

“Where will they go?”

What homeless people in Glasgow said about:
Homelessness, hostels and homelessness services

Summary Report

Glasgow Homelessness Network strives to prevent, alleviate and ultimately eradicate homelessness by raising awareness of the issue, facilitating a joint working approach, influencing policy and provision at all levels and empowering homeless people to contribute to this process



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Foreword

Glasgow's Homelessness Partnership, of which GHN is part, was formed to bring about a major change in the way homelessness is tackled in the city. Learning from successive stages of the Rough Sleeping Initiative, the partners recognised that Glasgow's large scale hostels, originally set up to be part of the solution to rising homelessness, had instead become part of the problem. A decision to close large scale hostels and at the same time realign the wider range of services to make them more appropriate, more responsive and ultimately more effective, was taken. Turning a decision to reshape services on such a large scale into a plan of action involves many months of research, planning and negotiating with many stakeholders, including a wide range of voluntary and statutory sector service providers, and practitioners in many disciplines. However, the key stakeholders are the people whose lives are directly affected by the experience of homelessness, and the aim of the Partnership in supporting the production of this report was to ensure that their views could be heard and taken into account in the process of change.

Living a life within the cycle of homelessness that is characterised by periods spent in a hostel, sleeping rough, living with friends, being in hospital or prison, being housed and the tenancy breaking down and so on, is not easy, and doesn't leave much energy for prioritising and contributing to planning for change. The many people whose views are expressed through this report gave freely of their time, describing experiences and understandings that, while sometimes shocking and sometimes humorous, are absolutely critical to plans for service development and delivery. If this knowledge and understanding is used to underpin the planned realignment of services, there will be the best possible chance of succeeding in the ultimate aim of minimising the damage caused by homelessness and the associated human, social and economic cost.

This must not be an exercise undertaken in isolation. It is the beginning of a dialogue, and a process of service user involvement, where recognition is given to the needs and quite legitimate aspirations of some of Glasgow's most marginalised citizens. The process of change has begun, and the processes of service user involvement have also begun, in the work behind this report and in the involvement processes in several local organisations. Both must develop in parallel, to the point at which service user involvement is embedded in planning and delivery of every aspect of homelessness services, in every sector, at both individual and collective level.

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Introduction

In December 2001, as part of the development of Glasgow's homelessness strategy and the hostel decommissioning process, the Glasgow Homelessness Partnership commissioned Glasgow Homelessness Network (GHN) to conduct a consultation exercise with service users. The main purpose of this exercise was to obtain homeless people's opinions, observations and concerns about the planned hostel decommissioning and re-provisioning process, and to find out more about how people experience homelessness in our city.

The consultation exercise aimed to:

1. Obtain homeless people's opinions, observations and concerns about hostel decommissioning and other key changes taking place within the homelessness network
2. Inform service users of the details of the changes to Glasgow's homelessness services
3. Inform and influence the development of Glasgow's decommissioning/re-provisioning processes, and inform the city's wider homelessness planning and implementation strategies
4. Inform and influence the development of a city-wide integrated approach to user involvement at both the strategic and day-to-day levels of service planning

GHN conducted a two-phase consultation exercise with service users during 2002. Phase one comprised 29 focus groups with 70 service users. Phase two comprised individual interviews with 88 service users which explored, in more depth, the key themes emerging from the first phase.

This important report summarises the key themes that emerged from the focus groups and individual interviews, and sets out development issues for those who are planning and providing services. As a consequence, it contains invaluable information for agencies involved in commissioning, planning and providing services. GHN hopes that the report will contribute to a well-informed, needs-led and client centred approach to hostel decommissioning and re-provisioning, and to the development of a local homelessness strategy which takes into account the views and the experiences of homeless people.

The detailed findings of the consultation exercise are available at www.ghn.org.uk

Methodology

Stage 1: Focus Groups

We arranged the focus groups in a variety of settings in an attempt to reach as many different 'sub-groups' of the homeless population as possible. By targeting these sub-groups (differentiated by age, gender, total length of homelessness, type of living situation, support needs, and current / past experience of large-scale hostels), the survey aimed to capture the full range of relevant experience within the total sample of homeless people targeted, with sufficient numbers in each 'sub-group' to yield useful information about each type of individual experience of homelessness.

We facilitated 29 focus groups at 21 sites between January and May 2002, with 13 of these focus groups proving viable. A total of 70 individuals participated in the focus groups.

The focus groups illustrated how participants experienced homelessness and hostel life. Participants outlined their fears about and hopes for the hostel decommissioning and re-provisioning process, and provided a valuable insight into the complex social, psychological and emotional impacts both of being in and of moving on from homelessness.

The key issues that emerged from focus groups were then taken forward for further investigation in one-to-one interviews.

Stage 2: Individual Interviews

This second phase aimed to:

- Further explore the most pertinent issues raised by service users in the focus group setting
- Clarify issues which were framed by service users in generalised terms during the focus group phase
- Consider further service gaps and explore models of accommodation and support to; address gaps, prevent repeat homelessness, and enable effective resettlement
- Focus the consultation exercise in such a way that the local planning structures with responsibility for hostel closure and re-provisioning have information which is relevant, useful and directly applicable to plans currently being developed
- Further consider the views of groups under-represented in the focus groups (including people sleeping rough, people who have moved on from homelessness and people who have been homeless in the short term)



We interviewed 88 people in a range of homelessness settings, within different sub-groups of the homelessness population.

The individual interviews explored:

- What kind of supported accommodation is required in terms of range and scale - particularly for those who do not wish to move out of homelessness into independent living situations?
- How useful is the staged re-entry model of resettlement?
- What type of support / interventions are required in the pre-resettlement, resettlement and post-resettlement phases?
- What are the perceptions and motivations of those who do not want to move on from homelessness?
- What would have prevented respondents' homelessness?
- For those respondents who had resettled, what would prevent repeat homelessness?

The findings from the focus groups and interviews were broadly similar and the key themes that emerged are summarised in the following section.

Key Themes

1. Understanding Homelessness and Its Prevention

Understanding Homelessness

For those who took part in this survey, the main causes of homelessness were:

- Addictions
- Breakdown of living arrangements, including bereavement
- Loss of tenancy after being in some kind of institution such as prison, hospital or care
- Threat of or actual violence
- Financial problems
- Health

Many said that a traumatic experience had directly or indirectly contributed to their homelessness. One in five interviewees became homeless because of a threat of, or actual violence. The same proportion said their homelessness was a consequence of bereavement (usually a close family member such as parent or child).

This has implications for the kind of services needed to support people in such situations and the information that needs to be made available.

"I had a four apartment in Easterhouse. I was drinking heavily and had the DTs. I abandoned the house. I didn't want anybody to see the state I was in. I ended up skipping when I was 20."

"I went off with an older man who was a drug-dealer and a gangster. I had lots of money and drugs, and then I left him and ended up in prostitution and homelessness."

"My mum and dad died within one day of each other, and I had no other family. I had to come straight to the hostels. I was 18. I had no support, no social worker, nothing."

"My mum and dad died. When they were ill, I was paying all the bills. I lost my job when they died. I couldn't afford to keep the house, so I handed in the keys."

"I got no support after leaving care - was given a tenancy with no support with budgeting. I wasn't used to benefit forms, poll tax and all that - I gave it up."

"A violent father. I got doings for nothing. He was very abusive."

"I took redundancy at Yarrows - I'd worked there for 14 years. Then I hit the drink through having no money and getting stressed. Then my marriage fell apart because of my drinking, and I became homeless."

"...I got depressed and gave up my house."

Prevention

Most people said that if the agencies they had contacted had intervened earlier or had provided more support, their homelessness could have been avoided. Many cited a lack of information as a contributory factor. They said that they would have liked more practical support; such as money advice, help with budgeting and managing bills. The types of assistance that people said would have helped were neither complicated nor expensive.

"By age 22, I was in Bell Street.... but I was scared to do anything around support. I didn't ask for support. Bell Street takes everything away from you. Not everyone will go and ask for help. I had no family, I was on my own. There should have been some kind of key work support, without having to ask for it - someone who gets to know you, especially if you're shy."

"If there were people to turn to when you have trouble at home, people like good social workers who took your side and made sure you were going to get a house and help."

"The violence (from husband) had been going on for years – throwing away food, not letting me eat, hurting me. I didn't know about Women's Aid then. My children went to my parents – my mother's was a safe place. When I was in the hostel I visited them all the time, but it would have been far better if I hadn't had to be separated from them. There should be more refuges for women"

"Someone to work with - to show me how to budget, how to run a house. I wouldn't have made some of the mistakes then."

"I didn't have any support to keep my tenancy - If I had I might not have had to go through this."

"I didn't know where to get help."

"I didn't know until I got into the hostels that there are people who can help you with debt."

2. Why Do People Remain In Homelessness?

"I like the company, people have been in here for years, they are just the same as me - I have known them for years."

Almost one in five interviewees said that they wanted to remain in homelessness. Taken at face value, this might seem surprising. But when we investigated further we found out that there are positive aspects of living in homelessness such as staff support, company, safety and a sense of belonging; and negative aspects of tenancies such as responsibility for paying bills, loneliness, lack of support and low confidence about their ability to cope.

Many people thought they would not get the support they needed to budget or run a house. Their preoccupations were similar to those who were moving to their own tenancies although the latter could see there were workable solutions.

This has implications for the kind of information that is provided to people within homelessness and the support they receive in planning for the future. Would attitudes change if people were aware of the range of support services available and the accommodation options open to them?

"I need to be in a place with staff who are qualified and who care for me."

"I don't feel I could cope with shopping and cooking and everything."

"I feel safer in Inglefield Street."

3. Moving To A Tenancy

Clearly, people moving from homelessness into a tenancy need support. Respondents highlighted a range of support they would find beneficial. This included practical assistance to obtain a tenancy, 'training' in household management skills and help with drug/alcohol problems.

"Support and help to learn how to budget, decorate my house, how to pay bills and run a house."

The knowledge that they could call on someone if there was a problem was very important. One in four said they would like "visiting support" to check on how things are going. The majority of respondents thought that this support should be for as long as they felt they needed it.

While a few people did not foresee any problems once they were in a tenancy, over three quarters envisaged one or more problems. These included loneliness and isolation, boredom, stress and anxiety, adapting to a new way of life and money. One in ten people thought they would miss friends and 'the company'. A few thought that maintaining contact with old acquaintances might lead them into homelessness again.

Respondents suggested solutions to such problems, for example, visiting support. They also suggested attending courses and activities, finding things to do in the community, and getting fit, as strategies to counter loneliness and boredom.

This highlights the need for services to both support people moving to tenancies after homelessness and to address the internal and external factors that can lead to homelessness.

"Somewhere where I could go and ask for help if I needed it. No contact if I don't need it, but it's there if I do."

"I need to feel safe, I need to know that I will have security at the new tenancy and help I can call on at short notice, because all the tenancies in the past went bad."

4. Living In A Tenancy

Respondents had both positive and negative views about being in a tenancy. Negative aspects included isolation, loneliness and boredom as well as a lack of practical skills in budgeting. This has implications for the services that need to be in place to ensure that people have the support they need to maintain their tenancy.

People typically mentioned freedom as being the most positive aspect of living in their own tenancy.

Both practical and emotional support offered at the point of need were seen as important both for making living in a tenancy better, and to avoid or cope with crises which could lead to repeat homelessness.

People highlighted the importance of practical support such as help with budgeting, making calls, and general help in obtaining a tenancy, as well as emotional support - 'the worker being there'. They also said that it was important to get assistance in negotiating their way around the system, or help to gain the confidence to do so themselves.

They also emphasised the need for continuing support. This included not only practical support such as help with GPs or neighbours, budgeting and household management, but also knowing that someone is there if they run into problems, or someone to check how they are doing. Over half stressed the need for more support with no time limit.

"More help and support out in the community."

"Good support, available when I need it."

"It's good having a worker there for you, because I need help with everything – money relationships, everything, and also being able to go and see the worker at their office."

"The fact that somebody knows where you have been, where you want to go – that you are not alone. It can be a very lonely world if nobody comes near your door."

"You can come and go when you want - you can make your own rules, and not have to live under somebody else's rules."

"There are no staff, sometimes being nice to me and sometimes being horrible. There's nobody telling me when I can go to bed."

"It can get lonely at times, especially at night."

"There's nothing to do, I get bored all the time."

"Life would be easier with a bit more money."

"Some support at weekends."

5. Hostel Closure

Lack Of Information

70% of interviewees were aware of the hostel closure programme. However, nearly one person in three did not know about the plans and there are clearly issues about conveying future plans to people who are homeless. From this survey generally, it is clear that homeless people are unaware of the range of services and support mechanisms available now or in the pipeline.

The focus groups highlighted that there is no consistent information being given to homeless people who often receive (potentially misleading) information through rumour and conjecture.

Positive Aspects Of Closure

"The positive is that the council will have to look at new / upgraded services for homeless people."

The following aspects were noted as being positive:

- Glasgow City Council hostels are too large with little support available
- People feel anonymous and de-individualised within large-scale hostels

"They are over-crowded, the buildings are all run down, the rooms are too small, there's no privacy, the staff are just not interested."

- The general availability and widespread use of illicit drugs within large-scale hostels has become unmanageable for hostel staff and creates an atmosphere of fear and tension within the hostel environment, particularly for non-drug users.

"I've known perfectly straight people who go into hostels and get a drug problem."

Negative Aspects Of Closure

"Where will they go? They'll end up on the streets."

The following aspects were noted as being negative:

- People were uncertain about where they will go once the hostels are closed, particularly those who are older, those who are especially vulnerable (as a result, for instance, of failing health, learning disability, compromised mental health), long-term hostel dwellers, and those who have become 'institutionalised' as a result of their homelessness

- Many thought that closing hostels would result in more rough sleeping since many people currently living in hostels will not be able to (or may not want to) manage either independently in the community, or within supported accommodation.

"There will be more people on the streets that can't cope with houses."

- The potential for people to become lonely and isolated, and the loss of the friendship and camaraderie often experienced within large hostel settings

"Some people can't handle their own house."

6. Re-provisioning

Alternative Accommodation Models

Respondents made suggestions about the types of alternative accommodation which should be provided. 78% of those interviewed said they preferred smaller accommodation projects and support from staff with counselling and related skills.

"Small separate units, not massive big places with lots of people – that makes people vulnerable."

"Your own flat, but supported if you want to talk to somebody."

Tenancies should be provided with individually tailored support programmes that should be available for as long as the individual requires it (some individuals may require minimal support, others may require long-term or permanent support).

Respondents suggested the importance of separate accommodation for different groups of homeless people, for example according to age, gender or support for drug or alcohol problems.

"Homeless people are damaged people, you can't treat them all the same – drink, drugs, not feeling good about themselves – mixed hostels don't help."

"Lumping everyone in together puts people at risk – like, people with mental health problems end up in with people taking drugs."

There should be accommodation with support which prepares people for resettlement and allows for a period of transition from homelessness to independent living – the Salvation Army's resettlement projects were cited as good practice examples of a transitional service.

"Units a bit like this (Wallace of Campsie), where people have to learn to cook, shop, the normal things in society, the fundamentals."



Support

Increased levels of service provision for homeless people with addiction problems are urgently required. Also required is specialist, easily accessible and readily available counselling provision for homeless people with complex needs, particularly those who have experienced childhood sexual abuse, and more generally for those for whom the effects of trauma is an ongoing factor in their homelessness history.

“Places with counsellors, there are a lot of messed up people in hostels.”

Development Issues

The research highlighted important development issues. These are set out in the following section. This information is key to commissioning, planning and delivering services.

The extent to which the development issues are tackled depends on the commitment of agencies. The importance of joint working is implicit. All agencies involved in the decommissioning/ resettlement/ re-provisioning should develop and sustain formal structures to ensure a joint approach.

It is also important for agencies to review the resettlement/ re-provisioning programme regularly to ensure that what is being provided is what people want and need.

1. Increase the level of information about hostel closure and re-provisioning amongst service users

New services or supports required:

- The implementation of a formalised way of delivering information about closure and re-provisioning to hostel dwellers and to other homeless people
- The development of a liaison / information service to run in parallel with the hostel closure programme, whereby liaison / information workers would have on-going presence in hostels, and in other types of service provision. The purpose of this service would be to ensure that hostel dwellers and other homeless people were kept fully apprised of the progress of the closure and re-provisioning programme

2. Ensure that the hostel closure process takes into account the expressed needs of people who currently use GCC hostels

Implications for the planning process:

In planning for hostel de-commissioning, the following must be taken into account:

- The frequency at which participants identified the potential for an increase in rough sleeping as a direct result of hostel closure
- The fact that a significant proportion of people express a wish to stay in homelessness because of the company, friendship and sense of belonging
- The (often complex) needs of those people who want to, or perceive a need to, remain in homelessness

3. Optimise the potential for voluntary sector services to respond to increased demand on following hostel closure

New developments required / implications for the planning process:

- Measures should be put in place which will monitor any increased demand on the voluntary sector during and after hostel closure
- Capacity-building work in voluntary sector services to take place in parallel with the hostel closure programme
- Monitor the uptake of voluntary sector services pre- and post-closure, to explore trends in service use and establish whether these trends are related to hostel closure

4. Ensure that the re-provisioning process meets the needs of service users

Implications for the planning process:

- Take steps to ensure that the negative elements identified by focus group participants about current GCC hostel provision are not replicated in the re-provisioning process
- Take steps to ensure good practice in new supported accommodation service provision, and the development of high quality, client-centred services

5. Develop new supported accommodation:

Implications for the planning process:

- Ensure that new accommodation is of optimum size to ensure the delivery of targeted support to all individuals
- Within an accommodation setting, ensure the delivery of high quality and levels of support which is targeted at particular need
- Recruit staff who are well-trained and knowledgeable about the needs of this client group, and who have a sound value base
- Recognise the need to establish a range of supported accommodation options, which will meet the needs of service users at different points of the homelessness 'continuum'

New services or supports required:

- Develop a range of high quality accommodation and support options for those people who choose to remain in homelessness
- Develop separate accommodation units which are targeted at specific groups within the homeless population (according to support needs, gender, and age)
- Develop more pre- resettlement preparation / midway point accommodation (similar to accommodation currently provided by Salvation Army and YMCA)

6. Provide access to mainstream housing and resettlement opportunities:

Implications for the planning process:

- The re-provisioning process must take into account the emphasis given by participants in regard to:
 - The expressed need for supported tenancies, as opposed to the development of a resettlement programme which focuses primarily (or solely) on the housing needs of those who currently use (or may in the future use) GCC hostels

New services or supports required:

- Develop new / innovative models of move-on accommodation, with particular attention being paid to the viability and usefulness of developing small, shared tenancies for groups of people moving on from homelessness

7. Develop sustainable move-on solutions:

Additional research required:

- Additional consultation with service users is required, in order to obtain more detailed information about the types of support which would be most useful at the pre-resettlement, resettlement, and post-resettlement stages

Implications for the planning process:

- The development of new types of interventions and innovative methods of support for people at each stage in the resettlement process is key to the development of sustainable resettlement solutions
- There will be significant resource implications for planners to consider given that a high proportion of people who took part in this survey wanted support that was not time limited
- A clear and fundamental understanding of the emotional and psychological impact of resettlement should underpin the planning and delivery of resettlement services
- For the population of homeless people who have moved on from homelessness into mainstream housing, a formal method of monitoring the extent and the causes of resettlement breakdown should be established
- Attention must be paid to the potential for the offer of housing in certain geographical areas to precipitate resettlement breakdown in vulnerable individuals
- Recognise the need to develop new and innovative types of pre- and post-resettlement interventions and an improved range of move-on options

New services or supports required:

- Establish a range of targeted addiction support services available after resettlement
- Interventions which have a focus on assisting homeless people to develop practical skills relevant to independent living must take place before a person has moved from homelessness into mainstream housing
- More resettlement-preparation accommodation should be developed, aimed at offering homeless people the opportunity to participate in a programme of staged re-entry into mainstream housing and independent living
- Both pre- and post-resettlement interventions should contain elements which address service users' expressed need for financial assistance, and income maximisation

8. Improve statutory sector service provision for homeless people

Implications for the planning process:

- Take cognisance of service users' current level of dissatisfaction with statutory service provision, together with their perception that statutory services are not helpful in terms of effecting change in the lives of clients, and that the often arbitrary nature of responses given increases the potential for discriminatory practice
- Take steps to ensure capacity building within statutory services (within the limitations of available resources), with the aim of enabling these services to better meet the needs of homeless people
- Implement relevant training programmes for staff that work within statutory services, with a particular emphasis on meeting the training needs of health, social work and housing staff. Measures should be taken to ensure that training for all staff groups covers:
 - core values underpinning good practice
 - non-discriminatory practice.

9. Develop targeted addiction services

New services or supports required:

- The development of a range of addiction-focused services which are specifically targeted at homeless people, and which have the capacity to deal with the range of complex issues that homeless people with addiction problems can present
- All addiction services targeted at homeless people should have a resettlement focus which directly addresses the long-term accommodation needs of service users
- The range of new resources required include:
 - residential detoxification and rehabilitation
 - improved access to substitute prescribing
 - improved access to generic / addiction counselling services
 - non-residential programmes which address the social, recreational, training and employment needs of homeless people with addiction problems
 - on-going post-resettlement support services for people with addiction problems
 - respite services for homeless people with addiction problems who have made a decision that they wish to remain within homelessness services. (Residential respite provision should have the primary aim of assisting individuals to address the negative health and emotional consequences of addiction within a safe environment)

10. Prevent protracted or frequently-repeated homelessness:

Implications for the planning process:

- Development of accessible and early crisis intervention or safety net services for resettled people who begin to experience difficulties
- Pre and post resettlement services need to consider the barriers homeless people face in integrating into local communities. They need to help homeless people access opportunities and provide support-type services that tackle loneliness and isolation
- The implementation of aggressive, proactive homelessness prevention measures, in order to ensure that people who become homeless in the future do not go on to experience protracted / repeated homelessness
- Integrated assessment for all homeless people, and diversion from city centre homelessness, should become established practice in Glasgow

11. Improve analyses and understanding of how the experience of homelessness impacts upon individuals

Implications for the planning process / additional research required:

- Recognise the need for additional qualitative research which would inform the development of an appropriate, evidence-based range of interventions which address the damaging emotional, psychological and social impacts of the experience of homelessness
- In current and future homelessness planning, take into account the damaging emotional, psychological and social impact of trauma, abuse, violence and bereavement which are compounded by and linked to the experience of homelessness itself.



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