

# Evidence from the frontline

How policy changes are affecting people experiencing multiple needs

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*An interim report from*

**VOICES**  
from the  
**frontline**



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Adult Matter

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## About this project

### Multiple needs and exclusions

People facing multiple needs and exclusions are in every community in Britain. They experience several problems at the same time, such as mental ill health, homelessness, drug and alcohol misuse, offending and family breakdown. They have ineffective contact with services, and are living chaotic lives.

### Making Every Adult Matter

Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) is a coalition of four national charities – Clinks, DrugScope, Homeless Link and Mind – formed to influence policy and services for adults facing multiple needs and exclusions. Together the charities represent over 1600 frontline organisations working in the criminal justice, drug and alcohol treatment, homelessness and mental health sectors.

### Voices from the Frontline

Voices from the Frontline is an exciting new project to bring the voices of people with multiple needs and those who support them to the heart of the policy debate.

Over two years, Voices from the Frontline will work directly with people experiencing multiple needs, and the practitioners who support them every day. Through workshops, interviews and survey research, we will capture their experiences and views, and help them explore how policy could better address the issues they identify.

Together, we'll provide a mirror to government on its progress on these issues, and raise the priority of multiple needs on the national agenda. What's more, we'll use the evidence gathered to help the 1,600 frontline organisations brought together by the Making Every Adult Matter coalition influence change in their local areas.



Voices from the Frontline is generously supported by the LankellyChase Foundation.

## Introduction

There are people in every community in Britain experiencing multiple needs: we estimate their number at 60,000<sup>1</sup>. These individuals require a great deal of coordinated support, but at present are not receiving it. The government spends a significant proportion of its health, welfare and criminal justice budgets on them, much of it paying for expensive emergency or crisis provision. Across the political spectrum, there is widespread agreement that policy and services could serve this group much better<sup>2</sup>.

Despite this, people experiencing multiple needs are largely absent from public debates that affect them. There are few high-profile advocates for their interests – and even fewer people who can speak from personal experience: living on the streets; struggling with substance misuse or mental health problems; caught in a cycle of reoffending.

What's more, the professionals who work with them, from drug and alcohol workers to street outreach teams, can be equally invisible. The work they do is rooted in local communities, carried out without fanfare, and deeply important. Their knowledge can help us improve the way we approach multiple needs, if only we're prepared to ask the right questions.

The aim of Voices from the Frontline is to change this state of affairs. We aim to ensure that those making policy on social issues – whether in Whitehall or in a town hall – are able to draw on the evidence and insights of people whose voices too often go unheard.

## Why we carried out this survey

Over the next two years, we'll be working closely with people experiencing multiple needs and exclusions and practitioners, starting with a programme of workshops held at services across the country in September and October 2014. Before embarking on this work, though, we wanted to understand what problems services have identified that are affecting people with multiple needs.

We are exploring two sets of issues in this work. Firstly, access to benefits, and changes to the welfare system. Secondly, access to services, and changes to the structures through which they are commissioned. The reason for this dual focus is that both these areas have experienced significant and rapid change over recent years, and there is relatively little evidence on how people with multiple needs have been affected.

Through the four charities in the Making Every Adult Matter coalition (Clinks, DrugScope, Homeless Link and Mind) we have the potential to reach over 1,600 organisations across England, working across the criminal justice, drug and alcohol, homelessness and mental health sectors. By surveying this group,

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<sup>1</sup> *Turning the tide: a vision paper for multiple needs and exclusions* (Making Every Adult Matter and Revolving Doors Agency, 2011)

<http://bit.ly/1uRahwf>

<sup>2</sup> For instance, see:

- Contributions to *Within Reach* (Fabian Society, 2014), a collection of essays on multiple needs contributed by authors writing from Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat perspectives  
<http://www.fabians.org.uk/publications/within-reach/>
- The government strategy paper *Social Justice: transforming lives* (HM Government, 2012):  
<http://bit.ly/1peqZ4e>

we've taken a snapshot of the impact that recent changes to policy are having. It is by no means a conclusive picture: many changes have not taken full effect and, especially in the case of offender management and rehabilitation services, significant reforms are yet to come.

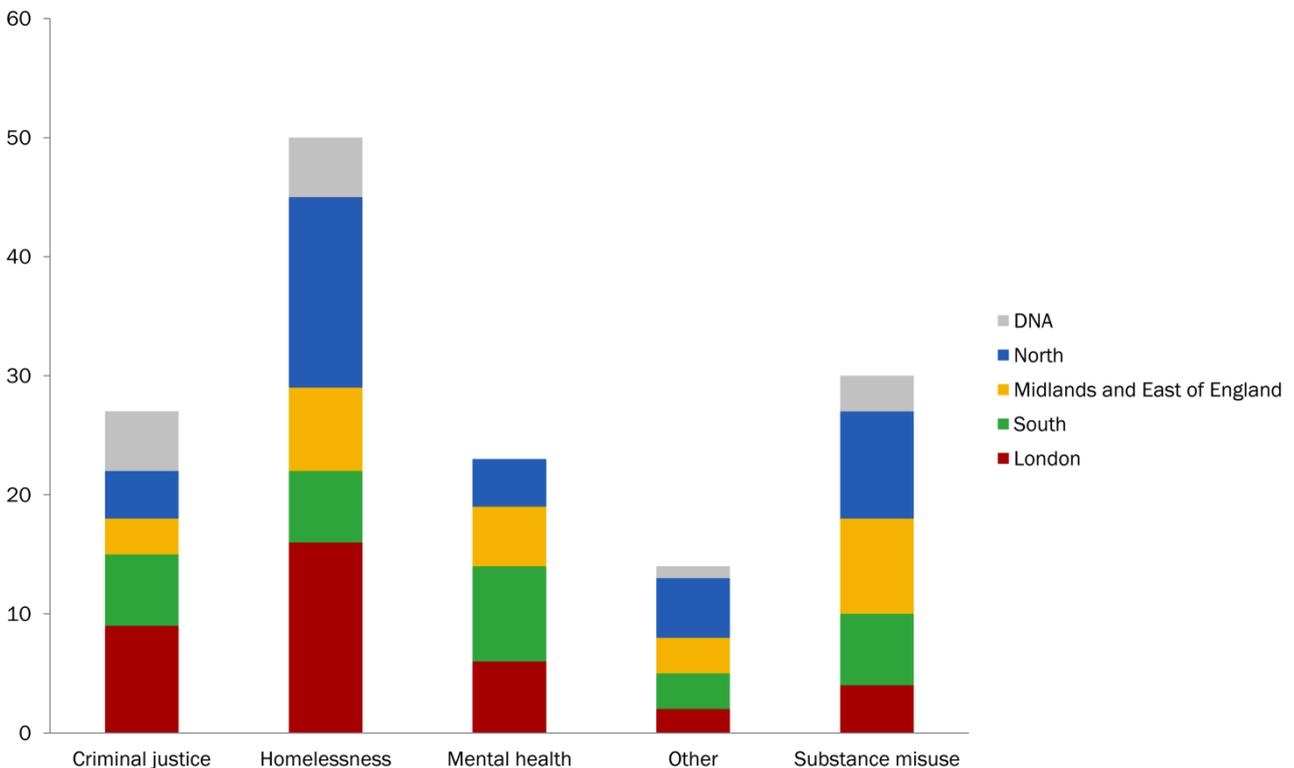
This, however, is only the beginning of Voices from the Frontline's work. Using these survey results as a starting point, we will hold further workshops and interviews over the coming year to explore and understand some of the issues that we have identified in this report.

## Methodology

The survey was sent during June and July 2014 to all MEAM coalition partners' members or affiliates likely to be working with multiple needs clients, and promoted through our wider public channels. It was designed to capture services' general perspectives on welfare reform and commissioning, as well as asking specific questions about the changes that have taken place over the last few years.

**We received 231 responses, of which 144 were usable<sup>3</sup>.** Cumulatively, the services reported over 70,000 contacts with people experiencing some form of multiple need<sup>4</sup>.

### Respondents by primary sector and Public Health England region



<sup>3</sup> Of these, 134 answered questions on commissioning, and 136 answered questions on welfare reform. All percentages quoted reflect the proportion of people who answered relevant questions.

<sup>4</sup> This figure will be greater than the number of individuals represented, due to double counting of people who access multiple services.

The services that responded were split across the four sectors, with homelessness services somewhat over-represented. We had responses from all English public health regions, with the highest number of responses coming from London and the north<sup>5</sup>.

## Summary of findings

### Welfare reform

We found that recent welfare reforms are having an overwhelmingly negative effect on people with multiple needs. They have led to financial and personal strain, and in some cases placed people at risk. There are particular concerns over the use of sanctions, and cuts to legal aid.

#### **Welfare changes are having a severe effect on people's mental health and well-being**

- 88% of services reported welfare changes had a negative effect on their clients' overall well-being, and 86% on their mental health
- Several services perceived an increased risk of suicide amongst their service users as a result

#### **Services report that the changes are not helping people with multiple needs to progress toward employment, and are placing them under financial and personal strain**

- Only two percent of services believed that welfare reforms have had a positive impact on people's ability to engage with the job market, with 55% reporting a negative impact
- 88% of services reported a negative impact on people's finances, 82% on access to appropriate housing, and 73% on access to appropriate food and nutrition

#### **In some cases, welfare reforms are prompting re-offending and placing vulnerable women at risk**

- Many services described a pattern in which people with a history of offending behaviour would reoffend when placed under stress through changes to their benefits
- Several services described vulnerable women turning to subsistence theft, sex work or being forced to depend on violent partners after losing their benefits

#### **Benefit sanctions are significantly disadvantaging people with multiple needs**

- 79% of services reported that sanctions are affecting over half of their service users, and sanctions were viewed as having the most negative impact of all the welfare changes

#### **Legal aid cuts are affecting a significant number of people with multiple needs**

- 64% of services said that cuts to legal advice are affecting over half their service users

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<sup>5</sup> Several of the MEAM organisations do not work across the UK, and for this reason the survey was targeted at services in England. One usable response came from a substance misuse service in Wales, which we have included as the majority of questions are still relevant in a Welsh context.

## Commissioning

Changes to the way services are commissioned have had a mixed impact. Commissioners see multiple needs as increasingly important, and plenty of good practice exists. However, cuts in former Supporting People funding are a major concern, and the effect of some reforms is yet to be seen.

**Most commissioners attach some importance to multiple needs. For many it is a priority, and its importance has grown over the last two years.**

- Most services said that their local commissioners attached at least some importance to multiple needs, with 23% rating its importance to them as 10 out of 10.
- 72% of services identified some kind of joint commissioning in their area

**The removal of ring-fenced funding from the former Supporting People programme has strongly affected people with multiple needs.**

- A majority of respondents – 56% – reported that this had a negative impact on people with multiple needs

**New policing and public health structures have had a neutral impact, but raised some issues**

- Most respondents felt the introduction of Health and Wellbeing Boards (40%) and Police and Crime Commissioners (39%) had a neutral impact on people with multiple needs
- 41% of mental health services said moving the substance misuse budget to public health has had a negative impact, compared to a third of substance misuse services

**Implementation of major programmes such as Troubled Families has varied in different areas**

- 32% of services rated Troubled Families as having a positive impact on people with multiple needs, and 40% a neutral impact
- Some areas reported significant difficulties engaging with the programme locally

## Welfare reform

Under the present government, significant changes are being made to the way that entitlement to benefits is assessed and managed, including limits to some forms of financial support<sup>6</sup>. These changes are aimed at simplifying the benefits system, encouraging more people to seek and secure employment, making the welfare system more efficient, and reducing the costs of the welfare budget.

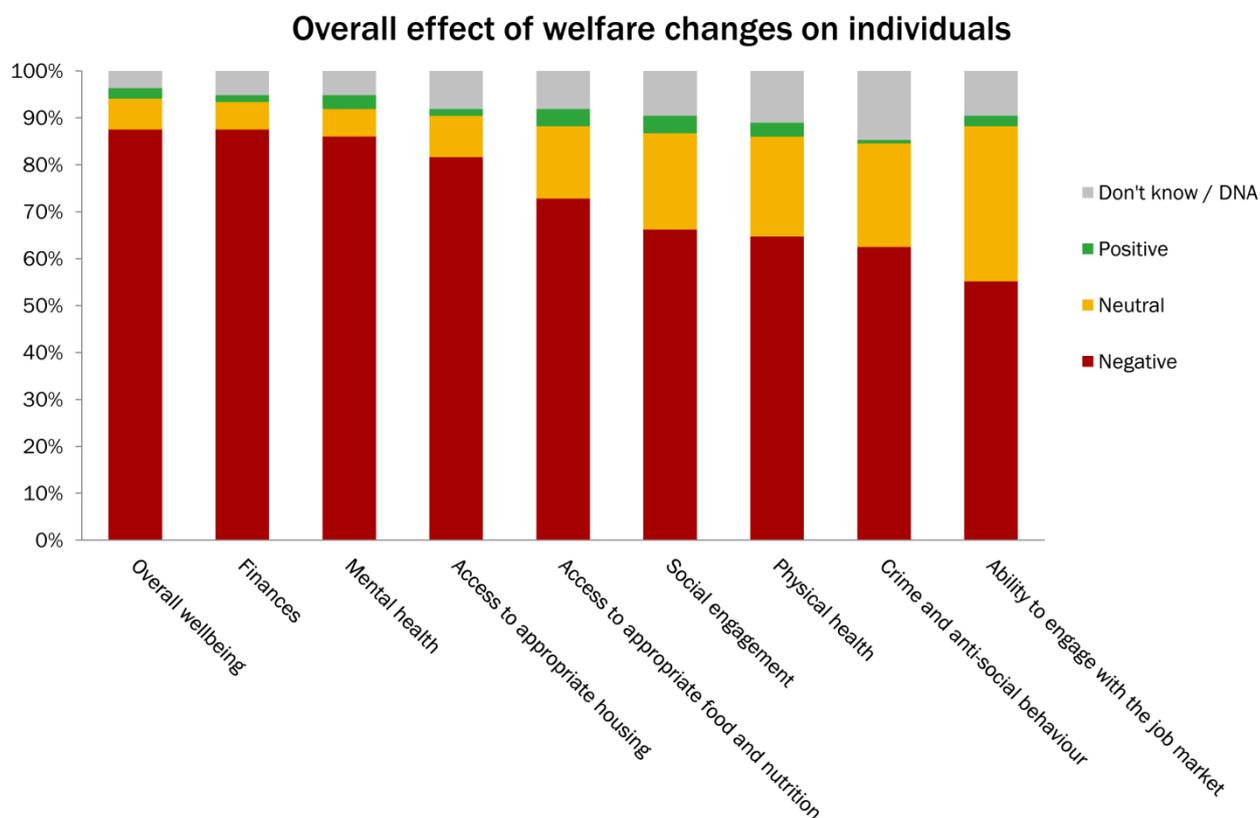
There is widespread concern, particularly amongst charities working with vulnerable or excluded groups, that these changes are having a negative impact on people's well-being and material circumstances. We asked respondents to the survey a number of questions on how people with multiple needs accessing their services have been affected by changes to the welfare system.

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<sup>6</sup> For background on these changes, see *DWP Reform: DWP's Welfare Reform Agenda explained* (Department for Work and Pensions, 2014) <http://bit.ly/1BxXbbh>

## Effect on individuals

The starkest findings were in terms of the effect that welfare changes – taken together – have had on people with multiple needs. Services’ responses highlight a range of areas of concern.



### Mental health and well-being

The clearest effect on people with multiple needs was in terms of their mental health and well-being. **88% of services reported welfare changes had a negative effect on their clients’ overall well-being, and 86% on their mental health.** Many services cited a direct link between the withdrawal of people’s benefits and difficulty managing their mental health problems, and – perhaps most worryingly – several perceived an increased risk of suicide as a result.

“[The biggest impact is] on their mental wellbeing – these welfare changes are having a very, very negative impact. There also appears to be very little support especially for those threatening suicide.”

*Specialist service*

When we asked services to describe the single biggest impact of welfare reforms, **31 individual services (23% of those participating in the survey) identified mental health or related issues without being prompted.**

There were also several references to the effect that reforms have had on the self-esteem and self-worth of people affected. There is already a serious stigma attached to people with

histories of substance misuse, homelessness, mental health problems and offending, and several services felt the withdrawal of support is contributing to this<sup>7</sup>.

“As one woman said to me: ‘it’s like everybody wants me to fail’.”

*Substance misuse service*

## Employment and finances

A stated aim of the government’s welfare reforms is to help people back into employment, but few services we surveyed had confidence that welfare reforms were helping people with multiple needs to move in this direction. **Only two percent of services believed that welfare reforms have had a positive impact on people’s ability to engage with the job market**, with **55% reporting they have had a negative impact**. The latter finding is particularly significant given that people with multiple needs already experience considerable barriers to employment.

“A huge increase in shop theft and mental health issues which de-stabilises all the positive work that had been achieved. People [are] being forced to apply for jobs they will never get and could never safely do!”

*Criminal justice service*

Moving beyond employment to financial stability, **88% of services reported a negative impact on people’s finances**, with many services referring to problems with debt, in several cases linked to use of payday loans or ‘loan sharks’. **23 services (17% of those participating in the survey) identified financial issues as the biggest impact of welfare reforms without being prompted**.

## Accommodation and food

In their detailed responses, services often connected financial problems closely to concerns about accommodation, with many citing issues with rent arrears. **82% of services reported welfare changes having a negative effect on access to appropriate housing**, (and the proportion is only marginally higher, at 87%, for services primarily working with homeless people).

There was also widespread concern about people struggling to buy food. **73% of services reported that welfare changes were having a negative effect on people’s ability to access appropriate food and nutrition**. A large number of services described people with multiple needs relying on food banks.

“More frequent and harsher benefit sanctions leading to serious problems, much higher use of local food banks, many clients going hungry at these times – several of our clients are very underweight due to lack of nutrition.”

*Homelessness service*

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<sup>7</sup> It is worth considering this in light of research from the Who Benefits? campaign, which found a significant proportion of people receiving benefits said their confidence, self-esteem and mental health had been negatively affected by public perceptions of claimants.

“Second class citizens?” *The personal impact of the debate on benefits* (Who Benefits?, 2014)

<http://www.whobenefits.org.uk/page/s/second-class-citizens>

## Offending and personal safety

In their detailed comments, many services highlighted the extent to which benefit changes are limiting people's ability to turn their lives around. In particular, many services described a pattern in which people with a history of offending behaviour would reoffend when placed under stress through changes to their benefits.

“For some of those who 'lose' benefits it becomes a challenge to re-engage with mainstream ways of seeking income and begging, theft, sex working etc. increases until they can be restarted on benefits.”

*Substance misuse service*

Several services working with vulnerable women highlighted the specific difficulties they can face, and described women feeling compelled to steal food and other essentials, engaging in sex work, or being forced to depend on violent partners<sup>8</sup>.

“As a service working on violence against women we see more women having to choose between destitution and staying [in] a violent or abusive situation, and women who try to exit prostitution feeling they have to revert to it to survive or turn to other offending.”

*Specialist service*

## Implementation of reforms and ability to cope

Some services argued that much of the impact of welfare reform was due to the complexity of the changes and how they have been implemented.

“I am reluctant to dismiss all changes as negative, as overall the welfare system is positive and important [...] However, it is the changes to the system and challenges of effective communication which have, to varying degrees, had negative impacts on service users.”

*Criminal justice service*

Connected to this was a perception that the negative impact of new policies is falling unfairly on those least able to cope. Several services referred to a feeling amongst people with multiple needs and those who work with them that they are being 'targeted' by government policy.

“I feel it is the impact of the many smaller changes together which have an overall impact on the ability of people with multiple needs to change things for the better. People with low incomes seem to be targeted at every level whether it is provision of healthcare, housing support, legal aid, quality of life.”

*Substance misuse service*

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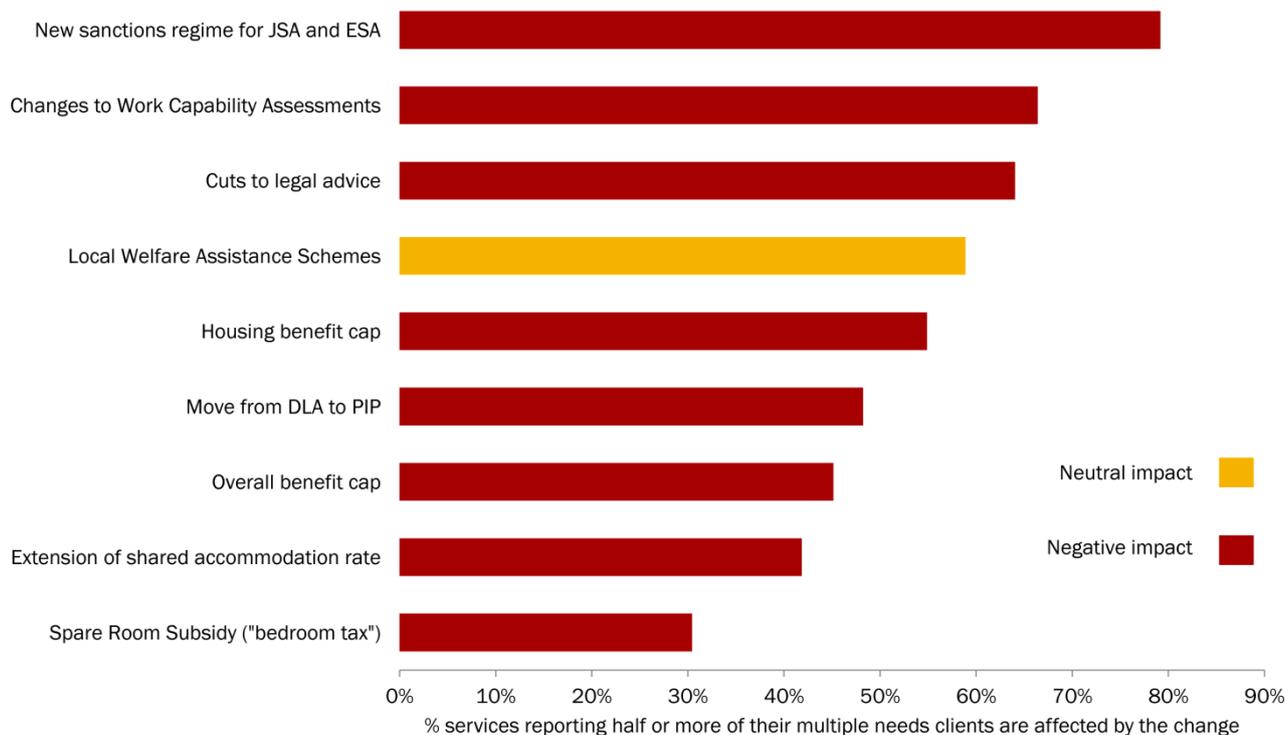
<sup>8</sup> For further background on this issue, see:

- *Clinks briefing about the nature of the relationship between debt and women's offending* (Clinks, 2014) <http://bit.ly/1rTqP9N>
- *Rebuilding shattered lives* (St Mungo's Broadway, 2014) <http://rebuildingshatteredlives.org/>

## Effect of specific changes

It is clear that services believe that welfare reforms are seriously affecting people with multiple needs. We asked them to rate the extent and impact of specific reforms, and also to provide examples of the kind of impact they were seeing.

### Extent of welfare reforms' impact on people with multiple needs



## Sanctions

The clearest finding from our results was that benefit sanctions are having a widespread and serious negative impact on people with multiple needs. Sanctions are applied when people fail to meet the conditions attached to receiving benefits. Since 2012, there is a perception that these conditions have tightened, and heavier penalties have been placed on those claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and Employment Support Allowance (ESA), which supports people unable to work due to illness or disability<sup>9</sup>.

**79% of services reported that sanctions are affecting over half of their service users with multiple needs, and sanctions were viewed as having the most negative impact of all the welfare changes we asked about.** Indeed, **29 services (21% of those participating in the survey) specifically mentioned sanctions as their greatest area of concern.** In their detailed responses, many referred to time spent supporting people whose benefits had been stopped unexpectedly.

"Benefits being stopped without warning is a daily occurrence [and] this is putting undue stress on residents who are already battling issues beyond most

<sup>9</sup> For a summary of changes to sanctions rules for JSA, see *Jobseeker's Allowance: overview of revised sanctions regime* (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/jobseekers-allowance-overview-of-sanctions-rules>

people's imaginations. As a support worker, the effect has been having to spend the majority of my day on the phone to Housing Benefits/ESA to help sort out issues, rather than spending time [addressing] fundamental issues such as struggles with mental health and substance misuse."

*Homelessness service*

As well as experiences of misapplied sanctions, others expressed concern about the administration of the sanctions regime, referring to poor communication and inconsistent practice in their contacts with agencies<sup>10</sup>.

"Benefit sanctions have caused problems with miscommunication between departments at the Jobcentre and DWP being the major concern."

*Specialist service*

These issues raised by respondents are particularly worrying given the rising number of people being sanctioned, particularly those in receipt of Employment Support Allowance (ESA). The number of people on ESA being sanctioned increased by 346% between April 2013 and April 2014, most of these for failing to meet the conditions they've been set<sup>11</sup>.

## Work capability assessments

Services also expressed concern about Work Capability Assessments, the most common way of assessing who is eligible for ESA and what conditions are attached to receiving it. **66% of respondents estimated that half or more of their service users have been affected by changes to the assessments.** Services commented particularly on the stress placed on people with multiple needs going through the process.

"I find that it is difficult for our clients to attend the welfare assessment because when they get the letter their mood changes, they seem to get paranoid that their benefits will be taken away from them."

*Homelessness service*

Our findings on sanctions and Work Capability Assessments, together with evidence gathered by other MEAM coalition members<sup>12</sup>, demonstrate that the way the benefits system works for people with multiple needs requires urgent attention.

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<sup>10</sup> This is reinforced by the findings of Matthew Oakley's independent review of the JSA sanctions regime, which identified significant shortcomings in the information provided to claimants. *Independent review of the operation of Jobseeker's Allowance sanctions validated by the Jobseekers Act 2013*, DWP (2014)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/jobseekers-allowance-sanctions-independent-review>

<sup>11</sup> In the first quarter of 2013, 3,574 people on ESA were sanctioned; the figure for Q1 of 2014 is 15,955. As of August, there were 552,000 claimants in the work related activity group of ESA. See 'Shocking increase' in ESA sickness benefit sanctions (BBC News, 13 August 2014)

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-28776102>

<sup>12</sup> For instance, see:

- *A high cost to pay: The impact of benefit sanctions on homeless people* (Homeless Link, 2013)  
<http://bit.ly/1pcS7jZ>

## Legal aid

A surprising finding was the extent to which cutbacks in legal aid are affecting people with multiple needs. **64% of services said that cuts to legal advice are affecting over half their users.** One service commented on the significance of legal aid in the context of family issues.

“Fathers/parents without parental responsibility now are denied access to their children with no recourse to the courts because of removal of legal aid. The impact on their children who have lost an involved parent is unquantifiable.”

*Substance abuse service*

Another hypothesis for the significance of legal aid cuts is that they could be affecting people’s ability to make effective challenges to decisions about other areas of welfare. This is something that needs further research and we will be exploring it more closely as the project develops.

## Crisis Loans

In their detailed feedback, several services referred to the removal of crisis loans. This took place as part of changes to the Discretionary Social Fund, a programme of support funded by the Department for Work and Pensions, which came into effect from April 2013.

Crisis loans, along with community care grants and budgeting loans, supported people who found themselves in short-term financial need – for instance, because of delays in accessing their benefits or costs associated with resettlement. Although local authorities currently receive funding to provide ‘local welfare assistance’, these grants can be complex to access, are limited in scope, and may not be centrally funded after April 2015.

“The removal of crisis loans has caused a significant increase in problems, including personal debt, housing instability, mental and physical health, and emotional distress, to those most in need amongst our society.”

*Homelessness service*

## Commissioning

Commissioning (at its very simplest) is the process of planning, agreeing, funding and monitoring services<sup>13</sup>. Recent years have seen a series of radical changes in the way that this happens, many of them driven by the principle of localism – that decisions on how to design services and allocate resources should be taken as close as possible to the people affected by them.

## Priorities and joint working

In principle, many of these changes should help to provide better support for people with multiple needs. In order to establish whether this is the case, we asked services a series of questions about

- 
- *Fourth Independent Review of the Work Capability Assessment Call for Evidence – Response from Mind et al* (Mind, 2013)  
<http://bit.ly/1tH1SdV>

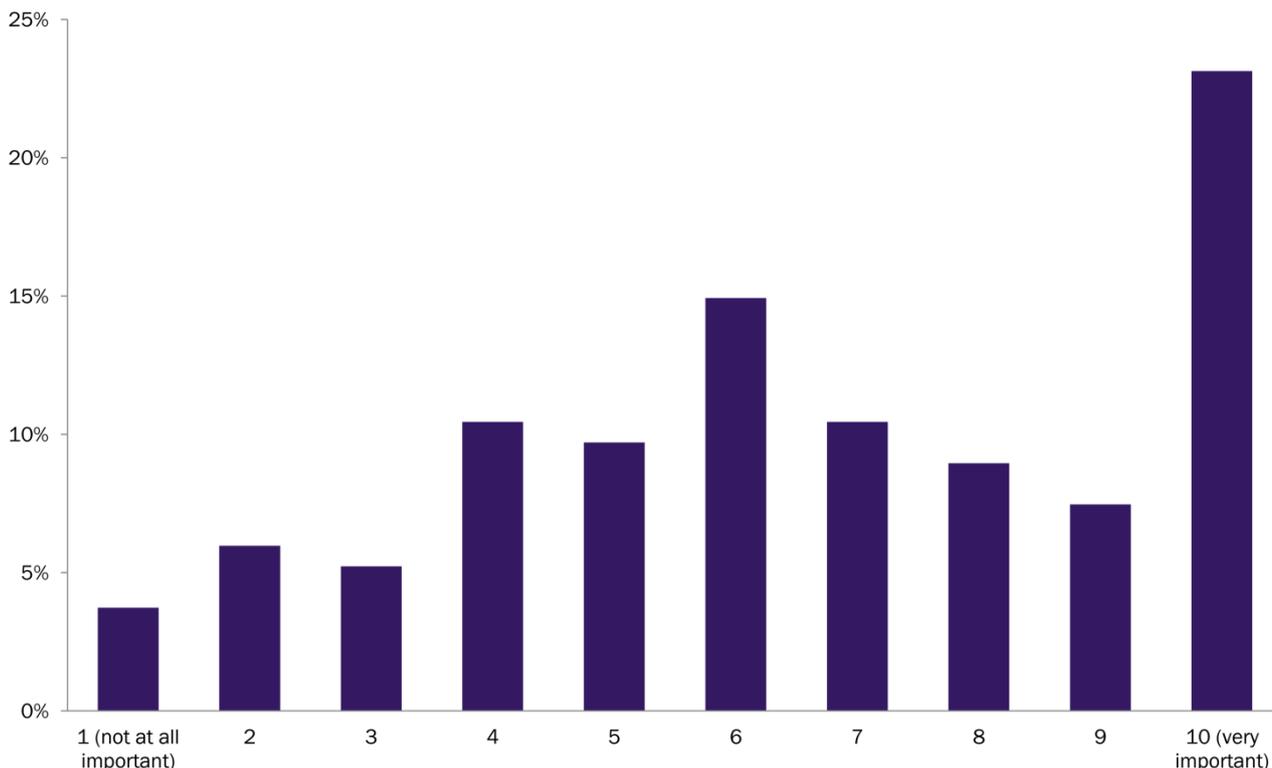
<sup>13</sup> This definition is adapted from the one used by NHS England:  
<http://www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/commissioning/> (accessed 3/9/2014)

commissioners' attitudes to multiple needs and the prevalence of commissioning approaches aimed at people experiencing them.

### Commissioners' priorities

There is clearly concern amongst commissioners about people with the most complex needs. **Most services said that their local commissioners attached at least some importance to multiple needs, with 23% rating its importance to them as 10 out of 10.**

**Importance of multiple needs to commissioners**



When asked to go into detail, though, many services raised issues about the gap between good intentions, and what is possible in the current funding climate.

“Commissioners are aware of the problem but blame funding cuts for the reasons they are no longer funding the required services.”

*Homelessness service*

Others were concerned that while the rhetoric may be there, in practice the focus remains on meeting single needs.

“In terms of lip-service they think they understand and care but [...] their commissioning, their outcomes, their monitoring and their public statements do not reflect multiple needs.”

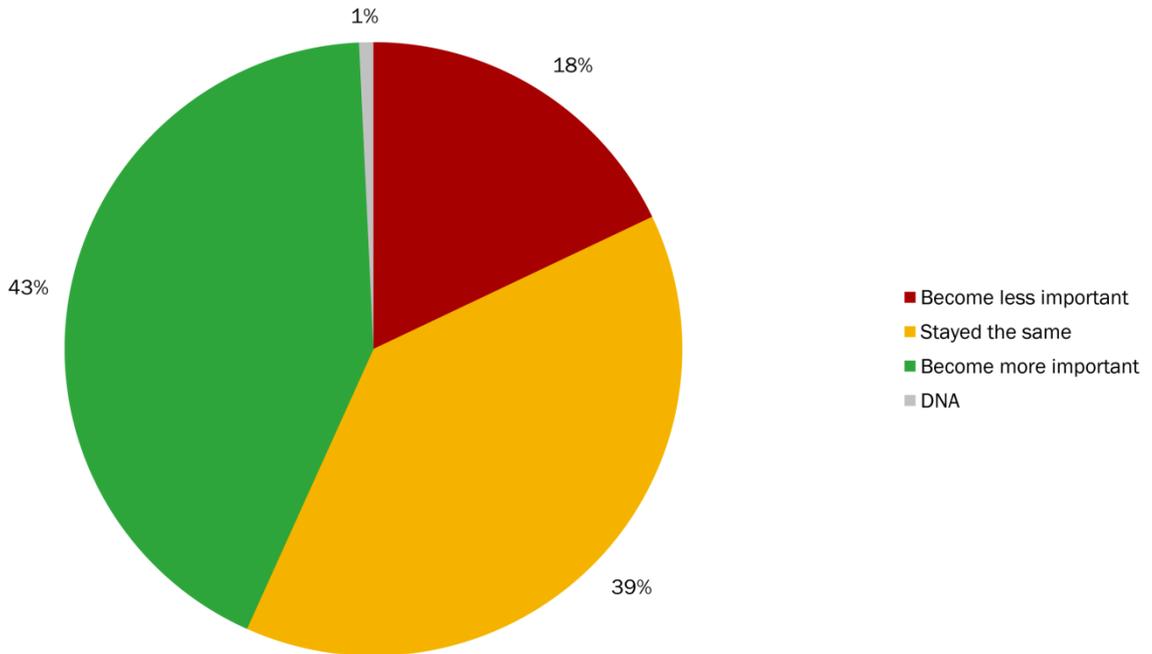
*Specialist service*

This was particularly evident in responses from services working with vulnerable women, several of whom argued that commissioners failed to recognise the specific needs of this group.

“We support women suffering domestic violence and they frequently don't fall into any commissioning framework despite this being a so called priority area – the agenda focusses on risk not needs.”

*Specialist service*

### In the last 2 years, has the importance of multiple needs to commissioners changed?



It is striking that **42% of respondents said multiple needs had become more important for commissioners in their area over the last two years**, suggesting that the profile of this client group is growing. The increased attention is welcome, although there is a danger that if attention shifts too far from those in need of lower-intensity support, the long-term consequences could be a greater number of people experiencing multiple needs.

### Joint commissioning and working

The survey suggested that commissioners' interest in multiple needs also translates into practical action. **72% of services identified some kind of joint commissioning in their area**, and a number of services cited local initiatives to prioritise multiple needs in commissioning, and referenced the importance of joint meetings between representatives of different sectors.

“The quarterly meetings serve as an effective place to network and bring outreach work to services to provide continued support for the client group. The meetings are reflective and dynamic and are an invaluable source of information.”

*Homelessness service*

It is also worth noting that **87% of respondents reported that they have effective links or referral arrangements with other services in their area**, implying that even where joint commissioning is not possible, services appreciate the need for co-operation.

In general, these findings provide strong evidence that commissioners and services are attuned to – if not necessarily meeting – the challenge of multiple needs.

## **Changes to commissioning structures**

Reductions in the available funding and the move towards localism have led to radical changes in the way that services are commissioned – particularly for housing and substance misuse services. We asked services to assess the impact of these changes on their ability to support people with multiple needs.

### **Supporting people**

When we asked about specific changes to commissioning in recent years, **services reported that the greatest negative impact came from the removal of the former Supporting People Programme's ring-fencing and its gradual incorporation into local authorities' wider grants.**

In its original incarnation, Supporting People was a national programme of ring-fenced funding that local authorities were required to spend on housing-related support. However, since 2009 local authorities have been free to spend as much or as little on services of this type as they decide<sup>14</sup>.

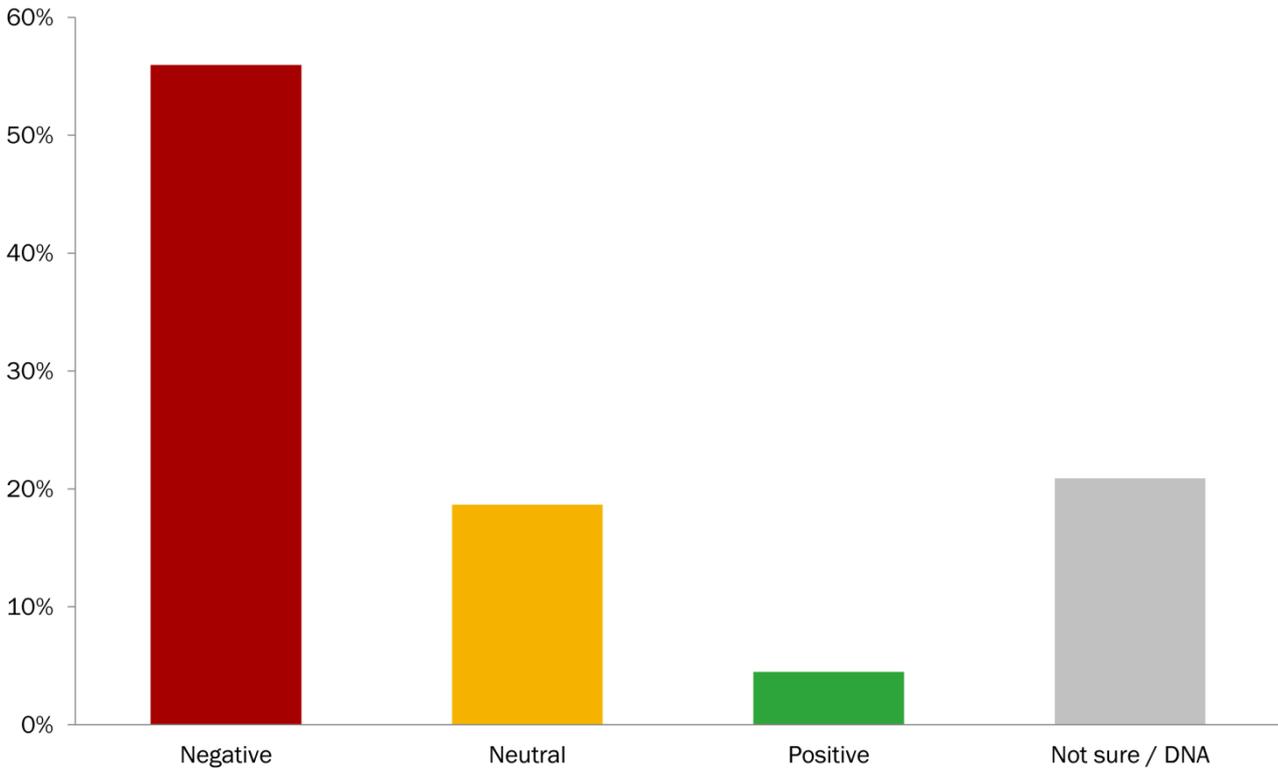
The rationale for these changes is to provide local authorities with greater flexibility in responding to local priorities and the needs of the most vulnerable people in their communities. This, however, is challenged by evidence from recent Freedom of Information requests, which revealed that during 2011/12 local authorities withdrew funding entirely from 305 different services, with a further 685 services experiencing some form of funding cut<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Budgets for housing-related support now come from a much larger pot, known as the Formula Grant. Unlike Supporting People, the Formula Grant is used to fund a wide range of local services, not just housing. As a result, councils are no longer required to spend any money on housing-related support beyond their statutory obligations.

<sup>15</sup> *The Supporting People programme* (House of Commons Library research paper, 2012), p. 17  
<http://bit.ly/1qPpXiU>

### Impact of removing the Supporting People ring-fence



Our findings demonstrate the impact the removal of this funding is having. **A majority of respondents – 56% – reported that removal of the ring-fence has had a negative impact on people with multiple needs** (rising to 71% of those who expressed an opinion).

“The worst thing to happen to this sector was the removal of SP [Supporting People] ring-fencing.”  
*Mental health service*

While local authorities have more freedom to spend their money as they see fit, decreases in funding for housing-related support services have reduced their flexibility to support people with multiple needs.

### New policing and public health structures

The last two years have seen a series of changes in the way that services that people with multiple needs access are organised – particularly in terms of the new public health structures created in 2013 following the Health and Social Care Act.

Some of these changes appear to have had relatively limited impact. Most respondents felt that the introduction of **Health and Wellbeing Boards (40%) and Police and Crime Commissioners (39%) had a neutral impact on people with multiple needs.**

It’s worth bearing in mind, though, that these new structures were intended to improve local accountability and – in the case of health and well-being boards – improve working between different agencies with an interest in public health. Given this, it is concerning that **a relatively small proportion –**

**27% for PCCs, and only 19% for HWBs – feel that the new structures are having a positive effect.**

However, this may improve as the new structures settle in.

“Some [commissioning changes] are very new like [Health &] wellbeing boards so haven’t impacted clients yet.”

*Criminal justice service*

There was more serious concern about other elements of the public health reforms, specifically moving the budget for substance misuse to local authority public health budgets<sup>16</sup>. **41% of mental health services rated this as having a negative impact**, significantly higher than other kinds of services (including substance misuse, where the figure was 33%).

## Troubled Families

One significant example of a locally-delivered programme is Troubled Families, introduced in 2011 to encourage better support for families facing serious problems<sup>17</sup>. The initiative as a whole is perceived by respondents as moderately successful, with **32% of services rating Troubled Families as having a positive impact on people with multiple needs, and 40% a neutral impact**. Some services noted the focus provided by the programme on multiple needs (although others raised questions about the criteria used to identify families, and whether these were identifying those most in need of support.)

“Troubled Families has made a big difference in some areas - for example in [this area]. Troubled Families are in effect the definition of multiple needs!”

*Substance misuse service*

As a locally-delivered programme, there were also services who reported problems engaging with those responsible for delivering the service on the ground in their localities.

“Troubled Families initiative is a joke [in our area]. After six meetings, we never hear back from anyone.”

*Criminal justice service*

This underlines the significance of localism across the commissioning reforms: where decisions about a service are made at a local authority level, the impact of the change will be variable.

## Cumulative impact

When asked about the overall impact of commissioning changes, most services assessed it as neutral, few were overwhelmingly positive and a significant minority took a negative view.

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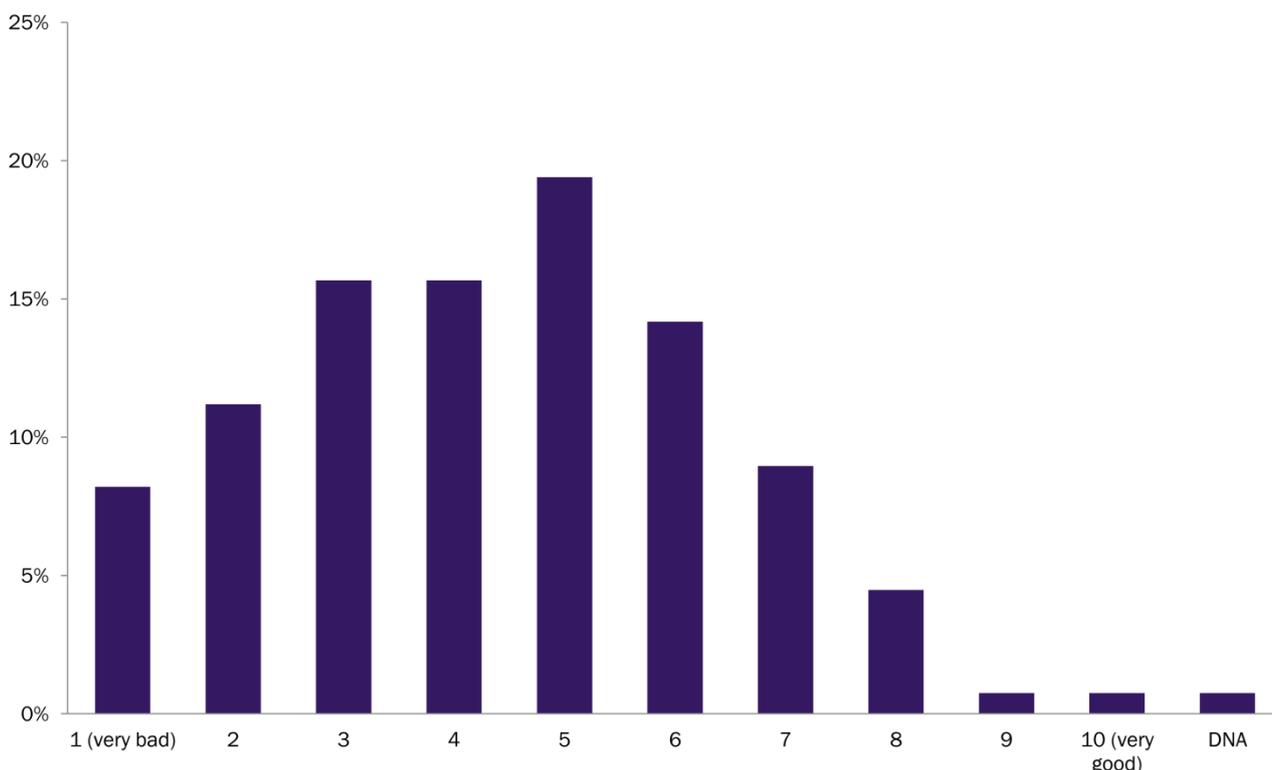
<sup>16</sup> From April 2013, PHE absorbed the responsibilities of the abolished National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse (NTA). For background on this change, see DrugScope’s briefing *The Public Health Reforms: what they mean for drug and alcohol services* (DrugScope, 2013)

<http://bit.ly/1uLI7DX>

<sup>17</sup> For background on Troubled Families, see *Helping troubled families turn their lives around* (gov.uk policy summary, accessed 22/8/2014)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/helping-troubled-families-turn-their-lives-around>

### Cumulative impact of commissioning changes



The lack of services reporting a positive impact from commissioning changes suggests a disparity: the greater attention commissioners are paying to multiple needs is not yielding better provision. Given the uncertainty over how new reforms are bedding in, and the variable nature of initiatives that are delivered locally, this picture is perhaps to be expected.

It’s also worth remembering, though, that more change is coming – for instance, the reform of the management and rehabilitation of offenders through the government’s Transforming Rehabilitation programme. Indeed, **a majority of services (37%) were unsure about the impact preparation for Transforming Rehabilitation was having on people with multiple needs.**

Voices from the Frontline will be following these issues closely over the next two years, helping government and commissioners to understand the perspectives of services and the people using them when deciding what will provide the best support to people with multiple needs.

## Next steps

The results of this survey have been invaluable in shaping our thinking for the next stages of Voices from the Frontline. Over the next 9 months, we’ll be exploring the following areas in more depth with people experiencing multiple needs and those supporting them (including many drawn from the services who participated in this survey).

## **Understanding the impact of welfare reform**

The coalition's Social Justice Strategy sets out the government's commitment to "promoting work for those who can as the most sustainable route out of poverty", while at the same time tackling the root causes of multiple disadvantages.

However, services have told us that they believe welfare reforms are making it harder, not easier, for people with multiple needs to take steps toward employment. What's more, they feel strongly that welfare reforms are having an overwhelmingly negative effect – on people's mental health, their financial security, and their access to food and shelter. It is particularly concerning to see evidence that vulnerable people have been placed in crisis situations after losing their benefits.

Through working with people who have direct experience of the welfare reform changes, we hope to understand the specific challenges they face, and explore how the system can be improved so these goals can be met for people with multiple needs.

## **Exploring how commissioning can be most effective**

Localism presents great opportunities to provide better services for people with multiple needs. Our evidence indicates that most commissioners believe services for this group are important, and that providers are willing to work together to achieve better outcomes. However, it also shows that this hasn't always translated to improved outcomes, with services not seeing the improvements they might have expected from new health, public health and policing structures.

What's more, there are potential dangers in the transfer of power from Whitehall to the town hall. Giving local areas flexibility but cutting their funding makes vital services vulnerable. The impact of changes to Supporting People – where services are telling us disinvestment by local authorities is directly affecting people with multiple needs – is the clearest example of this risk.

We plan to work with services, their staff and service users to learn where successful services are being commissioned, and where there are changes that need to be made.

## **Helping solve a different kind of policy challenge**

The policy challenges affecting those with multiple needs are not irresolvable, but they are complex. Part of the difficulty is that one intervention, one policy change, or one funding scheme isn't enough. What's needed is careful, systemic thinking about how people's needs can be met using all the resources available.

Beyond that, though, there's also a gap in understanding. For people facing difficult circumstances, a change to their benefits or their local mental health service is more than just a change in provision. It's another piece of an increasingly difficult puzzle they must solve.

We want to work with policymakers to help them listen to the views of people with multiple needs, and those who support them. Where things aren't working, or are having unexpected results, we aim to help them improve provision, and support people through changes. And over time, we hope the project will help them make better-informed decisions – to everyone's benefit.

## Acknowledgments

The Voices from the Frontline steering group provided invaluable support throughout the research process and in producing this interim report:

<b>Paul Anderson</b>	Policy Manager, Homeless Link
<b>Andrew Brown</b>	Director of Policy, Influence and Engagement, DrugScope
<b>Ellie Cumbo</b>	Policy Manager, Clinks
<b>Oliver Hilbery</b>	Director, Making Every Adult Matter coalition
<b>Jacqui McCluskey</b>	Director of Policy and Communications, Homeless Link
<b>Naomi Phillips</b>	Interim Head of Policy and Campaigns, Mind

Thanks also to **Marcus Roberts** and **Ruth Goldsmith** at DrugScope for their helpful comments on drafts of the report, and above all to the 144 services that took the time to complete the survey.

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## Get involved in Voices from the Frontline

Find out more about Voices from the Frontline on the Making Every Adult Matter website.

[www.meam.org.uk/voices-from-the-frontline](http://www.meam.org.uk/voices-from-the-frontline)

If you'd like to find out more about getting involved in the project, please contact:

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