

Working Together

Our vision to end homelessness

‘A snapshot’ of the VCSE homeless and rough sleepers sector in Brighton and Hove Spring 2021



This report is a combined project between Community Works, Justlife and the Brighton and Hove Frontline Network and YMCA DownsLink Group.



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- Purple People Kitchen Food Bank
- Social Enterprise Complementary Therapy Company
- St Peter's Church
- St Luke's Church, Prestonville
- Sussex Homeless Support
- Sussex Nightstop
- The Clock Tower Sanctuary
- The Village Metropolitan Community Church
- The Whitehawk Foodbank
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A further 23 voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE) members completed the survey anonymously.

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The report was written by **Laura Williams, Jayne Ross** and with contributions from **Rachel Marshall, Kate Standing and Harriet Morris**.

¹ The VCSE Homeless and Rough Sleeper Network is coordinated by Community Works. Members include commissioned and non-commissioned groups and organisations providing services to people experiencing homelessness in Brighton and Hove.

² [The Brighton & Hove Frontline Network](#), hosted by Justlife, brings together staff supporting people experiencing homelessness. It exists because collaboration creates a better chance for those they are all trying to support. It brings together frontline workers to harness ideas, energy and experience through regular meetups with discussions, workshops and resource sharing.

Executive summary

Working Together – Our vision to end homelessness – A snapshot of the VCSE homeless and rough sleepers sector in Brighton and Hove (Spring 2021) sets out to develop a cohesive understanding of the scale, scope and impact of the VCSE sector's work and contribution towards preventing and reducing homelessness in Brighton and Hove.

Why do this now?

Brighton and Hove City Council has a dedicated Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy (2022–2025)³ which states that ‘there isn’t a single intervention that can tackle homelessness and rough sleeping, [and] there needs to be a citywide partnership approach in the context of the national approach’. This implies the need for the VCSE sector to take an active role under the umbrella of this strategy, to know ourselves better and understand our own value as an essential component of this partnership approach. In seeking to understand the breadth and depth of our collective resources, we can identify our strengths and opportunities to develop and respond as a sector to the shifting landscape of homelessness.

It is predicted that *‘the economic aftermath of COVID-19 risks a substantial rise in core homelessness, including rough sleeping’*⁴. The Homeless Monitor captures the key categories of homelessness as being people sleeping rough, staying in places not intended as residential accommodation (e.g. cars, tents, boats, sheds), living in homeless hostels, refuges and shelters, placed in unsuitable temporary accommodation (e.g. bed and breakfast hotels, out of area placements), and sofa surfing (i.e. staying with non-family, on a short-term basis, in overcrowded conditions). The 2021 Monitor reports that in 2018–19 the largest element of core homelessness was sofa surfing, followed by hostel and similar accommodation and unsuitable temporary accommodation/other unconventional accommodation. The least numerous group comprised those sleeping rough at a point in time.

³ [Brighton & Hove City Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020 to 2025](#).

⁴ [The Homelessness Monitor](#) 2021 Suzanne Fitzpatrick, Beth Watts, Hal Pawson, Glen Bramley, Jenny Wood, Mark Stephens & Janice Blenkinsopp. Institute for Social Policy, Housing and Equalities Research (I-SPHERE), Heriot-Watt University; City Futures Research Centre, University of New South Wales; School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Glasgow March 2021.

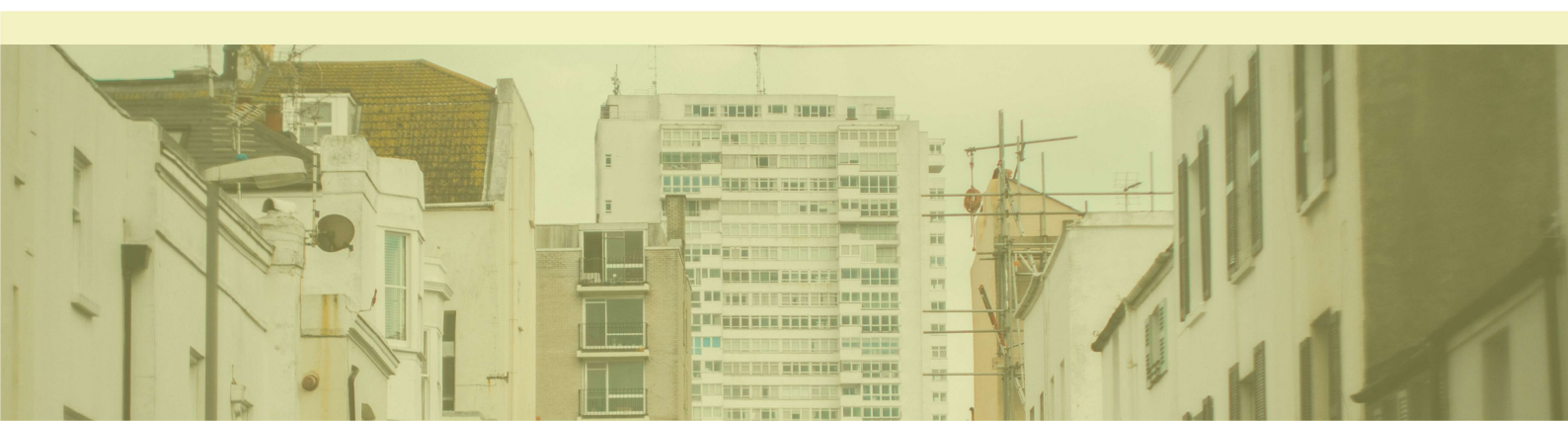
Simultaneously, at the time of writing, we have seen the launch of pandemic-related funds which have a focus either on local authorities working in partnership with the VCSE or funds being devolved exclusively to the sector to strengthen and reinvigorate the national response (Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI), Protect and Vaccinate, Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP), Cold Weather Fund and Winter Pressures Fund)⁵.

The timing creates an imperative for the VCSE to ensure that stakeholders – the VCSE itself and statutory sector partners – understand the scale and scope of the VCSE contribution to tackling homelessness (its leadership, buildings, people and financial assets), and to identify opportunities to work together strategically and operationally to amplify these resources in the local and national response to homelessness.

Who participated in the survey?

The findings in this report are drawn from a survey of VCSE sector organisations working to support people experiencing homelessness in Brighton and Hove over the spring of 2021. The 44 organisations which completed the survey included large professionalised housing charities, small and medium-sized charities, social enterprises and small volunteer/ community-run organisations and groups.

They comprised commissioned and non-commissioned organisations. The respondents represented a diverse cross section of the sector, including street-based outreach and food provision, night shelters, supported accommodation, day centres, and a wealth of projects and services geared towards supporting people to reconnect to, and stay rooted and healthy in, their communities.



⁵ [Push to protect and vaccinate rough sleepers with £28 million government boost](#) Published 20 December 2021 From: Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and [Eddie Hughes MP](#).

[Rough Sleeping Initiative: 2021 to 2022 funding allocations](#) Published 15 May 2021 Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government.

[Government announces support for rough sleepers over winter](#) Published 29 October 2021 From: Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Department of Health and Social Care, [Eddie Hughes MP](#), and [Gillian Keegan MP](#).

Key findings

The report shines a light on the significant contribution of the VCSE in responding to homelessness. For example, respondents participating in the survey reported that a range of £10-20m (a likely underestimation) was invested by the VCSE sector in the previous financial year in the provision of services for people experiencing homelessness and sleeping rough in the city. The launch of the Street Support Network website for Brighton and Hove coincided with the survey, and this tells us at the time of writing that there are 110 organisations offering 204 services offering a range of support to people experiencing homelessness, either exclusively or as a key part of their delivery. The report also highlights the myriad of ways that the VCSE connects with statutory providers in areas such as health, housing, criminal justice, and social care. However, the report also points to the prevalence of extreme poverty, debt and social isolation – as well as ‘hidden homelessness’ – leading to a concerning increase in the complexity and scale of need that presents challenges to homelessness prevention and relief.

Our easy-to-view headline messages and key findings illustrate more fully the scale and scope of the contribution of the VCSE.

Conclusion

The landscape of homelessness is clearly complex and requires a considered response. Respondents called for collaboration and strategic involvement in developing ‘a *citywide partnership approach*’.

The snapshot of the VCSE contribution provides a springboard for collaboration between the VCSE and statutory partners to build and shape the future with a clearly defined shared purpose, each working to their strengths – while acknowledging and understanding their respective limitations – to end the dangerous and isolating experience of homelessness in Brighton and Hove.

Key findings

VCSE infrastructure

204
services



In the snapshot, there were an estimated **110 VCSE organisations offering 204 services** to people experiencing homelessness and sleeping rough in Brighton and Hove on 'The Street Support' register.

£10-20m
investment



Based on survey responses there was a (likely underestimated) **investment range of £10-20m** by the VCSE in the provision of services for people experiencing homelessness and sleeping rough in the city.

People

A total of **2026 people** were employed in the VCSE by organisations responding to the survey, working the equivalent of **37,632 hours**.

314 staff members worked specifically on the issue of homelessness, contributing to a total of **8,325 hours** per week.

Volunteers donated **2,220 hours** per week within the VCSE in the city. Their contributing hours amounted to the equivalent of just under **£1.1m a year** when calculated using the Living Wage.

Through volunteering, the VCSE provided a significant opportunity for members of the wider community to connect with, and offer support to, their neighbours experiencing homelessness, thereby becoming part of the solution and embodying the concept of a 'citywide partnership approach'.

2026
people
employed

2,220
volunteer
hours



ACCOMMODATION



772
housing
units

An estimated **772 units of accommodation** (commissioned and non-commissioned provision) were provided in the last financial year, generating over **£5m a year** in revenue through housing benefit which is reinvested in providing homelessness support.

Demand for services is high

Survey respondents observed an increase in people living in food poverty, struggling with debt, and with greater complexity of needs, particularly from young people and those with additional health and social support needs.

Support services

The local VCSE sector offers people experiencing homelessness a breadth of accommodation and other essential services such as food, basic provisions, life skills, training and employment support to address the underlying complexities of homelessness and to secure sustainable, safe accommodation.

Healthcare and wellbeing

50% of providers offered mental health support



A range of healthcare and wellbeing services are delivered to support people who are rough sleeping or homeless. Nearly 50% of providers offered mental health support and over 30% provided substance misuse services alongside a plethora of wellbeing services.

IMPACT

426
positive
move-ons



408
private rental
agreements secured



VCSE organisations took differing approaches to monitoring and evaluating their impact depending on the nature of the support they offered. Participating organisations shared that **426 people achieved a positive move on** from their accommodation in the last financial year and **408 people secured accommodation through the private rental sector (PRS)** in the last financial year.

The differing approaches to monitoring and evaluating impact highlighted opportunities for further research to inform the development of approaches to sharing and capturing data.

Policy and influencing

The sector played a significant role in raising awareness of the issues surrounding homelessness and campaigning for change as well as seeking funding to implement solutions in the prevention of homelessness.

Organisations regularly attended 50 different inter-agency meetings and networks contributing to the wider city strategic plans.



Headline messages



The VCSE sector generates and contributes significant income alongside local commissioning to support people experiencing homelessness in the city. This is realised through assets such as buildings providing accommodation, people, funding, and expertise to develop holistic approaches that help to prevent and relieve homelessness.



The scale and complexity of homelessness means that demand for VCSE and statutory services exceeds current capacity, leading to significant risk being held within the system. Collaboration leading to co-production between the VCSE and the statutory sector may relieve pressure on resources by ensuring duplication is avoided and impact maximised.



A one-system response (involving statutory sectors and the VCSE sector) characterised by a focus on collaboration and co-production in the development of aligned strategies or shared ownership of strategies could further amplify the future success of the city's homelessness and rough sleeping strategy. Collaboration and coordination of support services, data and local insight could inform further understanding of services, gaps and duplication on offer in the city.



There is a need to coordinate provision to maximise support for people experiencing homelessness and thus avoid the risk of revolving door experiences when accessing support, which can be created by siloed support services, increasingly challenging threshold barriers and diminishing statutory services.



There is a particular lack of a cohesive strategy and adequate services to address the urgent and acute needs of young people (16–25 year olds).

The VCSE identified an opportunity to develop services dynamically through shared learning, training and collaboration within the VCSE sector in order to grow sector expertise and create alignment in approaches. Coordination across existing networks can facilitate this wider information sharing to increase capacity.

There is value in further research to understand more fully the scale of investment in accommodation by all contributing sectors and how this may lead to solutions that can alleviate the existing pressures on commissioning funds available for housing support and address the currently perceived over-reliance on temporary accommodation.



Introduction

The voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE) has a long history of providing vital services for people who are homeless or rough sleeping in Brighton and Hove. The sector comprises voluntary organisations, formal and unconstituted charities and organisations, community groups and volunteers both in a commissioned and non-commissioned capacity.

Members of the VCSE Homeless and Rough Sleepers Network identified that there is a lack of cohesive understanding of the contribution by the VCSE and the overall impact of this work by public sector partners, elected members and within the sector itself. Its response was to develop a survey of the sector to capture a snapshot as an indicator of its scale and resources, and to identify opportunities for sectors to work together to address homelessness in the city.

Aims of the project

This report aims to build an understanding of the contribution and impact that the VCSE makes in supporting people who experience homelessness in Brighton and Hove and in the prevention of homelessness. It also makes recommendations to inform current and future work to prevent homelessness and improve outcomes for people accessing support.

Approach

The report is based on the results of an online survey, designed and distributed by members of the VCSE Homeless and Rough Sleepers Network, between January and March 2021. The survey was widely circulated among VCSE providers in Brighton and Hove. Forty-four organisations representing the diversity of the sector responded, including large professionalised housing charities, small and medium-sized charities, social enterprises and small volunteer/community-run organisations and groups. They comprise commissioned and non-commissioned organisations.

Some questions within the survey received fewer than 44 responses, for example where they were not relevant to all participating organisations. Further information about the methodology is available from Community Works.

Throughout this report we have embedded quotes from survey respondents.

Definition of homelessness

We have adopted the Homelessness Monitor 2021⁶ wider definition of ‘core homelessness’. This includes the following categories: **people sleeping rough; single homeless people living in hostels, shelters and temporary supported accommodation; statutorily homeless households (households who seek housing assistance from local authorities on grounds of being currently or imminently without accommodation); and ‘hidden homeless’ households (people who may be considered homeless but whose situation is not ‘visible’ either on the streets or in official statistics).**

COVID-19

At the time of conducting the survey, the COVID-19 pandemic had entered a second full lockdown in Brighton and Hove. During the intervening months, changes to public health guidance presented ongoing challenges in preventing and relieving homelessness within the context of a pandemic.

At the time of writing, the pandemic continues to be a constantly shifting and uncertain landscape. Implications are still unfolding and being felt by people experiencing homelessness and frontline organisations in the VCSE sector and the wider community.

⁶ The Homelessness Monitor <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/homelessness-monitor>

Results

1.VCSE infrastructure

This section provides an overview of the types of organisations in the VCSE homeless and rough sleeping sector, the people involved, and organisational income and investment in accommodation.

Types of organisations

Most commonly, organisations responding to the survey were charities, followed by charitable incorporated organisations and housing associations. ‘Other’ responses included PLC limited by guarantee, supported accommodation project, social enterprise, registered with regulator of social housing, and Accredited Investment Partner with Homes England.

What type of organisation are you? (Tick all that apply – e.g. can be a faith group and charity) (N=44)⁷



⁷ n=X refers to the number of survey responses received to a particular question, out of a maximum of N=44.

People

Respondents (n=35) reported having a total of **2,026 employees working the equivalent of 37,632 hours**.

A smaller but significant proportion of staff were deployed in working specifically in homelessness projects in Brighton and Hove. Responding organisations reported:

- Employing a total of 314 staff members to work specifically on the issue of homelessness (n=33)
- Employees working on homelessness projects for a total of 8,325 hours per week (n=31)

314 people employed
to work on the issue
of homelessness



Responding organisations were also supported by the contributions of volunteers:

- **563 volunteer trustees and directors donated 690 hours per week** (n=37). If they were paid the UK Living Wage of £9.50 per hour it would be **worth £340,860 per year**.
- **420 further volunteers** were reported to be working specifically in homelessness projects in Brighton and Hove, amounting to an **estimated 1,530 hours per week** (n=36). If they were paid the UK Living Wage it would **total £755,820 per year donated**.

£1.1m value
of time
given by **volunteers**
in 2021



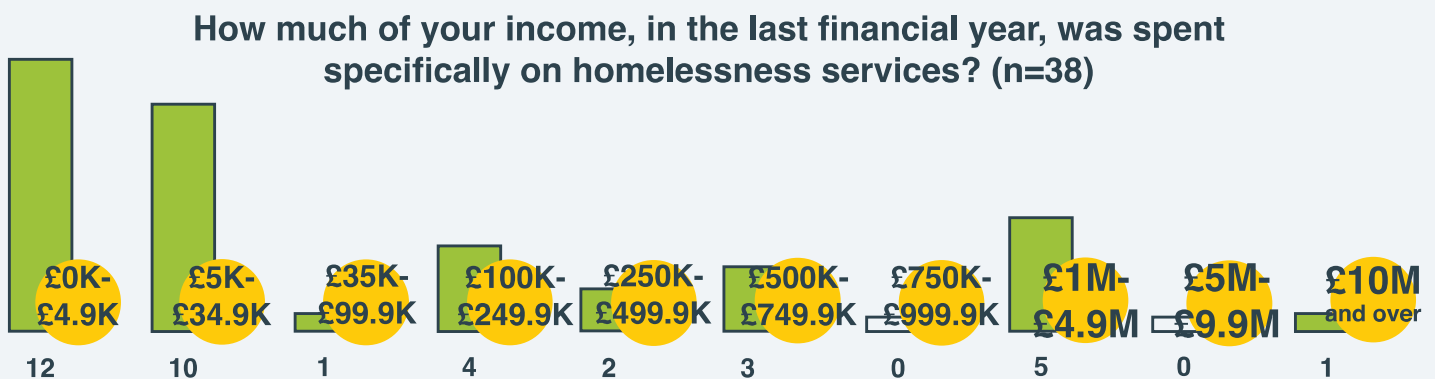
Income

Some services might be specifically commissioned by statutory sectors while others were funded by a wide range of other income streams secured by respondents

The annual income of organisations ranged considerably. **Four organisations reported an income of £10m and over** in their previous financial year, with a further **seven reporting an income of between £1m and £4,999,999**.

Approximately one quarter of organisations reported spending 100% of their funding on homelessness services in Brighton and Hove. The remainder had a wider scope of work, spending a smaller portion of their total funding on this focus.

Five organisations reported individual **investments specifically on homeless services of between £1m and £5m**, with **one organisation reporting an investment of £10m and over**.



Investment in accommodation

A range of technical questions was asked to understand the scale of commissioned and non-commissioned investment in accommodation. However, the responses and findings suggest a value in further research to understand more accurately the full scale of investment in accommodation by all contributing sectors, and how this may lead to solutions that can alleviate the existing pressures on limited commissioning funds available for housing support and also address the currently perceived over-reliance on temporary accommodation.

In the last 10 years, approximately a fifth of organisations (9/43) reported an investment in buildings in the city that provide accommodation for people experiencing homelessness. When sense checked against local insight, survey responses indicated that not all VCSE housing stock in the city has been captured.

Respondents indicated that they provide over 772 units of accommodation (commissioned and non-commissioned provision) that support the city's homeless strategy, generating at least £5m a year in revenue through housing benefit which is reinvested in homeless services.

£5m

value of accommodation:
all reinvested into homeless support



772 housing

units provided

Respondents reported that £100,000 a year was generated by the sector's housing assets to support people experiencing homelessness in the city. This does not include capital fundraising. Again, when sense checked against local insight, this represents a very modest figure.

Recurring themes from respondents indicated a lack of affordable housing in the city, expensive private rented sector accommodation, a high demand for student accommodation, Local Housing Allowances being out of line with local rental markets, and a lack of emergency accommodation driven by a lack of land available for development.

Respondents called for increased collaboration leading to co-production across services and the sector to maximise the potential for more and better quality accommodation, and an exploration of ways to leverage additional national income and fundraising to support people experiencing homelessness, for example jointly considering the opportunities within the housing benefit subsidy guidance for temporary accommodation.⁸



“[We need] co-production being embedded within the services and the city's decision making processes.”

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-benefit-subsidy-guidance-manual-2020-to-2021/section-6-temporary-accommodation>

2. Support services

This section provides an overview of the local VCSE offer of holistic services that explore solutions beyond the immediate issues of homelessness and help to tackle the underlying complexities.

The VCSE sector offers people who are experiencing homelessness a breadth of accommodation and other essential services – such as food, basic provisions, health and wellbeing support, life skills and training and employment support – to help them move into and sustain safe, secure accommodation. Respondents described these services as both their primary and secondary areas of focus and in many cases offered more than one service, others offering very specialist support.

People may attend just one service but may also access wider support across the sector depending on their individual support needs. There is evidence of partners working in collaboration to wrap services around their mutual clients:



“[There is an] increase in awareness of our service with other homeless organisations through closer joint working and virtual multi-agency meetings.”

The responses indicated that organisations use varying methods to measure demand for their services and in some cases do not count attendances. Overall, the survey found that there was increased demand for services for people presenting with complex needs, and particularly from young people. Responses indicated that some collaboration and coordination of support services and data would help inform further understanding of services, gaps and duplication of offer in the city.



“... we have seen an increase in the complexity of need that young people are presenting with both in terms of our general young people’s drop in and our housing advice and family mediation cohort. Our safeguarding activity has hugely increased – with many more presentations of mental health issues with increases in suicide ideation, repost of attempts and self-harming behaviours.”

Demand for services

Organisations reported:

- Anywhere between **5 or 6 to 5,000 people affected by homelessness** accessed their services in the last financial year (n=42)
- Estimated figures indicated a total of **16,465 people accessed their services** in the last year (n=39)

The responses highlighted the varied recording methods used by organisations, given the scope and specialist nature of support available within the sector. Data may therefore reflect numbers of individuals and/or headcounts, and in some cases respondents reported that such data was not collected.

It is also recognised that individuals may be receiving support from multiple services within both the VCSE and public sector. Deriving more accurate data and insights into the needs of people experiencing homelessness may support the coordination and co-creation of services across the city.

The intensity of support provided by organisations varied considerably. 'Other' responses varied from 'as many as required' to a number (n=5) who stated that support was either not recorded or the question was not applicable to them.

On average how many hours support do you provide to each service user per month? (n=41)



The majority (29/34) of organisations had observed an increase in need for their services over the last five years (up to March 2020, pre-pandemic). Comments from service providers included:

- That people were presenting with more complex needs (especially young people)
- An increase in people sleeping rough (although from March 2020 'Everyone In' may have partially addressed this)
- An increase in people living in food poverty and struggling with debt

This increasing complexity of needs has led to some services being unable to provide the specialist support needed within their models of delivery to keep people safe and support a successful outcome.



“Our service is always operating at full/overcapacity.”



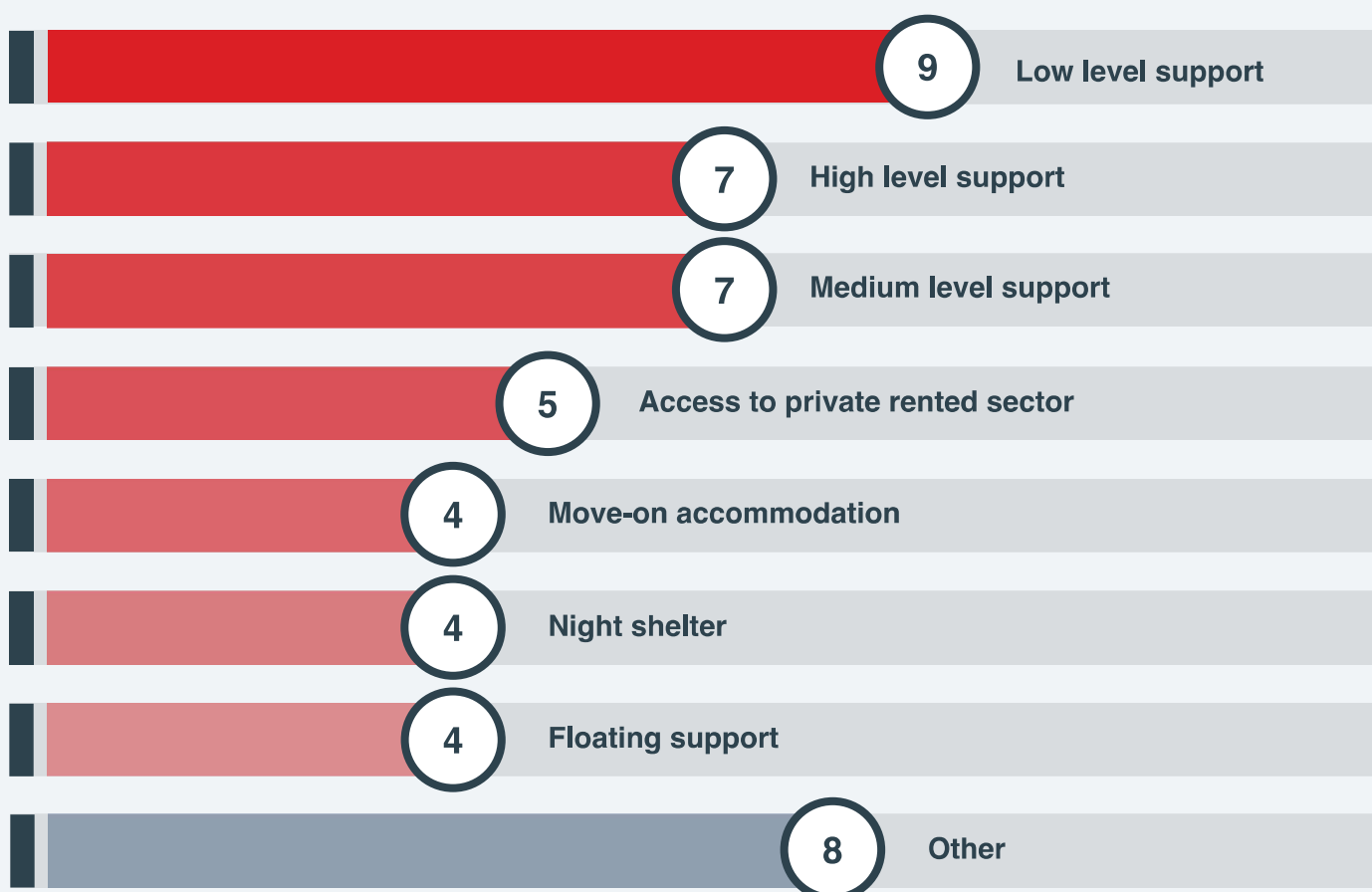
“... more clients than ever moving into emergency accommodation for long periods; not ‘emergency’ but medium to long term – 3-6 months up to 2 years. Clients with complex needs being placed in accommodation with no support – increased complex health needs with clients.”

Types of support services

Accommodation

A wide range of types of accommodation is available; most commonly, organisations reported focusing on low level support, followed by high and medium level support⁹. ‘Other’ responses included ‘access to accommodation which could include private sector’ with the remainder referring to non-accommodation related support.

Which best describes your primary area of support? (n=40)



⁹ A definition taken from Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme: Prospectus and guidance (outside of Greater London), February 2022 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rough-sleeping-accommodation-programme-2021-24/rough-sleeping-accommodation-programme-prospectus-and-guidance-outside-of-greater-london-html-version>

a) High/complex/multiple needs: long-term rough sleepers, and those requiring extensive support through housing first, with high-level or on-site management and support.

b) Medium needs: people who have a significant or repeat history of rough sleeping and/or have health, care and support needs best met through a housing-led placement with sufficient support.

c) Low support needs: people who are newly homeless and/or have less significant health, care or support needs and can be assisted through low-support accommodation options, or access to housing and short-term visiting support.

A total of 13 respondents reported operating 31 buildings in Brighton and Hove providing some form of service for people experiencing homelessness. Spaces and venues included meeting rooms, day centre, storage, kitchen for varied services, table tennis, counselling, key working and health matters.

Person-centred support (non-accommodation)

Respondents reported that they provided a range of tailored support services to people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness. These included:

Provision of basic needs (n=41): The majority of organisations provided their clients with essential basic needs – food, clothing, bedding, phones, hygiene items and a range of other practical items such as furniture and help with moving. This support is essential in supporting individuals to move from crisis to stability.

Promoting independence (n=41): These services aim to equip people experiencing homelessness to develop their individual resilience, interests and skills so that they may live independently. Examples of this type of support include assistance to find work and manage conflict. The majority of respondents offered a variety of these services.



“You have given me another chance. I would never have got this place without you. 1) Literally, physically. 2) Practically with helping with all the forms and the council. I would never have done it on my own. You have given me another chance at life and to have my independence again ... I was completely broken, but with the support and care I have received, I have managed to put myself back together again. I feel safe.”

- A client quote

Food provision: 30 organisations offered some kind of food provision, most commonly this was via a foodbank (9) and regular community meals (7). Food provision was a significant part of service provision, with some services set up to provide food (foodbanks) but a number of agencies providing dedicated food support as part of their overall service offer.



“[We provide] on average 40 meals per day each 5 day week given out to homeless people.”



“Over the first lockdown, approx. 800 food parcels were given out per week to hostel residents. Since then, weekly meals have been delivered to approx. 150 women and children and approx. 150 men, who collect them from the church.”

Advice/information: 29 organisations provided signposting; nine debt advice; and five legal advice. Other areas of advice or information included welfare benefit advice and housing advice (including accessing the private rental sector and support to find accommodation).



“I feel a weight has been lifted from my shoulders.”

- A client quote

Advocacy/casework/keywork support: 15 organisations provided tenancy sustainment support; 12 provided financial management/casework (budgeting and accessing benefits); nine provided mediation. ‘Other’ responses included bespoke gender specific casework support, and advocacy as needed.



“My feedback is that you have given me a first-class service. You have always said to me ring me with anything, it’s no problem and we can deal with it. You have reassured me throughout the process when I was quite nervous.”

- A client quote

Daytime provision: Nine organisations provided a regular drop-in and four provided a day centre service.

Outreach: Five organisations provided street outreach and a further two offered satellite/co-located services. Satellite and co-located services can occur on a formal or informal basis. For example, a specialist worker may base themselves at another service, such as for a weekly advice or drop-in service. These arrangements can work well and increase engagement of support by making services more accessible either in terms of location or ease of accessing specialist support at an already familiar host service. VCSE sector insight recognises that there are many more examples of outreach and satellite services available across the city.

Other areas of speciality that are deployed for people experiencing homelessness include:

- Substance misuse and addiction recovery services
- Qualified clinicians with extensive experience of healthcare for the homeless
- Mental health services
- Podiatry
- Animal welfare

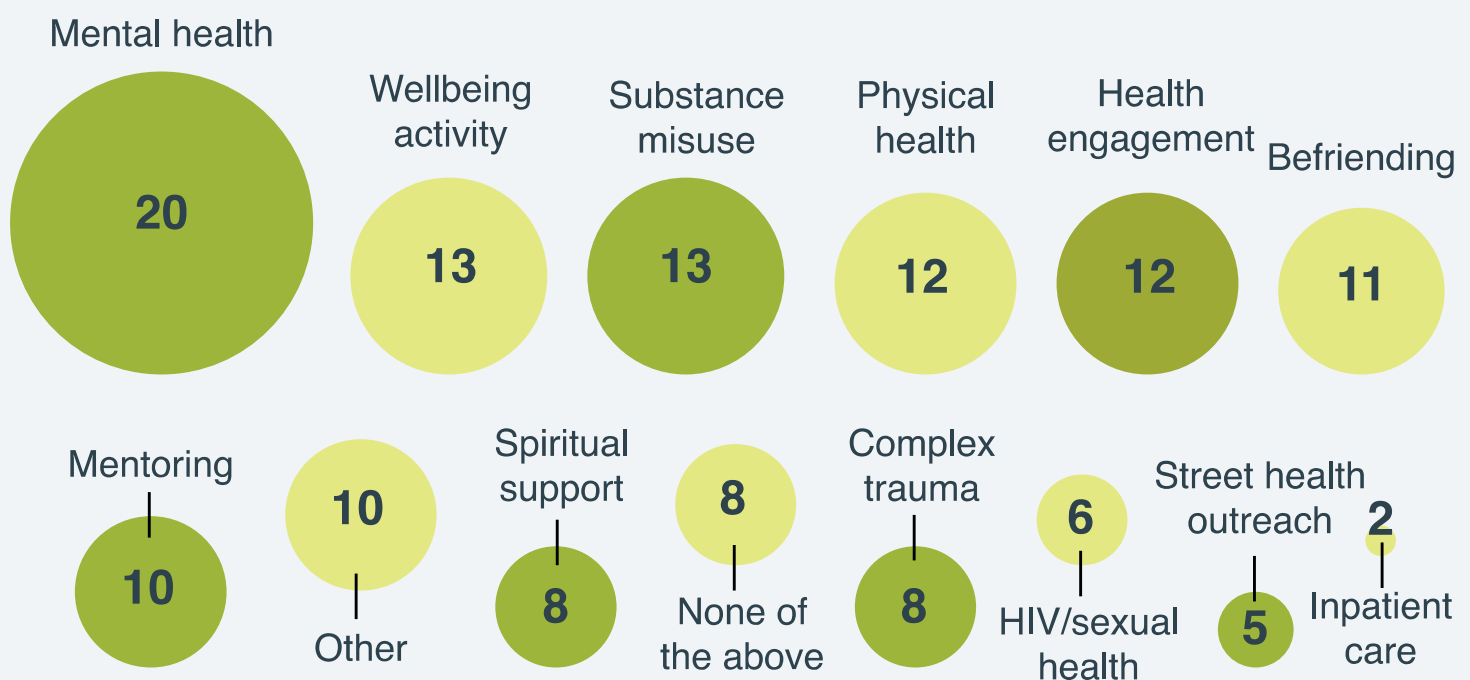
Healthcare and wellbeing

People experiencing homelessness are more likely to have a physical health condition and mental health diagnosis than the general population, having some of the highest and costliest health needs in a local community.¹⁰

Respondents offered a range of services to support a variety of health and wellbeing needs, with nearly 50% of providers (total respondents 41) offering mental health support (n=20) and over 30% providing substance misuse services (n=13). Wellbeing services are also prevalent (n=13).

Other services and activities included signposting to specialist health and wellbeing services and creative activities, such as singing and group sessions for neurodivergent people and those with disabilities. This focus on prevention and maintaining good health moved beyond crisis work to support clients more holistically, encouraging client independence and increased understanding of their health care needs.

Healthcare and Wellbeing (n=41)

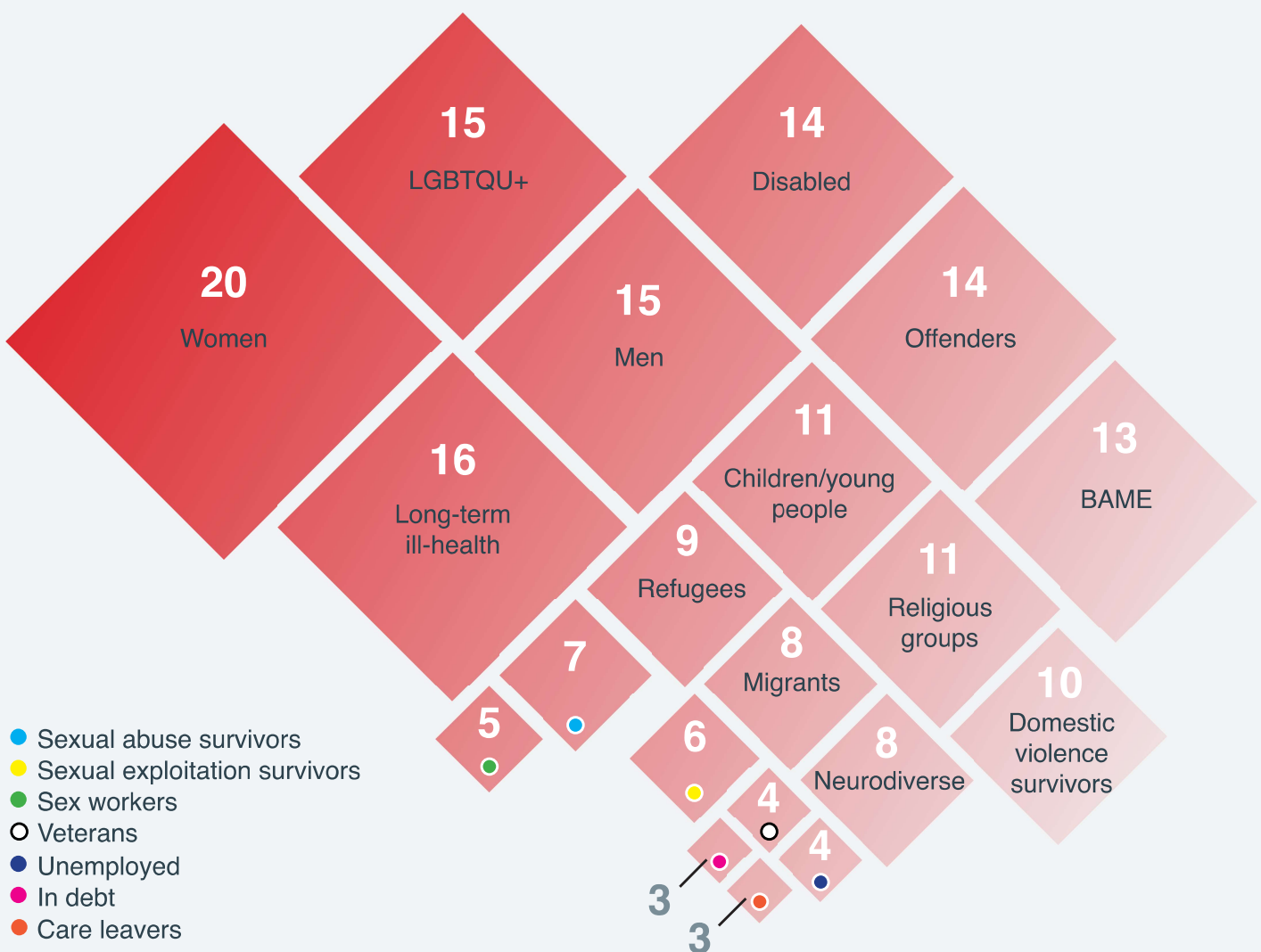


¹⁰ Health Needs Audit 2016, Homeless Link. <https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/the-unhealthy-state-of-homelessness-health-audit-results-2014/>

Specialist support

Organisations aimed to work in ways that recognise and meet specific needs of diverse communities and individuals.

Do you offer specific support to any of the following communities or groups of people? (tick all that apply) (n=33)



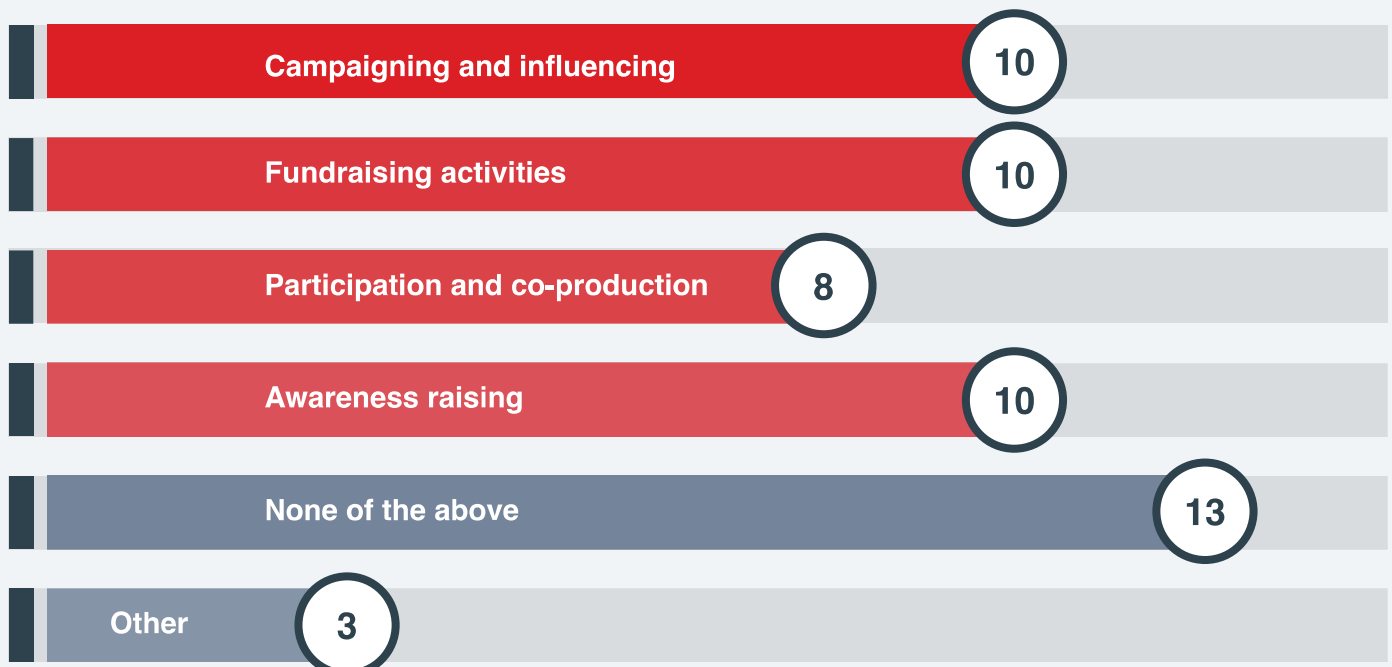
Policy and influencing

The VCSE sector plays a significant role in raising awareness of the issues surrounding homelessness and campaigning for change, as well as seeking funding to implement solutions in the prevention of homelessness.



“We host round table discussions and workshops for the sector around topics of neurodiversity and disability.”

Wider work (n=40)



Inter-agency meetings and networks

Organisations identified just under 50 different inter-agency meetings and networks which they attended regularly. Most commonly mentioned VCSE networks were: the Homeless Operational Forum (10/36), Frontline Network (9/36), VCSE Homeless and Rough Sleepers Network (B&H) (6/36), Youth Homelessness Working Group (4/36), Faith in Action (4/36), Faith-based Foodbank Network (4/36), Homeless Link, Regional and Local forums (4/36), Work and Learning Working Group (4/36).

There was engagement across a spectrum of inter-agency meetings, some of which include: Brighton and Hove Safeguarding Board and Panel, Sussex Police Independent Advisory Group, Community Safety Forum Multi-Agency Risk Management, Cuckooing multi-agency meetings, Hoarding multi-agency meetings, Substance Misuse Programme Board, Alcohol Programme Board, Sexual Health Programme Board, Street Community multi-agency meeting, Early Help Partnership Board.

The attendance by VCSE sector members at a plethora of networks and interagency meetings provided an opportunity for network coordination to facilitate information sharing and insight of sector development and needs. A joined-up approach can increase sector capacity and expertise. For these networks and meetings to be most effective, key stakeholders should be in attendance and information and actions communicated clearly and consistently.

3. Working practices

The sector demonstrated both expertise in and a commitment to the development of staff skills and knowledge, as well as a preparedness to share their resources, assets, good practice and training across the sector.

Co-production emerged in a number of responses to this and in previous sections, suggesting an opportunity to explore and share experiences and its advantages as an approach.

Models of working

Organisations reported a range of practice models that influenced their work.

Are any of the following practice models used to influence your work? (tick all that apply) (n=30)



Training

Half of respondents (n=43) had specialist training open to volunteers/paid staff and the wider sector. Available training included the practice models outlined above as well as in specific areas, such as drug and alcohol awareness, suicide prevention, managing challenging situations, and supporting adults with autism.

Half of respondents did not have access to or provide specialist training. Some responses indicated *‘the growing need for good practice support and development opportunities for services providing support or engagement’*.

A number of organisations reported having resources that they were able to share with others (n=27). These included:

- Training courses (in some cases bespoke and delivered for free to local partners)
- Peer support between frontline staff
- Practical support (e.g. supplying food, clothes, furniture, office space)
- Signposting and introductions to relevant organisations and stakeholders
- Sharing data about health and care needs of the local community
- Providing free office space to homelessness service providers

4. Impact of COVID-19

Organisations described how the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted the delivery of their services.

The sector demonstrated its agility in responding to the unexpected and rapidly escalating situation and collectively offering adapted essential services. It pointed to the need to consider longer-term changes to services as a result of the ‘Everyone In¹¹’ initiative and the increasing reliance on delivering services remotely. It also highlighted concerns about the level of complexity of need and how risk is held more generally in the system.

There were key themes identified by respondents:

Adapting service delivery: Few closed their services, however many switched to delivering remote support using phone, video conferencing and email. Some services that continued with distanced face-to-face contact (e.g. doorstep visits and outside support) saw an increased demand due to other service provision being more limited. Others changed their services completely, for example setting up the provision of food services in place of usual services. One respondent described how, rather than closing their service that couldn’t operate under the initial lockdown restrictions, they adapted their offer to operating a food hub to address the immediate need. They achieved this by utilising their existing staff and volunteers, plus recruiting a further 30 volunteers, working closely with a range of other services.

¹¹ ‘Everyone In: A government response to the COVID-19 crisis’, launched in March 2020 and aiming to provide people sleeping rough and staying in hostels and night shelters with safe accommodation: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/928780/Letter_from_Minister_Hall_to_Local_Authorities.pdf

Digital inclusion: Some organisations reported that the need to support individuals remotely made them look more closely at those who were digitally excluded. Although digital accessibility for some people proved an issue, other people were able to access meaningful support this way:



“The iPad has changed my life. I am absolutely loving what I am accessing. It has helped massively reduce, if not take away, the feelings of absolute isolation and not feeling connected to anything. This is one of the best things I have ever done. I feel like I am taking part in society. Lockdown has changed everything. My Support Worker is one of two people who calls me every week.”

- A client quote

Increased work/demand: As well as having to adapt the way they delivered services, some respondents highlighted that they had seen an increase in demand for their services.



“Increase in number. Apr 21 4x higher than Apr 20. Increase in numbers has meant change in operations, increase in food deliveries, befriending calls, and more volunteers across more days.”



“Increases everywhere, service users/volunteers.”



“We have had increased referrals and needed to increase staff hours as delivering remotely has been more time consuming.”



“[We have] seen an increase in referrals but a decrease in movement through the commissioned projects – opened two new projects to address the need – reduced face to face support hours to some residents.”



“We have seen increased demand, as other services and provision stopped running.”



“We have seen an increase in numbers in treatment overall and we have prioritised referrals for those who are homeless and rough sleeping.”

Food provision: Organisations providing food switched to take away and delivery. Several found they saw a marked increase in need which meant an increase in operations. However, another food provider noticed a decrease in people accessing their service, attributing it to the fact that they had been well cared for during this time via the ‘Everybody In’ initiative and the food deliveries as part of it.



“[There were more than] 800 food parcels given out to those living in hostels each week during pandemic.”

Accommodation-based services: Some reported a decrease in referrals to their services, as a result of the ‘Everyone In’ initiative which altered referral pathways, whereas other accommodation-based services reported an increase in referrals, and for one respondent a decrease in movement through commissioned projects.

Volunteers: The qualitative responses provided an insight into a mixed picture with regards to the impact on volunteers. Some organisations reported a reduction in volunteers, due to suspension of face-to-face work or volunteers’ reduced capacity or need to shield. Others found they increased their volunteer numbers – often to help with food deliveries and telephone support.

Impact on staff/services: Some organisations reported increased pressure on staff due to some of the changes outlined above. Comments included the challenge of working with limited staff on site, without the additional provision provided by volunteers; supporting people to switch to engaging with support digitally and, where this didn't work, addressing the barriers to ensure people were supported; navigating the changed landscape of what services organisations could offer – especially adapting to the numerous lockdowns and changing restrictions and subsequent policies and procedures.

Working together: Despite the challenges, there have been examples of the sector pulling together and working collaboratively:



“Over this time we have been able to use organisational expertise to co-develop a telephone befriending scheme with [another local organisation] which was supported by some [of our] volunteers.”

Looking forward

At the time of the audit and the writing of this report, the COVID-19 pandemic has continued to have a significant impact on people experiencing homelessness and organisations offering support. Looking forward, respondents raised the following points:

Long-term planning

Some respondents highlighted the need to move from crisis responses to thinking about strategic responses, such as around food need and linking in with the local situation and policy context. A few stated that their longer-term planning would depend on external influences such as the ongoing pandemic and government policy following 'Everyone In'.

Collaboration

There was a call for 'a longer-term plan for increased understanding of each provider's' mission and vision, and a coming together to work collaboratively on 'a shared city wide mission'. There was a call for the development of a 'multi-agency hub for collaboration' for improved working together, building relations with Brighton and Hove City Council and building on the gains made from 'Everyone In'.

Flexibility

Many respondents described the need to continue to be adaptable and flexible in terms of service delivery, with the priority of keeping clients and workers safe while ensuring that they offer the best support possible. Some respondents highlighted recent trends which needed a response: a change in client base with more people accessing services having been made redundant, and more people affected by loneliness and isolation.

Digital provision

Multiple respondents cited digital provision, suggesting the need for more investment in digital communications, not only securing more tablets, but also providing more data to enable clients to engage with services. Respondents aimed to continue to support people remotely and explore blended models, while recognising the importance of face-to-face support – often with the aim of getting back to it when it is safe to do so.

Impact of support

Respondents shared information about outcomes for people experiencing homelessness with whom they had come into contact. The responses demonstrated the significant impact of the range of support and investment in the sector that contributes to both preventing homelessness and moving people out of homelessness.

Four organisations supported **408 people to secure accommodation through the private rental sector (PRS)** in the last financial year. The majority of those helped were by two organisations, which points to the specialist nature of this work. An additional 14 people were supported into PRS out of area.

426 a positive
people achieved move-on



We asked respondents to share the outcomes they captured in their previous financial/reporting year, and 36 responded with a vast range of anecdotes and statistics to highlight positive outcomes. Common themes and a flavour of these are highlighted below:

Accessing volunteering, training, education, employment

“Two clients are now trained up as kitchen prep volunteers ... still volunteering pending job offers.”

“Two social enterprise businesses set up.”

“A client has started a college course with the aim of becoming a support worker.”

Homeless prevention

“Clients have told us that they ‘have been able to avoid rough-sleeping or staying in BnB or Backpackers’ and that ‘they feel more positive about their future’ – they felt their physical and mental health had improved – they felt more in control of their life and more able to make decisions – they felt more connected to other people – they had support from other organisations they wouldn’t have known about.”

Improved health/ mental health/ substance misuse issues

“Prevented [serious medical condition] of one individual with intervening clinical and holistic care.”

“Access to health and care services and other basic support needs for [BHCC] homeless placements in East Sussex.”

Improved nutrition

Tenancy sustainment
– including managing conflict, increased safety and financial resilience

“Increase in feeling safe and increased well-being and confidence.”

Addressing debt issues and support with benefits and budgeting

“75% felt supported with their benefit/debt issue, 64% of clients felt their anxiety around their situation was reduced after the appointment, 51% felt more confident about their situation after the appointment.”

Digital inclusion

“People we have supported have stated their confidence and independence has increased and they have learnt new skills that have unlocked new opportunities for them.”

We also asked respondents to tell us about any other top statistics that they felt represented the work of their organisation. Here is a selection from the 26 responses:

“40 meals a day, five days a week.”

“90% of those who engaged with our support have been able to resolve or manage conflict situations so they can remain in their current housing.”

“We see and interact with approximately 60 people per week and in doing so reduce isolation for many of them.”

“Our monitoring also gathers volunteer data – a key social value output of the project. In particular volunteers have reported these outcomes:

- I feel more connected to my community*
- My knowledge on homelessness has increased*
- It has given me a sense of purpose and meaning in my life*
- It has broadened my perspective on life*
- It has given me new skills and/or knowledge.”*

Gaps in services in Brighton and Hove

We asked respondents to tell us about any gaps in services on offer in Brighton and Hove that need filling, and 29 free text responses identified some key areas of concern:

Appropriate accommodation

As well as highlighting the urgent need for more affordable housing in the city, respondents identified the need for the development of targeted strategies for specific groups, particularly:

Addressing gaps in supported housing, including:

- Increased intensive supported accommodation and emergency housing for young people
- Substance free accommodation
- More Housing First provision

Specific accommodation providing 'safe spaces' for particularly vulnerable groups were highlighted, namely:

- Women
- LGBTQI+ people
- Young people (18-25)
- People with mental health/substance misuse issues who don't want to live in standard supported accommodation
- People in recovery

Additionally, there were calls for:

- Improved emergency accommodation and support for people placed outside of the city
- Out of hours support (especially for young people)
- Longer stay accommodation
- Reasonable access to PRS

Increased mental health provision

Respondents noted frequently the pressure on statutory services due to statutory funding cuts and the impact on clients and the sector as it holds increasing risk. In particular, respondents highlighted the lack of:

- Preventative work
- Emergency response provision
- Specific services for young people – barriers to services were identified as inaccessible thresholds, design of service offer and dual diagnosis



“... we don't know if we will ever see a young person again when they walk out of the door as the mental health support is just not available to them. We have had several cases when we have suicidal young people present to us and we have been unable to get the urgent/crisis support they have needed and they have left us and attempted suicide ...”¹²

Improved representation of those with lived experience

Through co-production and service user involvement in designing and delivering commissioned and non-commissioned services.

¹² Content warning- this quote discusses suicidal feelings. Help is available at <https://www.samaritans.org/> if you require support.

Young people (18-25)

The lack of appropriate strategies and services to address the overall needs of this particular client group was a recurrent theme highlighted by respondents and included the need for suitable accommodation (emergency and longer term) with support, mental health support (both preventative, acute and with specialist support for complex cases), and substance addiction support services.



“Part of the challenge relates to commissioning, culture and practice and everyone is doing their best to make it work. There needs to be some fresh thinking about how young people access and move between services and how agencies gather around and proactively collaborate.”

Inclusive practices

In particular recognising neurodiversity as well as the need for gender-informed approaches and LGBTQI+ support, embedding inclusive practices into all services and practice.

Increased provision (support and advice) for migrants

Increasing understanding of sofa surfing/hidden homeless

For example, the extent of those living long term in backpacker hostels (pre-COVID).

Coordination and collaboration

There was a call for increased dialogue, transparency, coordination and collaboration across and between statutory services and the VCSE to build on existing services and to develop joint responses to the gaps highlighted.



“... Meaningful homelessness prevention plan that engages the whole community including schools ...”



“Community sector are often still not engaged in the mainstream dialogue and not working in collaboration with the existing support frameworks/networks.”

Respondents identified a need to address workforce challenges

Low wages, a transient workforce and the need to increase training and support opportunities generally.

Recommendations

Finding 1: VCSE and statutory partners engage as one system

The VCSE sector has made a significant investment in resources and expertise to address and end homelessness and rough sleeping in the city. The sector's value and diversity are demonstrated through its wide range of resources and the extent of its reach into the wider community. The people within the VCSE sector – staff, volunteers and clients – bring considerable skills, experience and partnerships that understand, and are working successfully together to meet, the challenge of ending and preventing homelessness. However, the demand and the complexity for VCSE and statutory services exceeds both capacity and available resources, leading to significant risk being held within the sector as people are not always receiving the crucial housing support they need.

These challenges may be addressed through the establishment of a shared purpose and coordination between all stakeholders to end and prevent homelessness and rough sleeping in the city. No one organisation or sector can find or organise the solution on their own and so solutions must include as many people's energies, ideas, talents and expertise as possible. A one-system response – characterised by its focus on collaboration, co-design and co-production to ensure representation and participation of a range of communities and organisations in the development of aligned strategies and operational models – may create the best opportunities for supporting people experiencing homelessness.¹³

Recommendation: The Homeless and Rough Sleepers network members and statutory partners create equitable, trusting relationships underpinned by transparent, open and clear lines of communication that endeavour to establish a parity of voice and status in strategic planning and funding relationships to engage as one system.

¹³ <https://www.bhcommunityworks.org.uk/voluntary-sector/report-impact-of-covid-19-on-the-vcse/>

Finding 2: Strengthen coordination and systems leadership approaches within the VCSE

The report identified as a strength the scope and range of available services and providers, as well as the existence of a number of networks within the VCSE. Respondents also highlighted an opportunity to coordinate provision to maximise support, improve outcomes and negate the ‘revolving door’ crisis created by diminishing statutory services, increasingly challenging threshold barriers, and increasingly complex needs.

The Homeless and Rough Sleepers Network provides an opportunity to offer clear routes for engagement, participation and dialogue between the VCSE and statutory sectors, creating opportunities for systems leadership and cross sector strategic thinking, alongside solution-focused collaboration between statutory services and the VCSE.

Recommendation: Explore ways in which the VCSE Homeless and Rough Sleepers Network can work collegiately with related networks to develop a sector leadership model to engage in systems working approaches at all levels. The Manchester Homeless Partnership provides evidence of the impact of joint approaches.¹⁴

Finding 3. The need to develop services dynamically through learning, sharing and collaboration

The report found that there was a need to build the sustainability and capacity of the homelessness sector through additional good practice development opportunities for organisations and individuals, developing a deeper understanding of homelessness to maximise the impact of services for clients.

Respondents indicated a willingness to share training, expertise, tools and resources, creating opportunities for collaboration within the sector as well as developing shared information, insights from services on the ground and local knowledge.

¹⁴ <https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/the-manchester-homelessness-partnership/>

Learning can be dynamically developed with tools such as the Street Support Brighton and Hove platform and the work of the Centre for Homelessness Impact to lead stakeholders as one system and to examine where people are excluded or impacted negatively by the ways in which services and policies are developed and offered.

Recommendation: Explore how multi-agency networks and forums identified in the ‘snapshot’ report may work together to coordinate support and sector intelligence to highlight gaps and duplication in provision and opportunities for practice development, and to share knowledge and learning dynamically.

Finding 4. The urgent and acute needs of young people

The lack of a cohesive strategy and adequate services to address the urgent needs of this particularly vulnerable client group (16-25 year olds) in a shifting landscape of homelessness as we moved through COVID was a recurrent theme highlighted by respondents. There were consistent calls for suitable accommodation (emergency and longer-term) and access to mental health support (both preventative, acute and with specialist support for complex cases) and substance addiction support services. This is also reflected in national research and recommendations.¹⁵

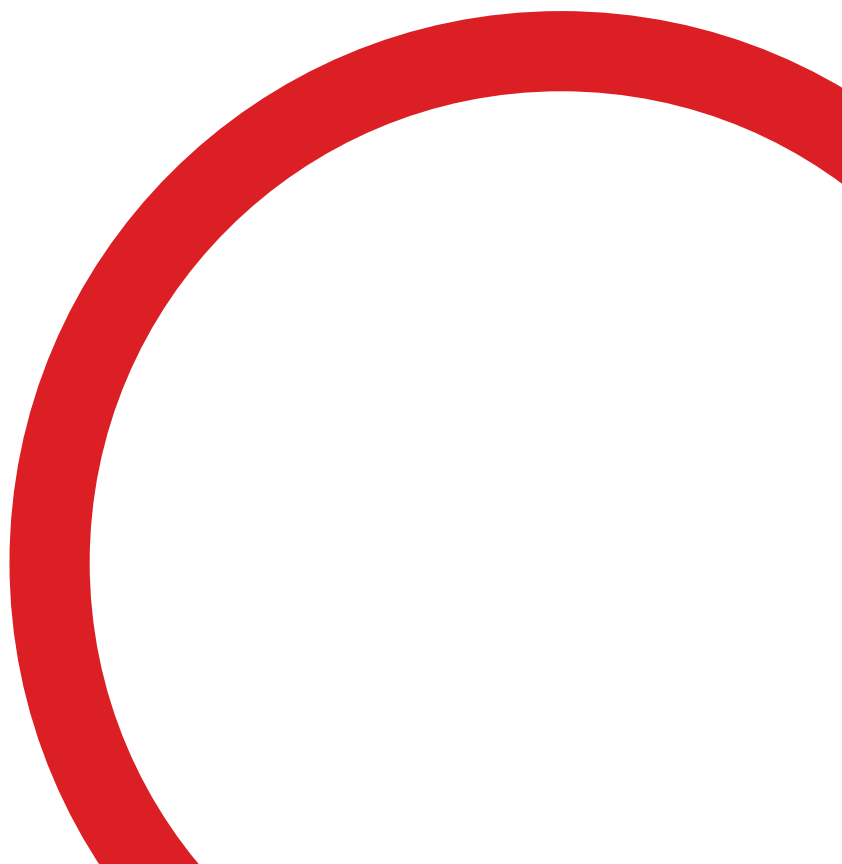
Recommendation: Ensure the specific needs of young people experiencing homelessness are recognised in policy and practice across strategies and service delivery with an emphasis placed upon partnership working and collaboration to engage as one system to urgently respond to those needs.

¹⁵ <https://homeless.org.uk/news/shaping-the-future-together-homeless-links-strategy-to-end-homelessness/>

Call to action



We call on our statutory sector and VCSE partners to develop a co-designed and co-produced model of working to amplify the future success of the city's homelessness and rough sleeping strategy, enabling valuable VCSE expertise and representation at all levels of strategy development and implementation. We believe that taking a collaborative approach will make a meaningful difference to the quality of support we can collectively offer, and therefore help to prevent and relieve homelessness in Brighton and Hove.



If you have any questions on this report please contact Kate Standing from Justlife on kate@justlife.org.uk or Jayne Ross from Community Works on jayne@bhcommunityworks.org.uk.

