

Rough Sleeping Initiative Programme 2020-2025

Learning Review

January 2025

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Rough Sleeping Initiative Programme

Learning Review

This report sets out the key learning, outcomes and impact of the West Midlands Combined Authority Homelessness Taskforce's five-year Rough Sleeping Initiative programme, as well as recommendations for future action, as we approach the end of the final year of the programme.

Background

Homelessness is not a devolved responsibility to the Mayor of the West Midlands or West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA). The primary responsibility and statutory duty for homelessness sits at local authority level. The central purpose of the WMCA Homelessness Taskforce has been to bring together organisations, people and resources to support and add value to the work of our local authorities and other partner organisations that are involved in the prevention and relief of homelessness.

The WMCA Homelessness Taskforce sees that role as promoting homelessness prevention at the earliest opportunity through collaboration and collective effort to affect systemic change to [design out homelessness](#).

The WMCA Homelessness Taskforce has always sought to undertake activities with its partners that are relevant and complementary to local strategies and commissioned services. Where there has been the opportunity for [added value](#) to be gained, the Homelessness Taskforce has played a pivotal role in convening, commissioning and coordinating activity right across the region.

One example of this approach has been the additional investment, totalling just over £2.7 million, we secured for the region through the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's [Rough Sleeping Initiative \(RSI\) programme](#). Working with local authority and wider partners we developed a programme that set out to provide additionality and avoid duplication, to test out innovation and to build the capacity of service systems across the region.

The WMCA RSI Programme has contributed to supporting thousands of individuals experiencing or at risk of rough sleeping, through a range of projects across the region. These projects include the development of a women-specific pathway, the implementation of an evidence based Psychologically Informed Environment (PIE) training and implementation programme, intensification of support in first stage accommodation, a digital IAG platform to support individuals to find and give help, employment support, a spot purchase fund, a tenancy sustainment service, a regional training programme, and infrastructure at the WMCA to support funded organisations and administer the programme.

Introduction

Our RSI investment plan centred around the region's ambition to prevent rough sleeping, wherever possible. Therefore, our planned activity with partners set out to help make incidences of rough sleeping:

- **Rare** - prevent those in crisis, and at imminent risk, from sleeping rough
- **Brief** - help people sleeping rough off the streets as quickly as possible; and
- **Non-recurring** - help those who have moved off the streets to successfully progress away from rough sleeping, avoiding a return to the streets.

We aimed to achieve this in three main ways:

- By **adding value** to the work of our local authority and wider partners, intentionally ensuring that we do not duplicate effort.
- **By creating and using economies of scale**, particularly supporting smaller local authority areas, investing in cross-regional initiatives to develop skills and capacity.
- By investing in and **testing out innovative** approaches.

We focused on investing in **outcomes** rather than outputs to encourage providers to be flexible about how they delivered services to address priority areas of need, where service gaps existed or there was potential to enhance existing services.

We encouraged **collaboration** and the joining up of services, bringing projects together to share learning, best practice and common challenges.

As the programme developed the following priorities were identified through consultation with key stakeholders:

- **Preventing and tackling rough sleeping at the earliest opportunity** - including investment in a **spot purchase fund** to enable tailored, flexible and personal interventions.
- **Preventing repeat rough sleeping** - through integrated prevention and investment to test how accommodation can be sustained through engagement with community activities and the creation of new supportive social networks.
- **Ensuring the needs of women are met** - addressing their unique gender-based experience of rough sleeping and other precarious situations, e.g. not feeling safe in mixed sex provision, needing a bespoke and intensive support and accommodation offer.

- **Individuals with restricted eligibility** - working within legal parameters to arrive at solutions for individuals from abroad for whom legal restrictions mean there are significant constraints on what help can be given, recognising the needs and opportunities to connect to migrant services, legal advice and employment pathways.
- **Intensification of support** - recognising that the support needs of some individuals are beyond current risk management levels, however with additional resource, individuals could be appropriately supported into accommodation and to remain in accommodation.
- **Access to good employment** - investment to test different ways of supporting individuals to access good quality employment that acts as both a protective factor in preventing homelessness and a sustainable route out of homelessness.
- **Information, Advice and Guidance** - activity to raise awareness about begging and other street activity through the alternative giving scheme, [Change into Action](#), and investment to develop Street Support Network West Midlands, reflecting our emphasis on moving away from crisis intervention to prevention.
- **Supporting the development of frontline staff** to enhance knowledge and skills, and to help build resilience through investment in a [regional training offer](#) for people working in homelessness and housing-related organisations; and investment for training staff to be trauma and **psychologically informed** in their approach and interactions with people experiencing or at risk of rough sleeping and homelessness.

Furthermore, we created a **Development Officer** role to work primarily with the region's diverse faith communities. The purpose of this role has been to harness the key strengths and unique contribution of faith communities to supporting people experiencing homelessness, drawing on our collective resources and expertise to build a universal prevention approach that keeps people in their homes, jobs, communities, education, and connected to safe support.

Undertaking this RSI Learning Review

As we entered the final year of the current tranche of RSI funding, we were keen to pull together the key learning, achievements and impact of the programme to date, to help inform future plans.

Two distinct activities were undertaken to carry out this review. Firstly, the learning and achievements of our RSI programme since 2020 were examined, using resources such as reports and case studies, meetings with our commissioned delivery partners, local authority colleagues and wider stakeholders, and analysis of project monitoring and reporting information.

Secondly, we commissioned an independent, comprehensive qualitative review of the programme to assess the impact and effectiveness of our investments and approach to collaborative working.

The qualitative review focused on understanding how our programme of work has influenced organisational practices, enhanced the capabilities of service providers, and improved outcomes for those directly impacted by homelessness. This involved qualitative data collection, including interviews and surveys with a wide range of stakeholders, from managers and frontline staff to case studies of individuals that have benefited from the RSI programme.

It is our assertion that the insights gained from the whole review process are not only important for assessing the success of the RSI programme, but also for shaping future homelessness prevention strategies in the WMCA region. The findings will help the Homelessness Taskforce to refine its approach, identify positive practices, and advocate for continued investment to support the region's ambition to design out homelessness, in all its forms.

Extracts from the qualitative review have been included in this report and the source report is available in its entirety on the [Homelessness Taskforce website](#). Learning and recommendations from the PIE Plus Closure Report are also included in this report.

Outcomes for individuals

Over the course of our programme, through the services, initiatives and other investments made, we have supported our delivery partners and services funded by the programme to achieve the following outcomes for people at risk of or experiencing rough sleeping.

Individuals supported across all funded projects

The graphic below highlights the number of people who have benefited from interventions delivered by our delivery partners and funded by our investments over the lifetime of the programme.

The data presented is based on monthly output and outcome monitoring from commissioned projects.



Outcomes achieved across all funded projects

The graphic below highlights the number of people who achieved an agreed outcome as a result of using or engaging with one of the services or interventions we commissioned over the lifetime of the programme.

The data presented is based on monthly output and outcome monitoring from commissioned projects.



Did we achieve our strategic aims?

Overall, our assessment as we near the end of five years of the programme, is that we have met our intended aims by:

- Facilitating support for a significant number of people who have slept rough, achieving meaningful outcomes which will help prevent repeated instances of rough sleeping.
- Helping people sleeping rough to move off the streets quickly and into accommodation.
- Investing in prototype activity and cross regional initiatives to positively influence the region's ability and capacity to work together to make rough sleeping rare, brief and non-recurrent across the region.

Our analysis, supported by both evidence and partner feedback, is that we are uniquely placed in the region to offer the kind of systemic interventions detailed below.

It is worth noting that whilst we have separated out adding value, economies of scale and testing innovation as discrete categories of intervention there is undoubtedly significant overlap between these categories, for example, by investing in projects that bring economies of scale we are inevitably adding value.

In the sections below we have set out more detail on each of the key ways in which we have sought to have an impact. We have tried to avoid too much repetition but to give a full picture of the programme, some repetition has been unavoidable.

Achieving 'value added'

One, perhaps unseen, way in which we have added value is through our regional convening role, an example of which is where we have successfully brought the RSI leads from across the region together to share challenges, learning and insights. Helping to develop collective responses to joint challenges, as well as sharing the learning from our investments quickly with colleagues in our local authorities.

“The regular meetings between us and the other authorities are useful ... it's good to have that sort of information-sharing network. ...The combined authority does a good job of knitting us all together ...without being too formal or cumbersome.”¹

1. We have included a number of quotes from stakeholders captured as part of the qualitative review.

Our operational flexibility helped facilitate collaboration across a range of partnerships, which stakeholders identified as another key factor driving successful outcomes. This collaborative model, involving local authorities, voluntary, community and faith sector networks, and other organisations, ensured that services and resources could be coordinated effectively to address the many individual, social, and systemic challenges of rough sleeping.

During interviews held as part of the qualitative review, partners consistently highlighted the value of the relationship between the WMCA Homelessness Taskforce's RSI team and participating organisations, which have allowed for more streamlined service delivery and improved outcomes. For instance, delivery partners emphasised the importance of the cross-authority remit of the Taskforce and its ability to bring people together around common challenges.

Stakeholders felt that **transparent communication** has built trust and ensured that agencies can collaborate **without duplication or interference**. One stakeholder noted that organisations were able to avoid treading on each other's toes.

“Collaboration is everything ... we don't tread on each other's toes and we're open and transparent in our relationships.”

Partnership working has also proved key to the success of both our employment support and social networks projects and through joint work involving being able to share best practice and enabling providers to work together on common issues.

“It's been really useful having the provider networking meetings that WMCA facilitate, it's good to share ideas and talk about issues and what solutions others have found.”

The introduction of the **RSI Co-ordinator** role increased our capacity to support our partners significantly. This has been especially critical for projects in the mobilisation stage of delivery. As we note above, the Coordinator has also convened a group for all the local authority RSI Coordinators located across the WMCA region so that we can promote the sharing of best practice and learning from innovation across the region, as well as keeping up to date with key gaps and challenges that we will continue feeding into our RSI programme, alongside our wider work on designing out homelessness through the WMCA Homelessness Taskforce and Rough Sleeping Task Group.

“The RSI Co-ordinator role has been the most crucial ... coordinating all of the West Midlands in terms of rough sleepers has just been really helpful. ... All across the areas ... we talk through what our barriers have been, and it’s been fed into the Rough Sleeping Task Group.”

A further example of added value includes the work we facilitated early in the programme as those supported by the ‘Everyone In’ initiative began to move out of that accommodation. Working with third sector providers we commissioned them to support people with restricted or **no recourse to public funds** in line with the legal parameters for supporting this cohort. As a result, 139 individuals were helped to achieve a variety of critical outcomes to avoid a return to the streets, including being supported to secure work.

The impact of adaptable funding models, such as the **spot purchase fund**, which allowed for immediate and tailored responses to the diverse needs of people sleeping rough again demonstrates added value. The flexibility of this additional RSI funding being brought into the region, enabled local authorities, service providers, and third-party organisations to allocate resources effectively across a range of areas – from emergency accommodation to the provision of essential household goods – without being constrained by overly rigid bureaucratic processes.

Our qualitative research found that many stakeholders reported that the **spot purchase fund** had added value to their existing offer and been effective in tackling barriers to engagement, as well as promoting positive outcomes. Key to that was the ability of frontline workers to respond quickly to the presenting needs of individuals. Furthermore, the spot purchase fund helped to overcome structural or systemic barriers to people’s progress in terms of both recovery from and prevention of rough sleeping.

Spot purchase funds were used in a range of ways, including crisis interventions like food and clothing, hot and cold weather packs for people experiencing rough sleeping, emergency accommodation, payment of rent or utility arrears, help with appointment or job-related necessities like transport or clothing, resettlement support such as essential furniture, and engagement or digital inclusion help like mobile phones. Services for women utilised the fund to meet individual needs, including gender specific accommodation and to provide tablets for digital inclusion, for example when a woman was in hospital.

“The flexibility enabled us to provide emergency provision, travel accommodation costs, deposits for accommodation ... making a house a home.”

The investment in the **Faith & Communities Development Officer** role provided an opportunity to work with faith, community and smaller scale voluntary groups to provide some level of co-ordination of services across the region, encouraging greater integration with local authority and statutory pathways, and to support faith communities to make a paradigm shift in their contribution to [designing out homelessness](#) for people at risk of rough sleeping. Our aim has been to coproduce a change in focus from crisis to prevention activity, in particular emphasising the potential role of the sector in [universal prevention](#).

Events held across the region helped us to maximise the impact of our briefing paper '[Preventing Homelessness with Faith Communities – Making a difference together](#)' and were an important element of our ongoing work to engage with groups across the whole of the WMCA region rather than just on activity focused on the larger conurbations. In addition, we worked with a range of faith groups to complete and disseminate an [accessible video](#) highlighting the benefits of shifting focus from crisis to prevention. The video complements the existing [Designing out Homelessness with Faith Communities Booklet](#) and acts as a starting point for discussions with faith and community groups about the shift in focus that needs to be made if groups are to maximise their impact on rough sleeping.

Our analysis is that our work has laid a strong foundation for supporting faith communities to recognise their unique contribution in moving from crisis to universal prevention. Feedback from many faith and community groups shows a keen interest in this shift, and our approach is gaining traction. However, this transition is challenging, and ongoing support is essential. We need to be flexible in engaging with faith communities, encouraging them to maximise their impact, such as through the redesigned spot purchase fund process.

A quote from a faith community group, who have worked with the Faith and Community Development Officer, demonstrates the impact of the role:

“We were delighted to work with WMCA’s Faith and Communities Development Officer because we were able to pull our focus back and look at the causes of homelessness rather than dealing with the end result... We have also benefited from plugging into a network of individuals and organisations who do similar work across the West Midlands and share insights and expertise.”

Feedback from another contact outlines the importance of the convening and networking aspect of the role:

“I found WMCA’s Faith and Communities Development Officer to be an invaluable source of information, knowledge and contacts. his connections were always spot on. He also sent me relevant reports, metrics and statistics to help me get the full context of housing and temporary accommodation in the West Midlands.”

There is the potential to build on this learning with continued investment in this role, to ensure that we are reaching, listening and actively engaging with the sector right across the region.

Specialist support projects that deliver additionality are a key aspect of our programme that has worked well, with projects exceeding outcomes in providing intensive support sessions to individuals with specific support needs, for example, nighttime support for people with disrupted sleep patterns. This investment helped providers to offer focused interventions and work with 406 individuals, resulting in a range of positive outcomes, such as connecting to and using support services, securing service user engagement and sustaining accommodation. This demonstrates that there is value in creating opportunities for bespoke, specialised support activities.

Our assessment, is that the WMCA RSI programme has **added value** to the work of our local authority partners, without replicating what local authorities are doing or investing in. Our analysis suggests that this way of working is continuing to have a positive impact and enabling the region to benefit.

Generating economies of scale

By creating **economies of scale**, we have been able to add value and provide support to all partners and in particular to smaller local authorities and organisations through our investment in cross-regional activities, to upskill and develop capacity within the homelessness sector in our region.

Examples of where we have been able to generate economies of scale and effort to deliver shared resources and add value to work being undertaken at a local level include: the wide-ranging regional training package; PIE Plus offer; promotional campaigns to raise awareness on street activity and begging; the work of the Faith and Communities Development Officer to build the capacity of and engagement with the faith and community sector; and the rollout of Street Support Network West Midlands.

Regional Training Programme

[Our training programme](#) has been significant in supporting our seven local authorities who may not all have the critical mass individually to either fund, commission or coordinate such an extensive programme. We have been successful in developing a region wide programme of training courses and learning sessions, covering a wide range of topics from mental health first aid, debt management and housing law through to impact and outcome measurement for staff, volunteers and trustees working in rough sleeping, homelessness and housing-related services.

To date, almost 60 courses have been delivered to over 907 frontline staff, managers or trustees working within homelessness and housing-related organisations, from over 200 different organisations demonstrating the wide reach of the training offer.

Findings from our two annual training audits showed that the training offer was an invaluable resource especially for smaller charities, and that cross-sector training provided an excellent opportunity for peers to share good practice, learning, ideas and knowledge. This cross-regional initiative has helped to develop capacity and skills across the sector, with a positive unintended consequence being that the staff who attended the training sessions met with colleagues from other areas and therefore had the opportunity to share their own experiences and learning across traditional boundaries.

“Training has been vital...like the Homelessness Reduction Act, just keeping it in the forefront of minds.”

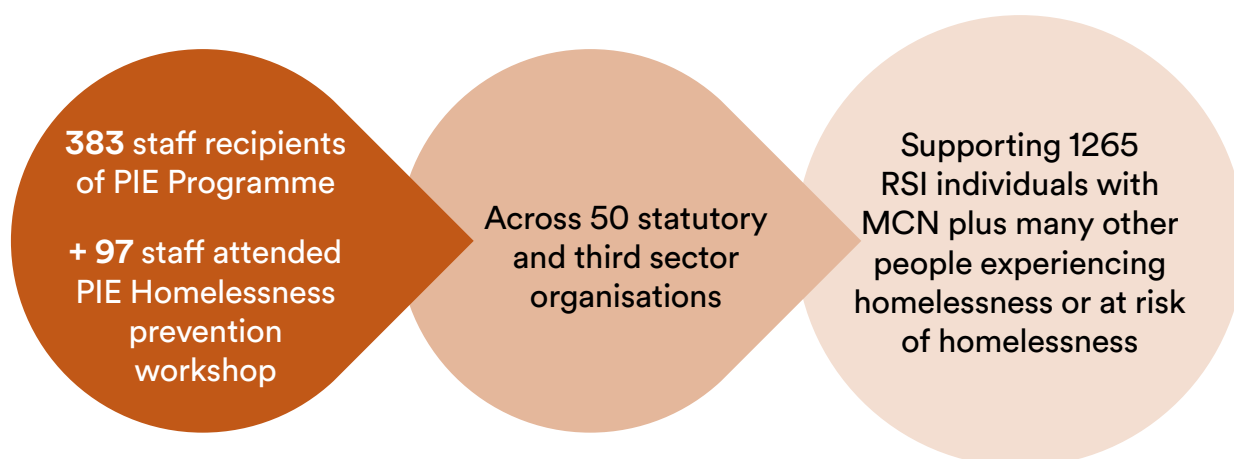
PIE Plus Offer

[Psychologically Informed Environments](#) (PIEs) in the context of homelessness services describes services that are designed and delivered in ways that actively consider the emotional and psychological needs of the individuals using them. In 2020, we invested in a programme of PIE training and reflective practice to be delivered to RSI funded organisations across the region. The aim was to improve psychological awareness and related mental health support to individuals with multiple and complex needs, including those people who have experience of rough sleeping. By creating economies of scale, we were able to make this investment, which no single authority would have the capacity to take on.

To help embed PIE practice systematically, PIE Action Plans were agreed with local authority colleagues in six areas and implemented using a combination of training and reflective practice sessions alongside individual consultancy and case management, all aimed to support engagement and embed trauma-informed practice.

The value of this cross regional work is evident in the outcomes achieved, with staff demonstrating a depth in their understanding and ability to apply skills to a range of situations. Furthermore, this consistent, shared paradigm enabled connections not only between staff within the same team, but across an organisation or even (as in this programme) across a network of homelessness support providers.

The PIE Plus approach combined a consistent training programme with strategic development activities across the WMCA region, to ensure that learning was embedded and maintained. Key learning from our PIE Plus investment includes:



- **The advantages of a consistent, coherent psychologically informed framework** were established by this programme. It provided a compassionate, trauma-informed understanding of people experiencing homelessness that is essential to providing effective services. Furthermore, this shared paradigm supported enhanced positive connections between professionals and across organisations.
- **The upskilling of homelessness professionals** was demonstrated. Learning was embedded and maintained which increased knowledge and skills in providing support that has therapeutic benefits and optimises the likelihood of change. People partaking in PIE Plus training and reflective activities reported that this led to improved outcomes for individuals they were supporting.
- **The benefits of harnessing the skills of homelessness support staff were evidenced.** It was shown that support staff, with the right training and support, could be active partners with a Clinical Psychologist in supporting recovery from trauma. It was identified that RSI support staff were in a key position to provide relational, therapeutic interventions within their existing remit that resulted in positive outcomes for individuals who had experienced homelessness.
- **The resilience and wellbeing of homelessness support staff was improved** with managers recognising subsequent benefits in reducing staff sickness and helping staff retention in a context of continual challenges.

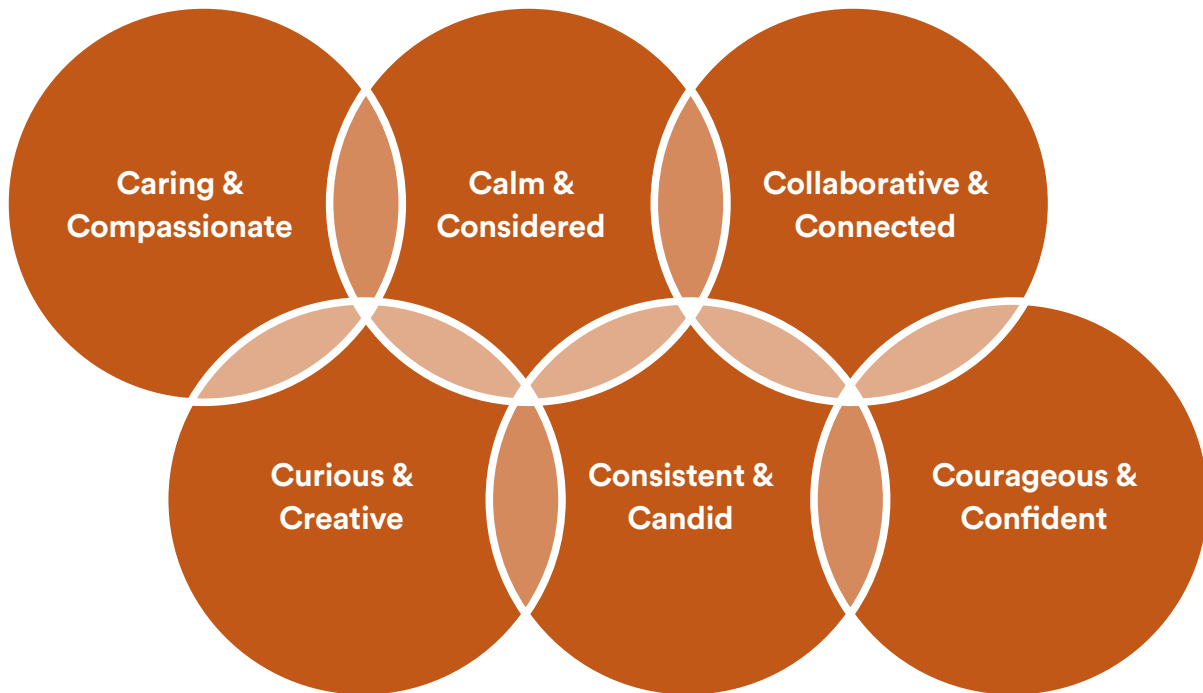
- **Implementation of a psychologically informed whole organisational culture** was described in many of the organisations involved in the programme. Small, incremental improvements combined over time to result in more significant cultural transformations at different levels: between individuals and frontline staff, staff and their team managers and team managers with senior leaders.
- **A different model of providing direct mental health interventions** was trialled and demonstrated effectiveness. These ‘client clinics’ were found to be acceptable and accessible to people with multiple and complex needs, with enhanced engagement and improved quality due to the active participation of homelessness support workers.
- **The considerable benefits of mutually respectful partnerships** between homelessness professionals and a mental health expert were observed across all aspects of the PIE activities.

Several positive impacts were also noted on wider **systems change** as a result of the PIE Plus investment. These were:

- **The cross pollination of PIE trained staff:** One local authority manager stated that candidates with an awareness of PIE are actively recruited into their Housing Department. Staff also feel that being involved with PIE programmes enhances their opportunities for progression within their organisation as well as similar roles with different services. Such cross pollination is evident to the PIE Psychologist, having conducted PIE contracts over several years. She is aware of at least seven staff who have continued to practice PIE across Coventry, Dudley Walsall and Wolverhampton, despite moving teams and/or areas.
- **PIE trained staff in homelessness prevention settings:** One of the explicit ways in which the RSI PIE Plus contract has aimed to influence systems change has been through the upstreaming of PIE knowledge to benefit individuals who may not have experienced rough sleeping, but face risks to the stability of their home, such as in the development of the Homeless Prevention workshop and PIE4Resilience for Birmingham City Council housing staff. The hope was that by raising awareness about the traumatic histories of individuals, staff would be encouraged to apply the C-Change Relational Values² and play a critical role in combating the inequalities that homelessness experienced individuals often face.

2. Skeate, A. & Templeton, J. (2024) St Basils Psychologically Informed Environment. In P. Cockersell & S. Marshall (Eds), Implementing Psychologically Informed Environments and Trauma Informed Care: Leadership Perspectives. Routledge

C-Change Values Framework



- **Organisations allocating funding for additional PIE plus activities** - some organisations have demonstrated the extent to which they value having the opportunity of being involved in the RSI PIE Plus contract, by securing funding for additional PIE training. This has included:
 - One local authority commissioning a series of PIE Communication Skills Workshops for accommodation providers aimed at reducing evictions.
 - Two homelessness organisations funding further Foundation PIE training and Reflective Practice for non-RSI services.
 - One homelessness organisation recently securing funding for their volunteers to attend PIE Awareness sessions.
 - The upskilling of homelessness professionals through the PIE Plus investment was highly valued by stakeholders. The feedback suggests that learning was embedded and maintained which increased knowledge and skills in providing support that has therapeutic benefits and optimises the likelihood of change. Staff receiving PIE Plus training and reflective activities reported that this led to improved outcomes for the people they were supporting to move away from rough sleeping.

Reflective practice emerged as a particularly important component of professional development, providing staff and volunteers with a safe space to share experiences and refine their approaches, as well as repeated reflection on the need for self-care and to maintain physical and psychological wellbeing.

An indirect impact of the PIE Plus activities, was that teams created a reflective space to connect, communicate support in the face of challenging situations and value each other's strengths and talents. Furthermore, where two or more teams came together as part of a local authority group, this provided an opportunity to learn more about the others' service and consider how to work together effectively.

“Reflective practice was really valuable for my team ... it's something we've missed since it stopped. It helped us understand how to better support our clients.”

Street Support Network West Midlands

An assessment of the [Street Support Network West Midlands](#) digital IAG platform indicated that **91%** of relevant, suitable and appropriate organisations in each local authority area were listed across this regional resource, enabling people at risk of rough sleeping, already rough sleeping, cross sector staff and members of the public who want to help to access up to date and accurate information about services on offer in their area.

Of those organisations listed, **68%** had been contacted to confirm that the information for that organisation/service on the site was accurate, and **81%** of verified organisations now have a named advocate - that is responsible for ensuring, each quarter, that the information for their organisation/service is up to date and accurate.

Since the formal launch of Street Support Network West Midlands in February 2023, there have been over 27,000 individual users and 51,000 unique page views, which demonstrates the increasing need for this investment, its growing reach and the emerging impact of the work undertaken over the last 2 years to raise the profile of Street Support West Midlands.

A recent survey of homelessness professionals in one local authority area indicated that the majority of respondents found the website to be useful, easy to navigate and with a wide range of useful information to enable effective signposting, and for providing valuable advice and guidance.

Raising awareness about street activity and begging

[Change into Action](#), our alternative giving scheme, was originally launched in 2017 as a pilot in Birmingham and thereafter rolled out in Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull and Walsall; with Wolverhampton running a similar existing scheme, known locally as Alternative Giving CIO.

The purpose of Change into Action is to provide residents and businesses with information about how they can practically support people sleeping rough in a safe way, as well as raising awareness about begging and helping in an informed way.

The Change into Action website provides residents with information about homelessness and encourages members of the public to support the campaign in three ways:

- **Locate** - to look out for people who might be sleeping rough, or at risk of homelessness, so that they can be connected through [StreetLink](#) to local support services and outreach teams.
- **Donate** - if they want to donate, to make that donation to Change into Action to directly help people to move away from the streets and turn their lives around.
- **Share** - promote and share details about the campaign.

The RSI investment enabled us to deliver regular and consistent promotional activity across the region to share these messages and help members of the public to be better informed about the inter-connected challenges between rough sleeping, street activity and begging. This activity was seen as a valuable contribution by stakeholders interviewed as part of the qualitative data collection.

“Collaboration ... in establishing Change into Action ... has played an important role in providing funds to assist those coming out of homelessness (sometimes rough sleeping). WMCA had knowledge to impart on the establishment of Change into Action at a ‘borough’ level, including issues such as custodianship of funds, publicity, IT etc.”

The most recent promotional campaign undertaken in winter 2023-24 used out of home advertising, alongside paid and organic digital to raise awareness about these issues and our alternative giving scheme.

- Impact of paid digital advertising:
 - Link Clicks – 15,630
 - Impressions – 878,330
 - Reach – 85,679
- Impact of organic digital advertising:
 - Link Clicks – 25
 - Impressions – 4,838
 - Reach – 1,764

A new static image was also created to raise awareness about begging at traffic junctions which occurs in some areas of the region. This resonated with people and this asset outperformed all other assets used in the campaign, with the male static image of the person begging on a pavement in second place.

To date, Change into Action has paid for c.1000 individual interventions worth over £130,000, supporting those who are rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping across the region to build a life away from the streets.

Testing out and delivering innovation

Our analysis is that we have successfully delivered **innovation** to help prevent rough sleeping and reduce the risk of people returning to rough sleeping. Through our RSI investment we have been able to help providers **test out new approaches and roles** which can be taken up by local authorities and other partners in the future as their funding permits.

For example, early in the programme one provider used the RSI investment to test out the impact of a specialist worker who could engage with people in emergency accommodation who had disrupted sleep and activity patterns - a group that often struggles to engage with services offered during office hours. The post holder worked with people during the late evening and night to help re-establish daytime routines that subsequently aided motivation and energy for engagement. This role enabled individuals to engage more effectively with the support on offer, and the evidence suggests that it also assisted with reducing unplanned moves.

The social networks and employment support projects tested out innovative solutions and bespoke ways of supporting people who have been rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping to develop positive social networks or to get closer to employment. The core aim of each project was to help individuals build critical protective factors (stable home, income, good relationships and health) that prevent homelessness or repeat homelessness.

The success of these innovative projects is demonstrated by the following outcomes:

- **59%** of people that engaged with the social network projects **sustained their tenancies for at least 6 months.**
- **43%** of people supported by the employment support projects actively engaged with **employment focused services** or training.
- **18%** achieved **sustainable employment.**

In addition to these key outcomes, **80%** of people engaged across these investments, delivered by 6 different projects, developed protective factors to help **avoid homelessness in the future**, **73%** were supported to develop **positive social networks** and **50%** have been supported to **reduce the risk of repeat homelessness.**

The learning and key aspects of the social networks project at one of our commissioned providers is being incorporated into a new peer support service, which is made up of a team of people with lived experience, who support individuals with integration and meaningful connection in their new communities. This example clearly demonstrates how innovation is being built into day-to-day practice.

It is worth noting that we did not initially agree high outcome targets with our employment support or social networks projects. This is because the evidence suggests the multiple and complex barriers that this group of people face when making the transition from rough sleeping to a settled and sustainable lifestyle present a significant challenge and that the success rates can be low.

Despite this, we believe good outcomes have been achieved particularly around retaining tenancies, entering and maintaining good quality, sustainable employment and developing protective factors to avoid homelessness in the future.

“The flexibility enabled us to provide emergency provision, accommodation, and deposits for accommodation ... and get young people into sustainable work quickly.”

As part of the qualitative review a theme emerged around what interventions worked best with helping people experiencing or at risk of rough sleeping find or sustain employment. Stakeholders emphasised how tailored support, flexible funding, and sustained engagement were all critical elements in helping individuals secure jobs and maintain stability. These interventions addressed both practical needs and emotional support, making it possible for some individuals to transition from homelessness into training, volunteering, or even paid employment.

Practical support, such as assistance with claiming welfare benefits, providing travel passes, work clothing, and assistance with job-related documentation such as identification, played a central role in helping individuals achieve sufficient stability to consider engaging in employment pathways. Partners reported that this type of assistance helps to ensure that individuals can meet the logistical challenges of entering the workforce, especially during the initial stages of employment when change can feel overwhelming.

Sustained engagement during the first month of employment is another critical factor in helping individuals succeed. Continuous check-ins helped individuals navigate the challenges of their new jobs, providing emotional and practical support when needed.

The deployment of a specific employment outreach worker for people experiencing or at risk of rough sleeping further enhanced the effectiveness of these employment interventions. One stakeholder noted the importance of having a job coach integrated into their team, stating:

“We’ve had a job coach deployed from the Job Shop who works directly with the Rough Sleeper team and has got knowledge of the issues specific to the people.”

This approach ensured that individuals received targeted support tailored to their unique circumstances. You can read more about how people benefitted from these innovative interventions in our [case studies](#).

Looking forward, we feel there is significant scope for extending access to both these types of provision, as an integral part of rough sleeping prevention approaches.

One final example of innovation is demonstrated through the work we enabled to bring relevant providers in Birmingham together to develop a joint proposal to design and deliver a new **women’s specific pathway** in the city. The outcomes delivered exceeded those envisaged and helped 95 women to move away from rough sleeping and to sustain tenancies. Many of the women reported that they had experienced a well-coordinated, collaborative approach because of the linked pathway between organisations working

specifically with women. Our analysis suggests that the gender specific pathway and the **innovative and joint nature of the delivery approach** enabled the creation of a successful model of working. The local authority picked up the ongoing funding of the pathway as part of their local RSI 2022 to 2025 investment plans.

Stakeholder perspectives on the WMCA RSI offer

Our assessment, supported by findings from our qualitative research, is that the **effective partnerships** and the **collaboration** encouraged by the WMCA Homelessness Taskforce are highly valued by stakeholders. The success of these collaborations is underpinned by our ability to bring together diverse stakeholders – including local authorities, housing services, voluntary organisations, and strategic networks – to share knowledge, informally pool resources, and tackle complex challenges. The qualitative research indicates that collaboration has advanced a sense of collective responsibility, enabling partners to deliver more effective, coordinated responses to individuals in need.

Delivery partners consistently highlighted the value of their relationship with the WMCA Homelessness Taskforce’s RSI team, which have allowed for more streamlined service delivery and improved outcomes. For instance, partners emphasised the importance of the cross-authority remit of the Taskforce and its ability to bring people together without being too formal and stifling.

The feedback gathered as part of this review indicates that individuals value the space to spend time with their peers to share good practice and for validation that they are ‘doing the right thing’ within their role.

“Sharing good practice. Having the opportunities to meet and discuss issues with fellow professionals.”

We also facilitated **two cross-provider groups** for our social networks and employment support projects, which brought projects together working on these two strands of activity, every quarter, to share best practice and to work together on common themes. It is our assertion that this approach has played a key role in the success of these projects. Furthermore, the opportunity to share learning from these projects with Advisors at MHCLG was facilitated, to share what works, to help disseminate learning to other local authorities in England, and to inform future investment.

“It’s been really useful having the provider networking meetings that WMCA facilitate, it’s good to share ideas and talk about issues and what solutions others have found.”

The effectiveness of the regional training offer and professional development offered by the PIE Plus initiative, were seen as important for equipping staff and volunteers with the necessary skills to effectively support people experiencing or at risk of rough sleeping.

A key aspect of this training focused on raising awareness about specific issues such as trauma, modern slavery, and legislative frameworks like the Homelessness Reduction Act. Partners highlighted the impact of this training on staff awareness, performance, and client outcomes. For instance, the modern slavery awareness courses were seen as important for frontline workers' knowledge and ability to support people effectively.

The training courses provided an opportunity for professionals to share experiences, good practice and gain time with peers from across the region and from outside their own organisation. This provided peer validation and was seen as a cathartic experience for many individuals.

“Keeping the RSI training plan is crucial ... I always say to my team, even if it's a repeat, you might learn something new.”

The **impact** of our investments on both people who are at risk of or who have experienced rough sleeping and staff was a recurring theme throughout the qualitative review. Stakeholders consistently highlighted the positive outcomes that the WMCA RSI programme enabled, emphasising improvements in customer well-being, housing stability, and staff capacity to provide effective, empathetic care.

The provision of practical support – often enabled through personalised and flexible funds – had a profound impact on lives. Simple interventions such as starter packs helped individuals transition from homelessness to stable accommodation. Additionally, sustained engagement with individuals, especially in the critical first month of housing or employment, was seen as important in helping people to navigate challenges associated with recovery from crisis and change.

The emotional and psychological well-being of individuals was also reported as improving significantly due to our programme investments. Relatively simple and practical support, such as helping people attend GP appointments or probation meetings, was thought to make a big difference in their overall stability and engagement with services. There were also other notable achievements, such as one person describing a dramatic improvement in their **mental health** after receiving support.

“By giving a starter pack ... there’s a greater chance of them staying in the accommodation ... and they had in general stayed for three months in the accommodation. ... Cumulative mental health before is 134 ... and mental health after is 245.5 ... it’s a big increase”

Additionally, stakeholders reported that engaging individuals in meaningful activities contributed significantly to their mental health. For example, as part of their social networks project, one organisation facilitated a cooking session led by an individual who had been a chef, which had a positive impact on their mood and confidence. Another person who was still accessing a community gym, facilitated by the Social Networks Co-ordinator, described this as *“life changing”*. Another organisation shared how simple acts like providing garden furniture helped an individual to develop a hobby that improved their mental health.

Staff also benefitted significantly from RSI support, particularly through trauma-informed training and reflective practices that enhanced their ability to deliver services. This focus on supporting staff well-being and development enabled them to better manage the complexities of their roles, ensuring that they could deliver improved quality and sustained care to people experiencing or at risk of rough sleeping. Several staff highlighted the important role of reflective practice in staff development.

It is acknowledged that workers in the homelessness sector are unlikely to receive pay and conditions commensurate with the intensity and emotional toil of their work. In fact, a recent survey found that 80% of respondents reported that they felt at risk of burnout.³

Providing interventions that support workers’ psychological and emotional welfare has significant impacts on reducing staff sickness and improving staff retention despite the continual, challenging environment. It was found that staff who can balance the demands of delivering quality support to people who are homeless, whilst managing their own self-care needs are critical to maintaining service delivery. Moreover, staff who can manage their own psychological needs, are more likely to be able to connect with the people they are supporting, keeping calm in high pressured situations and coping with frustrations and disappointments.

We can conclude that the support we commissioned beyond immediate housing needs, encouraged long-term improvements in mental health, stability, and staff capacity. By providing both practical and emotional support to individuals and empowering staff with the tools and training to manage their roles effectively, partners reported that the WMCA RSI programme had created a positive and lasting impact.

3. Alex Turner, based on St Martins in the Fields Survey, published in Inside Housing, 19th September 2024

What were the challenges?

This section looks at the programme specific challenges and then goes on to look at some of the challenges in the wider environment.

Programme specific challenges

One key challenge we experienced was in designing and commissioning a specific spot purchase fund that faith and community groups felt able to access and apply for.

In 2023-24, we provided an opportunity for groups to apply for a small grant to deliver flexible, person-centred interventions. This gained good interest with twenty faith and community groups formally submitting an expression of interest. However, of these, only two applied, with one group successful in receiving this funding and commencing delivery in 2023-24.

Our assessment was that there were a large range of groups who expressed interest in the opportunity but who did not submit applications. We worked with those groups to understand some of their barriers to applying for this kind of funding. The main barriers cited was a lack of capacity and resources to complete the application.

Drawing on this learning, in 2024-25, we designed a shorter and simpler application process aimed at faith and community groups and applications were invited in either video or written format. The application period was also extended to just over five weeks. This change of approach led to an increase in applications from two to five compared to the previous year, with three of those being successful. Additional work was undertaken following this application round to understand any further barriers, with lack of capacity and resources continuing to be a running theme. It is our assessment that we need to continue these discussions with smaller groups going forwards to enable them to partake in activities with us.

Minimising bureaucracy and offering administrative flexibility emerged as a point of divergence among the stakeholders interviewed as part of the qualitative review, with mixed views on the administrative demands of the programme. While some interviewees expressed frustration with the burden of administrative tasks, most felt that the level of bureaucracy was manageable and proportionate given the flexibility the programme allowed for delivering important services.

However, it must be acknowledged that for some partners the administrative processes were perceived as time-consuming. Despite these concerns, others felt that the level of bureaucracy was lighter than expected compared to other funding streams. These divergent views were particularly apparent in the administration of personal budgets.

Several stakeholders compared our programme favourably to other short term funding initiatives in terms of having lower levels of administrative bureaucracy. This suggests that, on balance, many partners appreciated the programme's relative flexibility, which allowed them to adapt their approaches to meet the immediate and varied needs of people experiencing or at risk of rough sleeping.

“It’s been great for us as well... There was no really heavy hand on proof of ID, proof of this, proof of that.”

Our objective to test out and deliver innovation through our investments in delivering employment support and facilitating supportive social networks has come with its challenges, not least due to a number of providers' ability to 'think' and deliver creatively, especially where the requirement has been to support individuals with a history of sleeping rough to integrate into their community. There is a tendency to 'default' to delivering all support to individuals within homelessness services rather than facilitating access to community services. The shift in focus to prevention rather than crisis intervention has also been challenging for some providers.

Another challenge identified was the lack of awareness about the WMCA, its role, the RSI initiative, and a perception of inconsistent buy-in from stakeholders, particularly among some local authorities. Partners noted that despite the success of collaborative efforts, not all stakeholders were equally engaged, and there was a clear disparity in the level of understanding and involvement across the region.

It was also highlighted that awareness of the rough sleeping initiatives organised by the Combined Authority was limited outside certain circles. One stakeholder believed that general awareness of the WMCA's activity in this area was limited outside the immediate circle of those directly involved. It was felt that this created difficulties in fully integrating efforts, particularly in raising awareness around specific issues affecting people experiencing rough sleeping, e.g. modern slavery and people with no recourse to public funds.

Structural challenges

The challenge of **short-term funding** and its impact on sustainability was a prominent concern across the interviews. Stakeholders consistently highlighted how the temporary nature of funding created barriers to long-term planning and service continuity. Many expressed frustration with the inability to sustain effective programs beyond the limited funding periods, which led to uncertainty and a lack of stability for both services and staff. This point was made specifically about the RSI, as well as about the nature of the funding landscape generally.

“It’s always going to be difficult with short-term funding because we’re working on things with long-term needs. ... Without continued funding, the work we’ve done might not have a lasting impact.”

A significant challenge identified by stakeholders was the **shortage of suitable move-on accommodation**. Many participants pointed to the housing crisis as a key challenging issue, with insufficient affordable housing options making it difficult for people to transition out of homelessness. That systemic blockage contributes to waiting lists for services, leaving organisations struggling to meet the demand.

“There’s just not enough move-on accommodation available... the housing crisis is one of the biggest challenges we face.”

Broader economic challenges, such as the **ongoing rises in cost of living**, changing employment landscapes, and scarcity of suitable housing, have adversely affected homelessness services and people experiencing homelessness. Across interviews, several partners pointed to how economic conditions challenge their work, often presenting additional obstacles for individuals at risk of homelessness.

One key issue raised was the cost-of-living crisis, which has strained both individuals and services. Delivery partners stated that rising prices for necessities, such as food, utilities, and housing, have made it increasingly difficult for people to sustain their tenancies. One partner noted that increasing costs have directly contributed to a rise in homelessness, as people struggle to afford their essential living expenses.

“We have also seen an increase in the number of customers facing homelessness for the first time as they are struggling with the cost of living.”

The changing employment landscape further complicates matters. Our partners discussed the challenges faced by individuals in securing stable, well-paying jobs, which are crucial to maintaining secure tenure in accommodation. One partner explained that precarious employment, such as zero hour contracts, has worsened the risk of homelessness, as individuals struggle to earn enough income to cover rent and living expenses.

A recurring issue reported by our commissioned providers was the difficulty in **recruiting and retaining staff**, which was perceived as driven largely by the challenges of short-term funding and job insecurity. Many organisations found it tough to attract suitable candidates and maintain a stable workforce due to the temporary nature of contracts and the lack of financial certainty.

Participants interviewed as part of our qualitative research explained that the limited duration of funding created a sense of instability, making it hard to keep staff on board. Several interviewees noted that the uncertainty about whether funding would continue beyond a two-year period led to high turnover rates, as employees were hesitant to remain in roles with unclear futures. One interviewee noted that staff often left in search of more secure employment.

Recruitment itself was also problematic, with delivery partners emphasising that it was difficult to hire people for short-term positions. Potential candidates were thought to be discouraged by the temporary nature of the roles, and some organisations reported experiencing prolonged vacancies that disrupted the flow of their work. In some cases, teams had to cope with recruitment gaps lasting several months, which slowed progress and caused challenges in re-establishing relationships once new staff were inducted.

In summary, the theme of staff recruitment and retention highlighted the difficulties faced by organisations in maintaining a stable workforce. Short-term funding, recruitment gaps, and high staff turnover were perceived as significant challenges, which in turn affected the likely sustainability and continuity of services.

“Recruitment has been tough ... getting people to join on a short-term contract is really difficult. ... The biggest challenge we face is the uncertainty around funding ... we don’t know if we can continue the work past March next year which has made staff retention really difficult.”

A key aspect of our regional RSI programme was to ensure that we help build resilience and knowledge in frontline services through interventions such as the regional training and PIE Plus offers. Although our qualitative research demonstrates that both interventions were highly valued, and our training courses were often over-subscribed, attendance was not always high on these courses, indicating that staff development was not always prioritised.

Stakeholders also reflected on other variations, noting that data collection helped identify specific patterns, such as an increase in **women experiencing rough sleeping**. These insights allowed for more targeted interventions, but they also underscored the importance of adapting services to meet evolving needs. Additionally, the economic landscape shifted, with a reduction in entry-level job opportunities, particularly in sectors more likely to employ people transitioning out of homelessness. These further complicated efforts to support individuals into sustainable employment.

“Reduction in entry level job opportunities in the Birmingham area.”

The **flow of new people** onto the street has continued to be a challenge. This led us to focus our investments on early prevention of rough sleeping wherever possible. It is also one of the factors which influenced our decision to ask our delivery partner commissioned to deliver the PIE initiative to focus some of their efforts on developing a version of the PIE offer for upstream services. This, together with our wider regional activity as an early adopter shines a light on the need for effective universal and targeted prevention services so that rough sleeping is prevented, wherever possible, so it is rare, and where it occurs it is brief and non-recurring.

Individual barriers to engagement

Individuals presenting for support were described as facing several complex **barriers to engagement**, often related to their personal circumstances and support needs. One of the most prominent issues was disengagement after initial contact, with some individuals showing early involvement only to later disappear from services, leaving support providers with the challenge of reconnection. Language barriers, particularly for those whose first language is not English, further complicated their ability to access and sustain engagement with services.

There is also a perception that the complexity of the cases being handled has also increased. Delivery partners observed a rise in the number of people presenting with **mental health challenges**, requiring more specialised interventions and resources. This added layer of complexity stretched services that were already under strain.

“We’ve had to adapt to more complex cases, especially with the number of rough sleepers facing mental health challenges increasing.”

Vulnerability to exploitation, such as gang involvement or “cuckooing,” also placed some customers in dangerous situations, which creates challenges in seeking or maintaining support. A lack of suitable housing options exacerbated this issue, as many individuals struggled to find move-on accommodation, making it harder for services to keep them engaged. Additionally, women faced distinct challenges, such as the hidden nature of women’s rough sleeping and the heightened safety concerns related to domestic abuse, which create further challenges for gaining and maintaining engagement.

The **poor physical health** of some people who have experienced rough sleeping can also act as a major barrier to engaging and accessing activities. For example, across the social networks projects, critical to building social networks was the project’s ability to support people with travel and transport to attend groups, especially where mobility was a concern. The evidence from our commissioned projects suggests that helping people to build confidence is key to full engagement with the activities and support on offer. Furthermore, a **strengths-based approach** and going at a pace led by the person and not being too time limited in focus has been of real benefit in terms of the impact of the support offered.

Some additional barriers to customer engagement include a lack of trust in those providing community activities, motivation, difficulty and confidence in communicating, organisational skills, financial barriers, challenges with being able to access IT, the stigma associated with rough sleeping and homelessness as well as personal well-being and struggling in group settings.

Some interviewees also reported a lack of engagement from important cross sector services, e.g. mental health services, which created challenges in providing comprehensive and joined up services for individuals. Delivery partners also reported frustrations with inconsistent buy-in from key stakeholders resulting in a perception of gaps in effective collaboration.

These challenges illustrate the complex nature of engagement difficulties faced by both individuals and the organisations offering support. However, given the large number of stakeholders involved in the sector, cross authority working, and the complex nature of the different cohorts, these challenges seem inevitable although nonetheless worthy of attention and mitigation.

What have we learned?

The first two years of the RSI funding were funded in single year settlements and the last three years as a **three-year settlement**. The three years funding settlement has enabled us, as commissioners, to work in a more collaborative and thoughtful way with the providers we have invested in. Allowing us to increase our focus on outcome-based approaches; enabling providers to feel confident to test out innovations in project design and allowing time for projects to demonstrate their potential long-term contribution to making rough sleeping rare, brief and non-recurrent. This longer-term approach is congruent with our stated aim of creating systemic rather than piecemeal change.

We have learnt from our **three prototype social networks** projects about some of the barriers to engagement with community activities encountered by people who have experienced homelessness.

Many of these barriers are outlined in the section above, but also include people not identifying building alternative social networks as an area that they would like support with or admitting to social isolation. One of the ways that this was overcome was to include low key, ad hoc work with individuals with less formal appointments to build trust and group work around topics to build a support network, as well as preparatory work around developing soft skills before moving onto activities within the community.

Although funds can be used to support people with lived experience of homelessness to attend community activities, our projects learnt that funds are not required to put on or to access community activities as there is a lot of free provision. However, having the resources to travel to those places and having someone to go with them is imperative to creating strong, sustainable social networks.

Light touch therapeutic interventions such as being involved in theatre groups, music and art to build confidence and engagement; are all examples of activities and good practice that have worked well with people with lived experience of homelessness. Projects found that activities that were co-produced were more likely to be attractive to individuals and have higher attendance.

Whilst the recruitment and retention of volunteers was often challenging, matching the person with the right volunteer can have a massive positive impact on that individual. One volunteer who dedicated time after work for several evenings each week, enabled a person who had formerly rough slept and had lived in a hostel achieve an NVQ Level 7 and go onto work as an engineer.

Through our qualitative research, several interviewees highlighted the importance of training volunteers to meet the right standards. For one organisation, initially they found managing volunteers complex, but the organisation streamlined its approach, assigning one dedicated worker to oversee volunteers which improved outcomes. They felt that ensuring volunteers received proper guidance and support allowed them to maintain appropriate boundaries and deliver better services.

“Training for volunteers has been something we’ve had to look at ... it’s been about getting the volunteers to the right standard.”

Our projects have also shown that support workers should be employed on a full-time basis to be able to provide the right level of support needed. Furthermore, having a dedicated support worker with lived experience of homelessness who can co-ordinate activities and accompany individuals to activities within the community helps to build confidence, as do peer support and volunteer befrienders.

Learning from our three **employment support projects** demonstrates the importance of the employment support provider having a close working relationship with the local authority rough sleeping outreach team. Whether that is by being based in local authority offices, which works well in terms of the number of referrals and a smooth referral process, or by going on outreach with rough sleeper team colleagues to build relationships with individuals experiencing homelessness.

The range of services offered from being located within a wider council job shop service, such as job coaching, CV workshops, digital vacancy boards, digital skills training, and collaboration with partner agencies, ensures that people can benefit from holistic support in one place.

The importance of going slowly and building trust with individuals is key and providing 1-2-1 specialist support has been vital, as well as providing a welcoming environment to reduce feelings of intimidation. The outreach model, commitment, and willingness of the worker to support individuals to access a wide range of services is central to achieving trust and rapport. Having access to ‘barrier-breaking’ support funds to help people with clothes or travel to interviews, or for necessities is key too. This approach has resulted in people successfully completing training, securing employment, or gaining an apprenticeship, despite facing significant barriers, including mental health struggles, financial insecurity, and language difficulties.

Using a psychologically informed and trauma-informed approach with both employees and employers is fundamental to ensuring engagement and a consistent approach.

A site visit to Coventry Job Shop⁴ as part of our qualitative research, identified the following key lessons learnt from their approach:

- The importance of a **multi-agency holistic model** where wider barriers to employment such as housing, health, and financial wellbeing form a coordinated support intervention is becoming clear in the context of successfully accessing a training or employment pathway.

4. Further information about the Job Shop visit in the Qualitative Review report is [available here](#).

- Case studies demonstrate that **early support interventions** when people new to rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping, e.g. due to circumstances such as relationship breakdown or friends no longer being able to accommodate, can be effective relatively quickly. Gaining or restoring sufficient stability in people's lives swiftly makes achieving training, volunteering, or employment a more realistic aspiration before additional complexities are formed.
- The value of **flexible, practical, and immediate assistance** – whether through personal budgets or support to apply for grants – proved vital in removing short-term barriers to accessing training or employment pathways, e.g. access to transportation, household essentials, digital inclusion (through mobile phones or the provision of a laptop), etc.
- **Regular contact between customers and the RSI worker** helped maintain trust, motivation, and rapport that promoted engagement with mainstream services as well as those provided through the Job Shop at its retail unit in the City Centre such as those funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.
- Demand for the service has been such that despite maintaining a waiting list, the RSI outreach worker is dealing with a **high caseload** which reduces the opportunity for networking, professional development, and reflective practice which are essential for a sustainable service.

The importance of **stability** emerged as a key theme. It was consistently highlighted as an important factor of effective interventions, underpinning successful outcomes for people experiencing rough sleeping. Creating stability in housing, support, and services is seen as necessary for helping individuals move beyond the immediate crisis of homelessness and into a more secure future.

Similarly, another key aspect of stability is the role of emergency provision, which offered immediate relief from rough sleeping. Emergency accommodation and support, often funded by our **spot purchase fund**, were seen as essential in stabilising individuals in the short term, encouraging trust and engagement, creating the opportunity for further steps toward longer-term recovery.

Sustained support was also emphasised as critical for maintaining stability. Ongoing active engagement, particularly in the early stages after securing housing, was identified by delivery partners as important for reducing the risk of a return to homelessness. As one participant noted, the first month of consistent check-ins and support is “absolutely key” for maintaining stability and maximising the opportunity for long-term success.

The success of our social networks projects in enabling individuals to sustain their accommodation for at least 6 months, showed that the development of new supportive social networks is key to preventing a return to rough sleeping.

However, stakeholders noted that the crisis-driven nature of services and high demands can make it difficult to establish and maintain stability for individuals. The rapid pace and immediate demands can hinder efforts to maintain consistency and stability. Similarly, the ongoing housing crisis poses a significant challenge to achieving stability in the wider community. The shortage of available move-on accommodation prevents individuals from transitioning to permanent housing, thereby undermining their ability to achieve lasting stability.

Partners commented on the power of small interventions in creating meaningful change for people experiencing homelessness. Minor yet impactful actions were thought to help in providing immediate relief, building trust, and laying the foundation for longer-term recovery.

One such intervention is the use of flexible personalisation funds, which can cover small but essential expenses that help individuals stabilise their lives. Personalisation budgets, referred to by one participant as a “slush fund”, have proven to be instrumental in making a big difference, allowing organisations to respond quickly to more immediate needs providing practical interventions and building trust.

Another example of small interventions having a large impact comes from community support, where seemingly simple actions such as organising a group meal have had a meaningful impact. One organisation shared how buying ingredients to cook a meal brought people together and created a positive, shared experience – small actions that can significantly improve morale and a sense of well-being.

Finally, small acts of immediate support can provide essential breathing and thinking space for both individuals and staff. For instance, securing overnight accommodation can offer enough stability to allow staff to focus on a more comprehensive and long-term support plan. Our delivery partners felt that these small interventions act as a stepping stone toward more significant progress, enabling both the individuals and the support teams to achieve better outcomes.

“The starter packs really improve people’s mental well-being ... it makes them happy to know there are people in the community who care about them. ... It’s tiny, but it does actually make quite a difference.”

Further learning includes the key role that **partnerships and collaboration** play in delivering successful outcomes. Strong partnerships between local authorities, service providers, and community organisations enable a more cohesive and effective response to homelessness, allowing for the sharing of resources, knowledge, and strategies. At the apex of the collaboration, those interviewed as part of the qualitative research, noted the

role of the WMCA Homelessness Taskforce in bringing together representatives from statutory and voluntary sector organisations across the West Midlands. This collaboration has been described as invaluable, providing a platform for sharing knowledge and supporting one another in understanding and tackling common challenges.

Similarly, collaboration between partner agencies at the frontline is considered essential in providing holistic and comprehensive support to people experiencing homelessness. One participant emphasised the importance of transparent and open relationships with other service providers, noting that effective collaboration allows for more seamless and coordinated interventions.

“The arrangement of the Taskforce which is all my equivalents across the West Midlands has been brilliant ... being able to support each other and share knowledge has been invaluable. ... We’ve learned so much from other authorities in the region ... If one area is facing a challenge, others have often already found a solution.”

For the women who have been helped through the RSI programme there is a disproportionate (in comparison to the whole population) number who are either fleeing domestic abuse or have experienced domestic abuse in the recent past. Many will have experienced ongoing abuse whilst rough sleeping.

It has been accepted that the **experience of women** who rough sleep is significantly different to that of men. For example, women are less likely to sleep rough in the same places as men, they are often at much greater risk of exploitation and are more likely to be the victims of abuse.

Collaboration was also seen as particularly important for specialised services, such as those focusing on women experiencing homelessness. In those specialised contexts, partnerships with other organisations have enabled a more tailored approach to addressing the unique needs of the target population. Interviewees noted that maintaining these partnerships has been key to continuing effective services for women in vulnerable situations.

“It was good to continue learning and supporting each other, particularly around women’s rough sleeping.”

Another key theme across the interviews was the importance of providing **holistic and tailored, person-centred support**. Participants emphasised that addressing homelessness requires more than just providing housing. Rather it involves taking a comprehensive approach that considers the whole person, including – for example – their mental health, employment, and overall well-being.

Consistently interviews emphasised the significance of **comprehensive training, volunteer support, and reflective practice** in the successful delivery of services. Many participants stressed that properly equipping volunteers and staff with the right knowledge and skills was essential for ensuring the quality and effectiveness of support provided.

Reflective practice was seen as a crucial element in helping staff and volunteers understand the challenges faced by people who have experienced rough sleeping. For example, it was emphasised how valuable reflective sessions were, as it helped staff to better understand how to support people more effectively.

In addition, partners pointed to the value of specialised training, such as a modern slavery awareness course, which helped frontline workers better understand and address specific vulnerabilities. Similarly, the importance of providing trauma-informed training and clinical supervision to help staff better understand the complex psychological needs of people as well as the potential impact of complex and emotionally demanding work on practitioners was highlighted.

Conclusion

Overall, the evidence of the review suggests that the regional RSI programme has fulfilled a unique role by adding value to the work of our local authority and wider partners and by avoiding the duplication of effort.

Our role as a strategic authority and Taskforce, has enabled us to focus on work that helps build the skills and capacity of the sector. We have exploited economies of scale to develop cross regional responses to rough sleeping and we have used our inherent flexibility to test innovation and further our thinking on approaches that can help to ensure that rough sleeping is prevented wherever possible, so it is rare, and where it occurs it is brief and non-recurring.

Importantly stakeholders at all levels across the partnership have valued our strategic contribution and the ways in which we have maximised our role in delivering complementary outcomes that add value to their work.

The investments we have made have directly impacted on the lives of a significant number of people who were rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping.

The WMCA's RSI programme is only one part of the work going on across the region and our role has been as one contributor in a multi-agency approach. Collectively we have not yet fully realised the aim of making rough sleeping rare, brief and non-recurrent and there are still significant amounts of work to be done. Our assessment is that the WMCA's RSI programme has contributed and is helping to ensure that we are getting closer to learning how we achieve that objective.

We believe that the financial certainty offered by the three-year settlement for the period 2022-25 has worked well and allowed us as commissioners to encourage partners and providers to be flexible, to plan for the medium term and has promoted innovation.

The evidence suggests that our aims of adding value, generating cross regional economies of scale and testing out innovation are making a difference to the combined efforts of partners across the region. It is our contention that the WMCA's role makes both a unique and valuable contribution to that collective endeavor.

We have added value through parts of the programme and we have enabled providers to maximise the impact of the funding they may receive from their local authority and promoted flexible and person centred problem solving.

By being able to invest in cross regional work, such as the PIE Plus offer, we have been able to help partners, both small and large, to upskill their staff and embed evidence-based practice into their day-to-day practice. The role of the Faith and Communities worker has proved to be invaluable in engaging the sector and in starting a paradigm shift away from crisis to prevention work.

Through our focus on testing out innovation we have been able to promote the potential impact of preventative interventions and demonstrate the importance of prevention as a critical element of making rough sleeping rare, brief and non-recurrent.

Finally, we suggest that if we do not continue to focus on promoting a shift of focus to prevention of rough sleeping there is a risk that services get locked into a crisis-based approach which will lead to ever increasing numbers of people only getting the help they need when they reach crisis point rather than further upstream. Our contention is that the WMCA Homelessness Taskforce is uniquely placed to ensure that our collective focus makes that shift of emphasis.

Next steps

Based on the findings of this review, and ongoing partner feedback, if the opportunity arises, we believe we can use new investment to continue to build on the foundations set over the last five years.

Our assessment is that any future investment plans would need to include some aspects of the programme we have run to date as well as new areas of investment to help develop new learning and opportunities. The suggestions below are subject to ongoing discussion with the wider Homelessness Taskforce partnership.

Areas of existing work that we think would be worth at least some investment going forward are:

- Spot purchase fund – this has been both effective and popular and has added significant value to partners across the region.
- Regional training offer – with new staff starting in the sector all the time and other staff moving roles for example, we think there is an ongoing need for a regional training offer that we are best placed to offer.
- Street Support Network West Midlands (SSNWM) – our initial plan was to use the initial period of investment to demonstrate the impact of SSNWM and to secure ongoing funding from both local authorities and the business community. Our analysis is that we need longer and further funding to achieve that aim, partly because the business community has been struggling post pandemic to fully re-engage with the Taskforce.
- Raising awareness about street activity and begging – this is a perpetual and intentional process, that requires investment to be done at scale across the region.
- Faith and Communities role – this has been invaluable and the work to further the paradigm shift required in the sector is still ongoing.

- RSI Coordination role – this has helped us to build new cross regional collaboration and to strengthen partnership working, our assessment is that this is an essential element if we want to ensure that this way of working is embedded and sustainable.

Areas of potential new investment include:

- Supporting people with specific needs to sustain their first move from the streets and into accommodation, reducing unplanned exits from services; encouraging innovation for cohorts with additional or specific support needs e.g. women, people with complex mental health needs etc.
- Testing new ways of supporting people in move on accommodation to sustain their new home, preventing repeat rough sleeping; with a particular focus on how people can be helped to develop the protective factors and confidence to tackle the challenges of day to day living in a new environment.
- Small scale ‘proof of concept’ projects to test out system change and service reform.
- Investigating ways in which the WMCA’s regional reach, its role in skill development and employment can be used to improve staff recruitment and retention in the sector.
- Developing wider public awareness of the nature and scale of rough sleeping and highlighting the best ways of helping people in a safe and informed way.

Lastly, we will also endeavour to promote the adoption of innovation, by helping partners make use of the learning and innovation we have helped to generate through the current programme. This does not necessarily require investment but will involve us influencing and supporting local authorities and other partners to invest in what are now well tested ideas. We will focus on encouraging others to:

- Extend and invest in the work started by the social networks prototypes
- Extend and the invest in the work started by the employment prototypes
- Embed PIE principles in their strategic planning and day to day practice

If the WMCA is successful in obtaining future funding, we will reflect on the comments made by providers about the ongoing monitoring of investments and work to streamline outcome reporting to more accurately reflect the achievement of positive outcomes and to the make the data collection process both more responsive and less onerous for commissioned providers.

Appendices

Case Studies

All the case studies included in this section of the report have been anonymised and a pseudonym used in place of the person's real name.



Social Networks

Colin

Background:

Colin, a migrant experiencing mental ill-health, lost his job, which put him at risk of eviction, leaving him days away from rough sleeping.

Barriers faced:

- Imminent risk of homelessness due to job loss
- Limited personal belongings upon arrival at the service
- English was not Colin's first language
- Required essential documents (ID, NI number) to assist with opening a bank account and to look for work

Support provided:

- Provision of personal items (toiletries, clothing, bedding)
- Assistance to secure ID documents and NI number
- Help to register with a local doctor
- CV organisation and participation in events and training
- Transportation to appointments
- Regular check-ins and reviews
- Opportunities for volunteering and community engagement, such as actively participating in English language classes, attending the theatre and joining film discussion groups



Key outcomes:

- Secured a low-paid job within weeks of arriving at the service
- Began saving money and moved into a rented room
- Gained valuable first-aid skills which helped in securing employment
- Active engagement with the community, contributing to his sense of belonging and progress towards independence
- Clear goals and motivation to continue working towards stability and independence

Brian

Background:

Following incidences of sleeping rough, Brian was living in a House of Multiple Occupancy. Having been diagnosed with depression, a history of self-harm and suicide ideation, Brian was working with a mental health navigator to support him to access mental health services.

Brian had stopped taking his medication for depression as he did not think it was helping him. He was struggling in terms of sleep which was impacting his overall mood, resulting in aggressive outbursts. Brian approached one of the Social Networks projects as he wanted to get involved in fitness classes. He had a gym membership in the past but was unable to continue paying for this as his only income was Universal Credit. He wanted help to find some low cost or free fitness classes to improve his mental health and wellbeing.

Barriers faced:

- Experience of rough sleeping
- Mental ill-health, exacerbated by stopping medication
- Limited finances
- Lack of routine and supportive social networks



Support provided:

- The Social Networks Co-ordinator worked with Brian to address his priorities and to make a plan to achieve them
- To locate a boxing gym in the local community to help with his physical and mental wellbeing
- Brian was accompanied to attend the gym and workshops on managing stress and anxiety

Key outcomes:

- Improved mental health, and strategies for managing emotions
- Reduced incidences of displaying aggressive behaviour and emotional distress
- Improved physical health
- A regular routine and new social network
- Engaging in other activities such as art sessions and 'get your week' ready workshops aimed planning and organising goals for the week ahead
- Due to attending the gym and having a regular routine, Brian's well-being and mental health improved dramatically and he is now more independent from the service

David

Background:

David arrived in the UK after fleeing military conscription in his home country. He left behind his family and travelled alone across multiple countries before arriving in the UK, where he was initially placed in a migrant holding centre. After receiving indefinite leave to remain, David had to leave his asylum accommodation and was at risk of rough sleeping. David later moved to supported housing with a social housing provider. David faced several challenges, including being withdrawn and losing contact with his family.



Barriers faced:

- Emotional withdrawal and feelings of hopelessness
- Loss of contact with family in his home country
- Slow progress in family reunification due to missing paperwork
- Difficulty obtaining necessary documents and DBS for volunteering

Support provided:

- Regular support sessions and motivational interviewing
- Assistance in contacting the Red Cross for family reunification
- Linked with community activities (theatre, ESOL classes, conversation café) to build new social networks
- Support to find a volunteering opportunity in the local community
- Helped with opening a bank account and registering for social housing

Key outcomes:

- Completed Level 2 ESOL, currently studying for Level 3
- Successfully applied for a DBS check and secured a volunteer position with a local charity
- Opened a bank account and registered with the local authority social housing lettings scheme
- Clear personal goals and motivation to transition from volunteering to paid work
- Actively working towards family reunification with support from the Red Cross



Employment Support

Tom

Background:

Tom lost his job and left his family home following a relationship breakdown. He was found sleeping in a tent by the local authority outreach team and subsequently referred to one of the RSI employment support projects.

Barriers faced:

- Rough sleeping following relationship breakdown
- Deteriorating mental health exacerbated by sleeping on the streets
- Limited finances
- Low confidence

Support provided:

- Access to emergency accommodation
- Assisted to update his CV and job search, with information provided about job opportunities via text
- Travel costs to attend interviews
- Financial support to get to work in the period between starting work and first payment from employer

Key outcomes:

- Tom secured a full-time job and moved into independent accommodation offered through a local housing association – he is set to sustain both



Patricia

Background:

Patricia was referred by the homelessness team at the local council to one of the RSI employment support projects as her current tenancy was about to end. She had moved to England with her three children when her marriage ended badly. Patricia was struggling to support her family, unable to receive support from the children's father, as well as being unable to claim any benefits. Patricia was in precarious employment, working 2-3 hours per week as and when requested by an agency.

Barriers faced:

- At risk of becoming homeless due to tenancy ending
- Language barrier as English was not Patricia's first language
- No recourse to public funds
- Unreliable employment
- Single parent - childcare

Support provided:

- Assessment of welfare eligibility and support to appeal Universal Credit decision
- Assistance to create an up-to-date CV, and help to job search, apply for work and with interview techniques
- Referred to ESOL classes
- Provided vouchers for food and clothing
- Budget management and understanding priority bills
- A new six month tenancy agreement has been taken out by Patricia whilst on the waiting list for council housing

Key outcomes:

- Patricia is now working 10 hours a week
- Suitable childcare arrangements are in place
- Patricia has been awarded Universal Credit and backdated child benefit
- Patricia will be able to apply for council housing from next year



Mustafa

Background:

Mustafa, an Afghan refugee, came to the UK as a minor. He moved from his social services accommodation to live with friends but had not sorted out his immigration status and was found sleeping rough.

Barriers faced:

- Rough sleeping
- Deteriorating mental health exacerbated by sleeping on the streets
- Uncertain immigration status
- Literacy - unable to write

Support provided:

- Assessment of asylum status
- Facilitated access to an accredited course to help maintain a tenancy and improve life skills
- Enrolled on an ESOL course and access to a laptop that will enable learning

Key outcomes:

- Housed in Home Office accommodation, awaiting status decision
- Completed the maintaining tenancy course which will help with future accommodation
- Improved mental health
- Building the ability to write



Spot Purchase / Personal Budgets

William

Background:

William felt unable to return to his accommodation due to threats from individuals, possibly linked to gang or county lines activity. William was visibly distressed and seeking safety.

Barriers faced:

- Threats, potentially linked to gang or county lines activity
- Emotional distress and fear for personal safety
- Mental health concerns
- Initial reluctance from housing services to relocate

Support provided:

- Reassurance and provision of emergency accommodation, paid for by spot purchase funding, offering a safe space, whilst the local authority assessed William's housing situation
- Assistance with reporting threats to the police
- Liaison with the council regarding housing options
- Engagement with mental health services for ongoing support
- Travel pass for transportation to accommodation

Key outcomes:

- Rehoused in exempt supported accommodation, with ongoing resettlement support from the spot purchase fund provider
- Accessing mental health support regularly
- Plans to move out of the area in the future



Maureen

Background:

Maureen experienced coercive control, financial, emotional, and verbal abuse from her ex-partner, who was affiliated with gangs. Maureen was forced to travel to another country and sell her belongings before coming to the UK, where the abuse continued. Her situation led to excessive alcohol use, a seizure, and hospitalisation. After discharge, she was left homeless and later entered another controlling relationship. Maureen eventually escaped and sought help from a homelessness service.

Barriers faced:

- Domestic abuse survivor - low self-esteem and psychological trauma
- Immigration status preventing access to benefits and housing
- Homelessness and destitution
- Limited funds to cover the cost of travel documents and embassy visits

Support provided:

- Access to emergency accommodation and subsistence support
- Emotional support and regular engagement to build a trusting relationship
- Referral to immigration advice services to explore her status
- Assistance with obtaining a replacement passport

Key outcomes:

- Maureen successfully returned to her home country, avoiding homelessness and destitution in the UK
- Gained employment in her home country, providing financial stability
- Is building a strong support network and feels empowered to maintain a positive life



Psychologically Informed Environments - PIE Plus Offer

Tony

Background:

At the point of referral, Tony was living a chaotic life, experiencing violence, mental ill health, involvement with the criminal justice system, and deteriorating relationships with family. Tony felt a long way from achieving goals around housing or any other area of his life.

Barriers faced:

- Homelessness
- Alcohol use
- History of criminality
- Wary and distrusting of services
- Deteriorating mental health and relationships with family

Support provided:

- Tony's aspirations were placed at the centre of his support plan, empowering him to make the critical decisions to determine his housing situation, his wider behaviours and actions
- The traffic light tool (staff self-care aid) and 'flip the lid' (neuropsychological model) was used to help Tony become less reactive and more informed about how he approaches situations.
- Provision of a psychologically safe environment to openly share issues and concerns, which were always validated

Key outcomes:

- Tony's empowerment and self-regulation skills have improved, leading to fewer reactionary incidences. He has learnt to pause when agitated, no longer 'flips the lid', and is able to understand the perspective of those around him better
- Tony has moved into Housing First accommodation, where he is enjoying the space his garden offers and the sense of safety he felt seeing the property for the first time



Nathan

Background:

Nathan attended a special needs school and started to experiment with drugs from the age of twelve. This led to him exploiting his mother before living with his older sister. This arrangement broke down too, due to Nathan stealing to fund his drug use, associated with cannabis and crack cocaine. Nathan was referred to the regional Housing First pilot when he was living in a car in a scrap yard and was being exploited for cheap labour.

Barriers faced:

- Homelessness
- Criminal history
- Drug use
- Learning difficulties
- Victim of exploitation
- Withdrawn and shy, showing very little enthusiasm for social interaction
- Strained family relationships

Support provided:

- PIE training to enable Nathan's support worker to consider the impact of adverse childhood experiences within the context of his learning difficulties, focus on empathic listening and validation to build rapport, manage their frustrations and persevere in engaging with him
- Facilitated Nathan and his support worker to jointly attend a client clinic with the PIE psychologist on two occasions.



Key outcomes:

- Nathan's support worker has learnt how to apply elastic tolerance (a flexible but bounded approach) in order that they have strategies for keeping their own "stress bucket" from overflowing
- PIE skills have helped staff to understand Nathan better and to guard against compassion fatigue and reduce the risk of burnout
- Although Nathan continues to require considerable support, he has managed to sustain his Housing First tenancy for around two years
- Immediate provision of basic needs (toiletries, clothing, bedding) through community funding
- Assistance in securing necessary documents (ID, bank account, NI number)
- Registration with a local doctor for healthcare
- Help with CV organisation and participation in events and training
- Transportation to appointments
- Regular check-ins and review meetings to monitor progress
- Opportunities for volunteering and community engagement

Glossary

DBS	Disclosure and Barring Service
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
ID	Identification
MCN	Multiple Complex Needs
MHCLG	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
NI	National Insurance
PIE	Psychologically Informed Environments
RSI	Rough Sleeping Initiative
SSNWM	Street Support Network West Midlands
WMCA	West Midlands Combined Authority

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**Mayor of the
West Midlands**



**West Midlands
Combined Authority**