisations, in order to identify gaps, emerging issues and rationalise provision (particularly accommodation).
4. Increase access to quality, independent **immigration and welfare advice** across homelessness and prevention settings by commissioning advice on a multi-year basis.
5. Facilitate equitable access to **person-centred and trauma-informed support** for non-UK nationals with restricted eligibility by investing in training, informal, peer-led support, and measures to mitigate language barriers.
6. Address barriers to access that reinforce **fear and reluctance** to seek support and leave people stuck in dangerous living situations by investing in training and clarifying the role of Housing Options teams.
7. Develop a targeted approach to **preventing** non-UK national rough sleeping through community-based awareness raising and outreach.
8. Develop and communicate local policies that ensure the safe, minimal and consent-based **sharing of service user data with the Home Office**, in close collaboration with the immigration advice sector.
9. Work to **improve Government processes and policies** by highlighting, with evidence, where they are having a detrimental effect on tackling homelessness.

National Government should:

1. Deliver on a **cross-departmental approach** to tackling rough sleeping as a public health issue, which facilitates joint funding and working across health, social care and homelessness to increase accommodation options for non-UK nationals with restricted eligibility. This should include provision of a discrete fund to local authorities to ensure a minimum level of accommodation provision, regardless of immigration status and commitment to review and monitor all immigration-based restrictions on public funds to mitigate their role in driving homelessness..
2. Address the **financial burden on local authorities** and delays to move-on by increasing central Government support and accommodation options for people facing homelessness while waiting for a Home Office decision and; investing in training, staff capacity and escalation pathways to accelerating compassionate and quality Home Office decision-making.
3. Extend eligibility for benefits to all EEA nationals with **pre-settled status**. At a minimum, provide a route to lifting eligibility restrictions for people with pre-settled status facing homelessness and reduce the evidence requirements for converting to settled status.
4. Further **clarify the legal powers and expectations** on local authorities to accommodate and support non-UK nationals with undetermined or restricted eligibility.
5. Improve access to **free immigration and welfare benefits advice** by funding and promoting the expansion of advice provision in homelessness settings and restoring legal aid for early legal advice to

pre-LASPO (Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012) levels for immigration, welfare benefits and housing law.

6. Prevent homelessness among people leaving the **asylum system** by:
 - a. allowing 56 days following an asylum decision before cessations of support, in line with the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA);
 - b. extending the HRA Duty to Refer to the Home Office;
 - c. giving people seeking asylum and their adult dependants the right to work from six months after their initial asylum claim or further submission.
7. Amend section 12 of the **Nationality and Borders Act 2022** (NABA) so that refugees are not treated differently simply because of how they arrived in the UK and the NRPF condition cannot be applied to tier 2 refugees and their families. At a minimum, commit to review, monitor and report on the impact of NABA on homelessness in an effort to mitigate unintended consequences.



Homeless Link



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About Us

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

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