



Multiple disadvantage: A framework for transition planning

This is a working document. We will continue to update it as the situation develops and as we collate information and evidence from across the local networks.

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Introduction

On 2 May 2020, the Secretary of State Robert Jenrick MP announced a new taskforce, led by Dame Louise Casey, to shape the next phase of the Government's support for rough sleepers during the Coronavirus pandemic.

This is welcome news, because the Coronavirus crisis is having – and will continue to have – a disproportionate impact on people facing multiple disadvantage. These individuals experience a combination of problems including homelessness, substance misuse, mental health problems and repeat contact with the criminal justice system.

Over the last few weeks, many of these individuals have experienced a significant change in their circumstances. Five thousand homeless people have been housed in hotels; the benefits system – and particularly Local Housing Allowance – has been substantially increased; support for people using substances has become more flexible; there is greater focus on transitions from prison and hospitals to accommodation; and mental health and wellbeing are at the forefront of people's minds.

In many cases, a system which has often failed this group has turned its attention to helping them, responding to people's problems with the urgency that they deserve. Not everyone has been supported, but many have been. There are numerous examples across the country of increased flexibility from services, a reduction in 'silo' working, a better response to risk and a collective 'let's get things done' attitude that may have been missing in the past. As a result, we are hearing that many people are currently more accepting of help and are re-building trust in services. This has made a very noticeable - but not yet a *fundamental and sustainable* – difference to local systems.

What happens next is the subject of debate. In local areas – and in the new taskforce - the question being discussed should be this: When the time comes to leave this crisis-response period are we going back to a system of services that looks remarkably like it did before; or are we going to grasp the opportunity to take a cross-sector, system-wide approach and re-build our policy and practice to better serve those in most need?

Everyone involved in tackling multiple disadvantage – and those facing it - has a vital role to play in determining the answer to this question. The transition plans developed by government and local areas need to be ambitious, cross-sector and take full account of multiple disadvantage.

In this document, MEAM argues that every local area – and the new taskforce – needs to develop a "multiple disadvantage transition strategy", which can answer four key questions:

1. Do we know what people need and want?
2. Do we have cross-sector leadership?
3. How can we maintain and expand flexible responses from housing, substance misuse, health, mental health and criminal justice services?
4. Do we have appropriate accommodation?

This document explores each of these questions in turn. We are working with local areas to collate their current thinking on these questions and will update the document as further information emerges.

Question 1: Do we know what people need and want?

Why discuss this?

- 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. But have we taken the opportunity to understand their needs and what they want, both now and in the future?

MEAM vision

- That every local area has mechanisms in place to involve people facing multiple disadvantage in the shape of current support, in the transition plans that will follow, and into the future.
- That everyone in hotel accommodation (and others who need it) has a full assessment of their strengths, aspirations, needs, health, housing, finances and entitlements to inform an ongoing support plan.

Key questions for local areas and national government to ask:

- Have people currently facing multiple disadvantage been integral to shaping the emergency service offer that they are receiving now?
- Are actions being taken to support those who are struggling to cope in the new environments and to re-welcome those who may have left?
- Has everyone had a review of their strengths, needs, aspirations, health, housing, finances and entitlements, leading to a clear personalised plan for future support and success?
- Are mechanisms being put in place so that people facing multiple disadvantage can help shape the transition plans and the longer-term future, with a focus on providing what people want and need?
- How can local areas update government and other areas on the actions they are taking to involve people with lived experience?

What should the government taskforce transition plan say on this?

- Support and encourage the involvement of people with lived experience in the co-development of local transition plans and the shape of future support.

Question 2: Do we have cross-sector leadership?

Why discuss this?

- The emergency response has required people across a range of sectors to act quickly and decisively. This has had a significant impact. But as we move towards transition, are there structures in place locally and nationally to support cross-sector discussions about what needs to happen next?

MEAM vision:

- That every local area has structures in place to provide a space for cross-sector leadership around transition and drive the development and implementation of ambitious transition plans.
- That the new government taskforce takes a cross-departmental approach, with key commitment from all relevant departments.

Key questions for local areas and national government to ask:

- Is there a clear commitment from senior cross-sector leaders that this is an opportunity to take a system-wide approach?
- Is there a structure in which cross-sector discussions can be had about what needs to happen next, and are these groups meeting?
- Is anyone missing from this forum and how can they be involved? Have people facing multiple disadvantage been meaningfully included in the process?
- Is there space for people to have honest and open discussions, and to take a 'system-wide' view of the opportunity that is presented?
- Is there a willingness for transition plans to be publically available and shaped by local expertise?

What should the government taskforce transition plan say on this?

- Require the development of local multiple disadvantage transition plans
- Ensure that there are cross-departmental commitments in place to provide leadership on multiple disadvantage transition across Whitehall.

Question 3: How can we maintain and expand flexible responses from housing, substance misuse, health, mental health and criminal justice services?

Why discuss this?

- In the last few weeks there have been numerous examples of flexibility in local service provision and national policy. There have also been some examples of services and systems becoming more restrictive. Do local areas and national policymakers have a sense of which flexibilities they want to keep, how they might do this, and what the beneficial effects might be in other parts of the system?

MEAM vision:

- That every local area – and the new taskforce – conducts a system-wide review of the cross-sector flexibilities developed for people facing multiple disadvantage during this crisis period and any restrictions that have emerged.
- They should explore which flexibilities they want to keep, what is needed to achieve this, and what further flexibilities may be required.
- MEAM is working with local areas to collate information on the flexibilities that local areas are putting in place and will update this document as new information emerges. At present we feel that the following flexibilities have (or will be) important:
 - Immediate housing responses with a relaxation of eligibility criteria.
 - A wide range of accommodation options, including safe spaces for women and people fleeing domestic violence.
 - Bespoke and personalised support for individuals.
 - Flexibility around those offered substance misuse support and the availability of support in different formats, including flexible and timely OST prescribing.
 - Increased input and accountability from health, mental health and public health services for people facing multiple disadvantage, including presence on local strategic and operational boards and buy-in to a shared area-wide vision for change.
 - More flexible responses to support people's mental health, including those facing 'dual diagnosis'.
 - A continued reduction in prison numbers (and a full commitment to end short-term sentences and improve living conditions in the secure estate.)
 - Improvements in transitions from prisons and hospitals to accommodation.
 - Increased levels of cross-sector trust, a more appropriate and collective response to risk and a reduction in 'silo' cultures.

Key questions for local areas and national government to ask:

- Has there been a discussion about what is working well in the crisis-response environment and what is not, including the views of people experiencing multiple disadvantage?
- Is there a clear sense of what the flexibilities have been, which you and your beneficiaries want to keep, and how this can be achieved? What further flexibilities might be beneficial? Do any restrictions that have emerged need to be addressed?
- Is there a clear plan in place to maintain and develop these flexibilities into the future? What is needed to achieve this?

What should the government taskforce transition plan say on this?

- Provide a clear message on the flexibilities that government wants to keep.
- Set out the actions that each department will take to ensure that flexible service responses can be maintained.

Question 4: Do we have appropriate accommodation?

Why discuss this?

- A clear plan is needed to ensure appropriate permanent accommodation for every one of the 5,400 individuals in the temporary 'hotel' accommodation, avoiding a return to night shelter accommodation.

MEAM vision:

- There should be a clear commitment from national government and every local area in transition plans that no-one will leave the hotel settings without appropriate permanent accommodation and the support they need to keep it.
- Every local area should developed a costed "accommodation transition plan" within their transition strategy. This would map the preferred housing options of the people in the hotels, rough sleepers, prison and hospital leavers, and those in other forms of temporary accommodation against the housing options available locally, analyse the gap, and show the investment needed from government to achieve this.
- Future homelessness accommodation pathways should include a range of options, including the ability to live independently outside the hostel system, allowing people to integrate with local communities and reach their full potential. This may involve a redesign of accommodation pathways in the longer term.

Key questions for local areas and national government to ask:

- Has everyone had a full review of their accommodation needs and a preferred option identified? A full range of options should be available including social, private, supported and Housing First.
- Does the preferred housing option identified for individuals take full account of their individual circumstances and needs, including their mental and physical health?
- Has a review of current housing availability against this demand been undertaken, with the gap identified and costed?
- Has a clear case been made to government about the cost of meeting this gap, in partnership with local housing and support providers?
- Has the review considered support (revenue) needs as well as housing needs?
- Does the preferred housing option for people have some flexibility in the future if required?

What should the government taskforce transition plan say on this?

- Make a clear commitment to a significant funding programme to support the financial requests of the local "accommodation transition plans".
- Provide leadership on a range of other supportive housing policy commitments including:
 - An early decision to maintain LHA at the 30 percentile or higher
 - Clarity on long-term funding for the homelessness sector
 - Increased support for the HRA implementation
 - A clear plan for people who face No Recourse to Public Funds, lack of local connection, intentionality decisions or who do not meet priority need rules.