

MEAM response to Tackling homelessness together: A consultation on structures that support partnership working and accountability in homelessness.

About MEAM

Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) is a coalition of Clinks, Homeless Link, Mind and associate member Collective Voice. MEAM was formed in 2009 to improve policy and services for people facing multiple disadvantage and represents over 1300 frontline organisations. Working together we support local areas across the country to develop effective, coordinated services that directly improve the lives of people facing multiple disadvantage.

The MEAM coalition partners welcome the consultation on tackling homelessness together and the focus on developing strategic structures that support partnership working and accountability in ending homelessness at a local level. MEAM partners Homeless Link and Clinks have submitted detailed responses to the consultation, which we support.

In this document, we outline in greater depth how learning from the national MEAM Approach network and the Fulfilling Lives programme (see below) can help support the development of Homelessness Reduction Boards.

Multiple Disadvantage

People experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping often face a combination of other problems including substance misuse, mental ill health and contact with the criminal justice system. They fall through the gaps between services and systems, making it harder for them to address their problems and lead fulfilling lives.

Working together the MEAM coalition supports 39 local areas across England to develop effective, coordinated approaches to multiple disadvantage that can increase wellbeing, reduce costs to public services and improve people's lives. Twenty-seven of these areas are using the MEAM Approach and 12 are part of The National Lottery Community Fund's Fulfilling Lives programme.

Why this consultation is important

Local accountability structures such as Homelessness Reduction Boards will be vital if the government is to achieve its aim of halving rough sleeping by 2022 and ending it by 2027.

Since the publication of the national strategy last year, significant investment has flowed into local areas and a wide range of practical, service-level improvements are underway. For these to have maximum impact, they will need to be supported by ambitious local homelessness strategies and clear, cross-sector accountability structures, which support and challenge a wide range of cross-sector partners to meet their responsibilities to end rough sleeping and homelessness.

A clear example of the link between service-level improvements and local accountability structures are the new Rough Sleeping Navigators, funded by MHCLG as part of the Rapid Rehousing Pathway. As MHCLG have acknowledged, to be successful navigators will require the support of a range of cross-sector partners. As well as working directly with individuals, Rough Sleeping Navigators must have the authority to act in flexible ways for individuals and be able to call on flexible responses from other statutory and voluntary services. They will only be able to achieve this if clear local accountability structures are in place. This consultation and its focus on local accountability structures is therefore vital to the delivery of the wider national rough sleeping strategy aims.

This response from MEAM shares learning from the national MEAM Approach network and is shaped around the three main sections from the consultation document. We use sub-headings to show responses to specific questions.

Existing accountability structures.

Q1 Q2 Q3: What non-statutory structures exist to tackle homelessness, how effective are they, and can they create systems change?

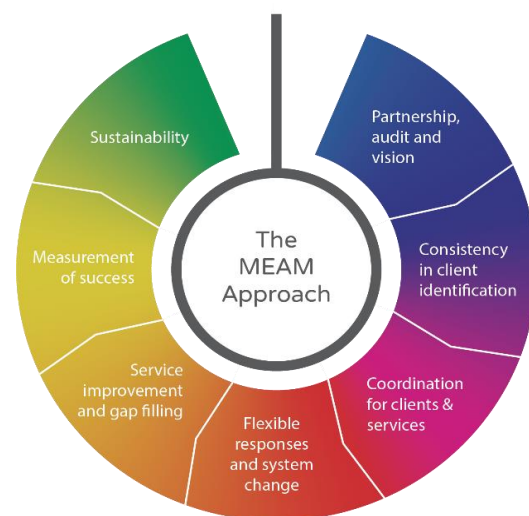
There are a range of existing groups and structures operating within local areas to tackle homelessness. These include many long-standing homelessness forums and numerous examples of 'task and targeting' meetings where professionals from different agencies seek to improve the provision of services for people facing multiple disadvantage.

Many of these meetings are effective, but in our experience, they can also vary significantly in terms of the roles they play, the strategic support they have, the resources that are available to them, and the ability they have to really offer a 'different approach.' For example, if a task and targeting meeting discusses an individual, but everyone on that group is constrained by systemic issues (i.e. high caseloads, limited budgets, risk-based operating structures, high thresholds for service access, etc) then the chance of the group having an impact for the individual is limited.

Thirty-nine areas across England are currently attempting to take a more systemic approach, having created local cross-sector partnerships to tackle multiple disadvantage. These partnerships have a strong focus on rough sleeping as well as the associated issues of substance misuse, mental health and contact with the criminal justice system. Twenty-seven of the local areas are using the MEAM Approach while 12 are part of the National Lottery Community Fund Fulfilling Lives programme.

The MEAM Approach provides local areas with a non-prescriptive framework from which to design and deliver better coordinated services for people facing multiple disadvantage. Bringing together a cross-sector partnership of providers, commissioners, people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage and key decision makers, MEAM Approach areas are committed to designing and delivering a new way of working that reflects their local environment and current service structure.

MEAM Approach areas tend to put in place two cross-sector partnership structures to ensure a systemic focus: an operational group of service managers explores practical approaches to better coordinated services; while a strategic group,



formed of senior commissioners and policy-makers, creates buy-in and ensure that all local agencies are willing to provide flexible responses. In some localities the operational and strategic groups will form part of existing structures (i.e. a Community Safety Partnership or a Health and Wellbeing Board may act as the strategic group).

The operational and strategic structures in MEAM Approach areas are closely linked to the client-facing element of the work, which usually involves a small team of coordinators/navigators working directly with people experiencing multiple disadvantage. The link between the two is vital: navigators cannot fulfil their role of creating new approaches for individuals without a mandate from the strategic and operational groups.

In this way, MEAM Approach areas develop practical and better-coordinated approaches for people and ensure flexible responses from services, thereby overcoming some of the issues of the traditional 'task and targeting' approach.

Two examples of local areas using the MEAM Approach to develop cross sector partnerships are provided below. In the next section of this response, we explore how learning from MEAM Approach areas could be used to shape Homelessness Reduction Boards.

Norwich

The Norwich MEAM Approach work was started several years ago by Norwich City Council in partnership with statutory and voluntary sector agencies. These partners worked together, alongside people with lived experience, to develop a new approach called Pathways to support homeless people in the city experiencing multiple disadvantage.

Pathways is a commissioned intervention delivered by a consortium of local voluntary sector agencies. Pathways staff adopt a personalised approach to support, building on individuals' strengths and recognising the impact of the trauma they have experienced. They are supported by a cross-sector operational group, which meets to solve problems and ensure coordinated offers of support.

A senior multi-agency partnership board oversees the Pathways work and a similar partnership approach focused on women facing multiple disadvantage and domestic abuse. The board's role is to "create long-term improvements in systems, commissioning and policy which will lead to accessible, coordinated and responsive support for people facing multiple disadvantage, enabling them to manage the challenges they face". The board aims to amplify the voice of people with lived experience, disseminate identified best practice and learning, take collective action to remove systemic barriers to progress, and facilitate close working relationships between partners at a strategic level. The board is attended by representatives from the city and county councils, the CCGs, Public Health, CRC, prisons, police and voluntary sector leaders.

To date, Pathways has supported over 80 'MEAM clients' across the city. An independent evaluation of the work has shown that multi-agency working was cited by the majority of stakeholders as a key strength of the Norwich Pathways work.

Doncaster

Over the last two years, Doncaster has developed an innovative 'whole system' model to tackle rough sleeping, called the Doncaster Complex Lives Alliance, which integrates the work of Doncaster MBC, Community and Acute NHS Trusts, primary care, housing, criminal justice and community, voluntary and faith organisations. The MEAM Approach has helped to shape this work.

The Alliance was formed in response to an increase in rough sleeping and was developed using a participatory design process, which has ensured an ongoing commitment to a user-centred and strengths-based approach.

At the core of the Alliance is an integrated, multi-disciplinary delivery team including a manager, senior caseworker, three intensive MEAM support workers, six system navigators and specialist housing, assertive outreach workers, substance misuse, mental health, criminal justice, housing benefit and trauma workers. Included in the team is lived experience. There is also aligned support from the police, town centre officers, hostel/housing providers and health agencies. These professionals meet regularly taking a 'pragmatic problem-solving approach', requiring flexibility across all partners.

A responsive governance structure ensures that when system barriers are identified which cannot be solved by frontline workers, they are escalated and addressed by more senior partners in the system. A 'Bronze, Silver, Gold' escalation model is used, bringing together chief executives and senior managers to develop flexible approaches. The Gold Group is chaired by the Chief Executive of Doncaster MBC.

To date the Alliance has worked to support 115 people facing multiple disadvantage, all previously rough sleeping. Ninety of these are now settled and stabilised in accommodation settings, being supported by key workers and wrap around support plans, and showing improvements relating to drug and alcohol misuse, physical health and offending behaviours.

Q4 Q5 Q6: Which statutory structures are currently having conversations about homelessness and what more should they be doing?

There are a range of statutory functions that have an impact on homelessness. Some of these are focussed at the individual level - for example MAPPA and MARAC - while others take a more strategic approach - for example Health and Wellbeing Boards and Community Safety Partnerships.

All these statutory structures have some impact on homelessness and rough sleeping, though this is usually only a small part of their focus and therefore they are not able to give the time to it that it deserves. There is also an issue about how different many of these structures are in local areas, with a wide range of quality, buy-in and focus. Homelessness Reduction Boards should complement and support the work of these existing structures.

Homelessness Reduction Boards

Q9: Could the aims of Homelessness Reduction Boards be met by amending the remit and function of existing local non-statutory and/or statutory structures?

For the reasons given above about their broad focus and available time, we are not convinced that the role of Homeless Reduction Boards could sit within existing statutory structures and be effective. Homelessness Reduction Boards need to involve statutory agencies, voluntary agencies and people with lived experience on an equal footing and the current statutory

structures aren't set up in this way. Equally, it is unlikely that current non-statutory structures could meet the aims of Homelessness Reduction Boards in every area of the country.

Q10: What are the merits and drawbacks in developing Homelessness Reduction Boards?

There is merit in developing Homelessness Reduction Boards. In particular we think that such local accountability structures:

- Will be vital if the government is to achieve its aim of halving rough sleeping by 2022 and ending it by 2027.
- Will be needed to ensure that the delivery-focused investment flowing into local areas from MHCLG is as effective as possible.
- Are an opportunity to re-frame the focus on homelessness and rough sleeping, bringing together voluntary agencies, statutory agencies and people with lived experience on an equal footing.
- Are an opportunity to ensure a systemic focus and to build stronger links locally between strategic and operational discussions and decisions.

There are a range of possible drawbacks. Some examples include:

- Placing too much accountability on local areas when there are a range of structural issues causing homelessness at the national level that government must commit to addressing.
- That Homelessness Reduction Boards could be poorly implemented locally; fail to bring partners together on an equal footing; be dominated by one sector (i.e. housing) and therefore fail to share responsibility for tackling rough sleeping and homelessness across all partners; or take a 'short-term' approach to reducing numbers which would not be sustainable.

Many of these risks could be mitigated within the design of Homelessness Reduction Boards, the legislation and guidance that shapes them, and the support available from MHCLG.

Q11: What should be the purpose and objectives of Homelessness Reduction Boards?

Getting the focus and role of Homelessness Reduction Boards right will be vital to their success. Based on learning from MEAM Approach areas and our wider experience we suggest that the following considerations should be taken around Homelessness Reduction Boards:

- **A statutory footing but avoiding current pitfalls of similar structures:** There are good arguments for and against placing Homelessness Reduction Boards on a statutory footing. Current statutory structures can be poorly implemented in practice and by nature they tend to promote the involvement of statutory partners over others. Equally, non-statutory structures sometimes struggle to get all relevant partner involved. On balance, given the current environment, we believe that having a statutory footing of some kind would be useful for Homelessness Reduction Boards as it would create clarity, ensure boards existed across the country, and ensure attendance from the main partners. However, strong legislation, guidance and national support would be needed to ensure that boards involved statutory agencies, voluntary agencies and people with lived experience on an equal footing and that all partners had a willingness to take a wide systemic focus (see below).
- **A systemic focus, a shared understanding of the problem and a clear vision:** Homelessness Reduction Boards need to take a broad, systemic approach to ending homelessness and rough sleeping, with all board members committed to exploring fresh perspectives and accepting shared responsibility. The boards will need to develop a shared understanding of the problem they are seeking to address; a clear vision around potential solutions; and a good understanding of how 'systems thinking' behaviours could help them approach this

complex problem. Legislation, guidance and support from MHCLG will need to promote a systemic way of working, without being overly prescriptive. The aim would be to avoid Homeless Reduction Boards becoming dominated by one sector (i.e. housing) or failing to take a system-wide view of the challenges and solutions.

- **A dual role on strategy and practical delivery:** Homelessness Reduction Boards will need to cover both the practical work of finding solutions for individuals and the strategic/systemic work of developing and ensuring flexible approaches from a wide range of agencies. Learning from the MEAM Approach areas shows that these are different conversations, requiring different players, but that they must relate closely to each other. MEAM Approach areas tend to operate both an 'operational' and a 'strategic' group (described in more detail above) and learning from this could help shape the model for Homelessness Reduction Boards.
- **A clear link to homelessness strategies:** There should be a clear link between Homelessness Reduction Boards and local homelessness strategies. This could include the Homelessness Reduction Board having responsibility for the development and monitoring of the strategy and being jointly accountable for its outcomes. In this way, all relevant agencies would accept a shared responsibility for ending homelessness. MHCLG should offer guidance, support and challenge.
- **A view that is wider than services:** As part of its systemic approach, a successful Homelessness Reduction Board will need to consider how to make the most use of local resources and opportunities including roles for the wider community, a range of voluntary and community services, and the private sector.

Q12: Where should HRBs be established

We suggest that Homelessness Reduction Boards are established in all areas, not just rough sleeping hotspots. Further consideration will be needed about whether to place boards in upper-tier authorities or within all authorities.

Q13: Who should be members of Homelessness Reduction Boards?

All local agencies, commissioners and policymakers with a responsibility for contributing to ending rough sleeping and homelessness should be members of Homelessness Reduction Boards. This should include statutory and voluntary representatives from homelessness, substance misuse, mental health and criminal justice sectors; social care and safeguarding teams; domestic violence and community safety services, among others. All representatives should be senior enough to commit their organisations to specific actions.

As outlined above, there is an argument that some statutory agencies/roles should be required to be members of Homelessness Reduction Boards, but there should also be a clear commitment in legislation and guidance that membership of Homelessness Reduction Boards must be balanced across statutory agencies, voluntary agencies and people with lived experience and that all members should be involved on an equal footing.

Q14: What is needed to make them effective?

Homelessness Reduction Boards will only be successful if the legislation, guidance and support from MHCLG promotes and encourages the focus and role described above. This will require significant effort to ensure Homelessness Reduction Boards avoid the pitfalls of other statutory structures. Personal and practical support from MHCLG will be vital.

Other ways of supporting effective partnership working.

Q21: What else could the government be doing to support partnership working?

There is an important role for national government in encouraging and supporting this local partnership approach. There should be a stronger cross-government commitment to tackling homelessness and multiple disadvantage, including addressing the structural drivers of homelessness that require national action. National government should set a clear expectation that every local area should develop a partnership response to homelessness and multiple disadvantage, while ensuring that flexible funding is available to support local partners to work together and respond to local need.

Conclusion

The learning and experiences of MEAM Approach and Fulfilling Lives areas can help shape the government's approach to Homelessness Reduction Boards. We would be happy to discuss any aspect of this response in more detail or to arrange visits to local areas to discuss their work.

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