



## **Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee: Impact of COVID-19 on homelessness and the private rented sector**

### **Submission of evidence from Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM)**

1. Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) is a coalition of national charities – Clinks, Homeless Link, Mind and associate member Collective Voice. Together MEAM represents over 1,300 frontline organisations across England. Working together we support local areas across the country to develop effective, coordinated services that directly improve the lives of people facing multiple disadvantage. We use our shared knowledge and practical experience from this work to influence policy at the national and local level.
2. People facing multiple disadvantage experience a combination of problems including homelessness, substance misuse, contact with the criminal justice system and mental ill health. They fall through the gaps between services and systems, making it harder for them to address their problems and lead fulfilling lives. In our submission we will be referring mainly to the impact of COVID-19 on people facing multiple disadvantage.
3. MEAM supports 39 local partnerships across the country that are taking 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 – a non-prescriptive framework to help local areas design and deliver better coordinated services – while twelve are part of the Big Lottery Fund's Fulfilling Lives programme.
4. As mentioned above Homeless Link is one of our core members and we fully endorse their submission to this inquiry.

### **How effective has the support provided by MHCLG and other Government departments been in addressing the impact of COVID-19 on those in the private rented sector, rough sleepers, and homeless people?**

5. Individuals experiencing multiple disadvantage often have serious housing issues, frequently rough sleeping for significant periods of time. For many, accessing stable and appropriate accommodation is exceptionally difficult. They are rarely deemed to be in priority need and regularly determined to be intentionally homeless because of past behaviour.
6. The instruction from MHCLG on 27 March 2020 that local authorities should house all rough sleepers and vulnerable homeless people was welcome. It demonstrated a clear imperative for all local authorities to develop plans at speed and it ensured that large numbers (though not all) rough sleepers were housed. For some individuals facing multiple disadvantage this offer of suitable temporary accommodation from local authorities will have been the first for several years.

7. Individuals experiencing multiple disadvantage often have serious underlying health conditions, particularly those who have slept rough for significant periods of time. As a result the virus poses considerable risks to this group. Without accommodation it would have been almost impossible for them to social distance, self isolate and access appropriate healthcare advice and treatment. Government triaging advice for cohorting people into the new temporary accommodation provided a useful guide and helped local areas to develop local plans to avoid the spread of infection. The involvement of health and public health colleagues in this process has been vitally important.
8. Substance misuse services have played an important role in adapting their approach during the crisis period, and the guidance on this from PHE was welcome.
9. There are some issues around which government guidance would have been very welcome but was not forthcoming. In particular, no guidance was offered to the homelessness sector about the operational running of new accommodation settings, particularly those designed to shield people at most risk or house people with symptoms. Many people facing multiple disadvantage will have been accommodated in these settings. Greater coordination between government departments and speedy operational guidance would have helped the sector to put local plans in place and ensure the full involvement of all relevant partners, including health and public health.
10. Although we have seen these partnerships develop naturally in numerous areas (a result of good existing partnerships or collaborative local leaders) this will not be the case everywhere across the country. For some, this will be completely new to them or local relationships might be difficult to put in place between organisations. As a result too much was left solely for housing and homelessness organisations to coordinate themselves.

### **What problems remain a current and immediate concern for these groups?**

#### Not everyone is being offered accommodation

11. The first point to note is that not all individuals were offered accommodation and some chose not to take it. There is a concern that those facing multiple disadvantage perhaps disproportionately fall into this group. The government could provide specific advice and support on engaging further with these groups and ensuring that appropriate accommodation offers are in place in every local area.
12. We are aware of a worrying trend that local areas already appear to be moving away from the “Everyone In” concept announced on 27 March. We are hearing that some local areas are placing “priority need” and “local connection” restrictions around access to the temporary accommodation settings. There is risk that this will have a significant impact on people facing multiple disadvantage.
13. There remain a significant group of people sleeping rough, including people who were not accommodated, those who have left accommodation settings (see below) and those who are new to homelessness. Accommodation offers urgently need to be made to this group.

#### The provision of cross-sector support must continue and expand

14. As mentioned above, the individuals housed in the new temporary accommodation will generally have a range of issues in addition to their housing problems, such as poor mental health and substance misuse. It is important that individuals have access to support they were receiving prior to entering the accommodation or that the opportunity is used to get them engaged with support.
15. We have seen local services adapt remarkably quickly in order to continue supporting these people or identifying new people who could benefit from support. They have rapidly created flexible processes to assess people quickly, provide support via phone or internet if necessary and work directly within the accommodation hubs. This needs to continue and should be encouraged further by government.

#### Some people cannot sustain accommodation in the new settings

16. A major concern across the network we support is the impact on individuals not able to cope with the restrictions imposed on them, struggling to self isolate and social distance. People experiencing multiple disadvantage are at risk of being the group least able to cope with the restrictions. This may be due to anxiety, triggering of past traumas or related to the need to access substances.
17. We know that in some areas individuals are being asked to leave the temporary accommodation settings because of a failure to comply with rules, with no other accommodation plans in place, effectively guaranteeing they will return to rough sleeping. We are concerned about recent reports showing local areas where large numbers of people have left the accommodation settings. This presents serious risk for their health but also jeopardises the potential for services to engage with the people in the future, as it compounds feelings of distrust in services.
18. In some areas trained staff are discussing the problematic behaviour with the individuals in a trauma informed way and developing methods to minimise risks such as developing ways to alleviate boredom and improve communication channels. However, in others enforcement led reactions are being reported.
19. It is vital that there is a trauma informed approach to support in all the accommodation settings (See the recent [MEAM blog](#) on this for more information).

#### For some the accommodation settings are not safe

20. For some groups, especially women, the hotel-style accommodation may present significant additional risks. It is an immediate concern to ensure that there are safe accommodation options available for women experiencing homelessness. Specific accommodation options are likely to be needed for this (for example the accommodation developed for women in Greater Manchester) but this does not exist in many local areas.

#### Protection for staff

21. We are concerned that some staff in new accommodation settings are not getting access to the PPE that they need to keep them safe. Many people facing homelessness and multiple disadvantage will struggle to comply with social distancing rules and so staff will be placed at increased risk. It is vital that all staff in settings set up to care for those with symptoms or protect those at most risk, have access to the PPE they need.

**What might be the immediate post-lockdown impacts for these groups, and what action is needed to help with these?**

22. In numerous local areas large proportions of people experiencing multiple disadvantage have been successfully housed and are now engaging with local support services. If exit strategies and transitional plans aren't developed these positives could be quickly lost and the opportunity to build something better than the pre-covid status quo will be gone as soon as the temporary accommodation comes to an end.

23. MEAM is due to publish some thoughts on the transition period shortly. We are of the view that the following will be important:

Involving people

24. We are in a unique situation, with many people facing multiple disadvantage far more accessible to decision makers than they were just a few weeks ago. It is vital that local areas take the opportunity to understand what people need and what they want, both now and in the future

25. We are encouraging every local area to have mechanisms in place to involve people facing multiple disadvantage in the shape of current support and in transition plans for the future.

Ensuring appropriate accommodation

26. There should be a clear commitment from national government and every local area that no-one will leave the hotel settings without appropriate permanent accommodation.

27. A clear plan is needed to ensure appropriate permanent accommodation for every individual currently housed in the new accommodation settings, for those rough sleeping and for those in other forms of accommodation.

28. Everyone in 'hotel' accommodation should have – as a priority - a full assessment of their strengths, aspirations, needs, health, housing and finances, to inform an ongoing support and accommodation plan.

29. Every local area should developed a costed “accommodation transition plan” within their transition strategy. This should map the preferred housing options of the people in the hotels, rough sleepers and those in other forms of temporary accommodation against the housing options available locally. The plans should highlight the gap, setting out how this will be addressed in partnership with local housing and support providers and the investment needed from government to achieve this.

30. MHCLG should make a clear commitment to a significant funding programme to support the financial requests of the local accommodation transition plans. It should also:
- a. Make an early commitment to maintain LHA at the 30 percentile or higher.
  - b. Provide clarity on long-term funding for the homelessness sector.
  - c. Increase support for the HRA implementation.
  - d. Address current NRPF, local connection and priority housing rules.

Work cross-sector to protect and expand the flexibilities that have been developed

31. In many local areas there has been impressive partnership working and collaboration across numerous sectors with coordinated support from multiple organisations and agencies to people experiencing multiple disadvantage. Cross sector relationships have been developed in many areas that had never existed previously.
32. We believe that every local area should have structures in place to provide a space for cross-sector leadership around transition and drive the development and implementation of ambitious transition plans.
33. Every local area - and national government – should undertake a review of the cross-sector flexibilities developed for people facing multiple disadvantage during this crisis period, explores which they want to keep, what is needed to achieve this, and what further flexibilities may be required.
34. MHCLG should ensure that cross-government leadership is in place to ensure that homeless people continue to get flexible local responses from health, mental health, substance misuse and criminal justice services.
35. There are concerns that after the crisis there will be increased demand for certain support services and as a result thresholds and eligibility criteria will become more stringent. In the past this has often meant people experiencing multiple disadvantage being excluded. Steps need to be taken to ensure this doesn't happen.
36. When temporary accommodation comes to an end there is the potential that individuals experiencing multiple disadvantage may still struggle to self isolate and social distance. There is the potential of greater contact with the police as a result as groups will be more conspicuous in public. It is vital that police are involved in all transition plans and approach all interactions primarily from a health and well being perspective.
37. Finally, a large proportion of these individuals will have minimal financial means, struggling to sustain themselves. Many will be entitled to benefits but may not be accessing them, in part due to difficulties understanding the application process. Others may have sanctions in place. As a result many will rely on donations from the public in order to survive, in order to feed themselves, something that is currently greatly restricted. Getting these individuals onto Universal Credit should be a priority.