



# Adding Value

---

**Briefing Paper**



**West Midlands  
Combined Authority**

## The role of the WMCA Homelessness Taskforce

Homelessness is not a devolved power 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. Therefore, the central role of the WMCA Homelessness Taskforce has been to bring together organisations, people and resources to support the work of our local authorities and other partner organisations that are involved in the prevention and relief of homelessness.

The 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](#). We have written a separate [briefing paper](#) outlining the logic model underpinning our key strategic objective.

## Our approach

We believe we can make a real difference by working together with our partners, as part of a continuous, perpetual and intentional process. Our collaboration across the region, across sectors and disciplines is primarily focused on adding value rather than adding work. We have endeavored to add value in a number of ways to the work of our local authorities and other critical partners to enhance capacity, resilience, and knowledge, contributing to our overarching aim of designing out homelessness.

### The 'litmus' test for all our activities are:

---

- 1** That we should **add value** to the work of our partners and not add work to already stretched services and organisations
- 2** That our activity should **not duplicate** what others are already doing
- 3** That our activity is always **focused on ultimately designing out homelessness**

## The whole is greater than the sum of the parts

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

This kind of activity has included convening joint bids for example, to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to secure investment through programmes such as the National Housing First Pilots, Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme (RSAP) and Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI).

This has resulted in additional resources in excess of £20 million for the region, that have allowed us to add value to the work of our local authorities and their partners by providing oversight to, commissioning and coordinating activity and projects that:

- Test out innovation
- Build resilience and capacity
- Generate economies of scale and effort
- Produce learning and knowledge that can be shared across the region

## Creating value add

Since its inception in 2017 the Homelessness Taskforce has worked on a wide range of issues and initiatives ranging from Housing First through to research work on children and families in Temporary Accommodation.

The following section sets out some examples of work that we believe has created added value and contributed to our ambition of designing out homelessness. These examples are built on existing local initiatives and demonstrate our ability to work in a coherent way across the region to join up and accelerate activity to support the work of our partners in the region.

### Testing out innovation

Through the RSI investment we have been able to test out innovation and ‘proof of concept’ projects in a number of areas. Working with Birmingham City Council, we brought together a number of service providers to design and test the delivery of a women’s specific pathway in the city to help women experiencing or at risk of rough sleeping to move away from the streets and to sustain tenancies. We used RSI resources and worked with providers to set up and run a well-coordinated and collaborative pathway for two years. At the end of that period there was sufficient evidence of positive outcomes for Birmingham City Council to invest in the pathway on an ongoing basis.

Over the past two years we have also invested RSI resources across a number of small projects to test out important work on helping people who have been rough sleeping to establish supportive social and community-based networks that help build resilience and avoid a return to the streets. If we can demonstrate effective ways of supporting people into their own accommodation and successfully sustaining that in a meaningful way, there will be evidence-based options for local authorities and others to invest in, in the future.

More recently through the WMCA Trailblazer Devolution Deal we have secured the commitment of DLUHC, Homes England and DWP to work with us to explore how we can achieve a truly affordable housing offer for young people, which enables them to live independently and take up employment opportunities. As part of this we will be looking at ways in which the [Live and Work model](#) could be expanded and tested in additional localities across the region to strengthen the evidence base for the model. Our plans also include considering how we can develop a local rent simplification model for young people in supported accommodation.

### **Regional resilience and capacity building**

It is our assessment that the environment in which our frontline services have continued to deliver outcomes for households at risk of homelessness has changed dramatically since the Covid-19 pandemic, subsequent lockdown periods and more recently challenges associated with cost of living increases. To keep up with these changes and to help those working in frontline services, we have, through the RSI investment, undertaken a number of significant pieces of cross-regional work that aim to build the capacity, skills and resilience of workers across the sector.

This work has been pertinent in supporting our local authority areas who would not have the critical mass individually to either fund, commission or make use of such programmes. For example, in 2022 we developed a regional 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 homelessness and housing-related services. This training offer, continuing until March 2025, has been designed to build resilience and knowledge in frontline services. There is also the added value that staff attending the training sessions can meet with colleagues from other areas and share their own experiences across traditional boundaries.

Similarly, since 2020 we have also invested in building the capacity and skills of workers and organisations in developing psychological approaches. We have commissioned Psychologically Informed Environment (PIE) training and support for staff working with people experiencing or at risk of rough sleeping, so that their interactions with people are both trauma and psychologically informed. To date over 150 staff have been trained across the region. Alongside that, this investment has also been used to work with managers to help embed those skills in day-to-day practice as well as funding direct work with clients.

Over the past three years we have also had a specialist post working within the WMCA to help build the capacity of, and engagement with the faith and community sector in effective homelessness prevention. Funded by the RSI, our Faith and Communities Development Officer has been working to help align the activity of faith and community groups with local homelessness strategies, upskilling frontline volunteers, sharing and promoting best practice, and supporting changes to practice to enable the development of planned approaches to homelessness prevention.

### **Economies of scale and effort**

The West Midlands Housing First pilot represents one of the first examples of where we sought to add value by generating economies of scale and effort. In 2018 we secured Government funding alongside Greater Manchester and Liverpool City Region to pilot the Housing First approach across the region. Our pilot was delivered through a combination of devolved and shared arrangements. First and foremost, a local authority-led model was implemented, with each of our local authorities directly commissioning Housing First services locally. The benefits of adopting a devolved approach to commissioning Housing First service providers included the potential to deliver a more locally responsive approach, adapting schemes to take account of local circumstances such as different housing markets, and a much greater capacity to evolve, change and meet local needs as required. It also embedded local community relationships with beneficiaries of the programme.

To complement this devolved approach resources were also pooled across the individual local authority funding allocations to centrally commission PIE reflective practice sessions for all support staff. This approach demonstrated not only cost advantages but also efficiencies in the time taken to design, commission and implement this activity as a single commission.

The Homelessness Taskforce provided strategic oversight of the pilot, supporting shared approaches and learning to emerging challenges, whilst Birmingham City Council, as the accountable body, provided operational oversight and project management. In this way our local authorities were able to retain a level of autonomy but also come together to share barriers, solutions, and key learning, ultimately maximising the Housing First pilot investment for the region.

There are further examples of generating economies of scale and effort where we have enabled and coordinated the rollout of initiatives across the WMCA. We launched an alternative giving scheme in Birmingham known as [Change into Action](#) as a pilot in 2017. Using learning from the pilot along with access to a shared web resource and pooled assets and resources, we have helped accelerate the rollout of the scheme to a further 5 local authority areas.

Similarly, in 2021 working on behalf of the local authorities in the region, we commissioned Street Support Network to work across the region to set up Street Support sites for each local authority area, as well as a bespoke [space](#) for the Homelessness Taskforce. Whilst local authorities could have commissioned this work individually, we assessed that a pan-regional offer would yield greater value to local people, who may move across those boundaries. In the case of Street Support, we were able to negotiate a reduction in costs by commissioning 8 microsites concurrently. Over the course of time, we hope that the sites will prove their worth and that local authorities will take up the hosting and other costs as a partnership.

### Sharing knowledge

Lastly, we firmly believe that the Taskforce has a critical role to play in promoting the sharing of learning and knowledge across the region. The Taskforce has the overview and capacity to invest time in the task of curating, collating, then disseminating knowledge and learning.

Over the past year we have delivered a programme of webinars for partners across the region so we could show case examples of interesting or innovative practice as an alternative to the more traditional route of drafting good practice reports and sharing these through our networks. To date we have run webinars covering topics such as the work of children's early help services in homelessness prevention, and approaches to homelessness prevention in the context of the cost of living crisis. Each webinar has attracted 80+ attendees and we have a programme of further webinars scheduled for 2023.

The Taskforce has also commissioned several independent pieces of pan-regional [research](#) ranging from work on families in Temporary Accommodation through to work on the impact of the benefits system on young people making the transition from homelessness. By commissioning this work at a regional level, we are able to engage with a significant number of partners, tackle issues that have a broader reach than many single areas would consider undertaking, and we ensure wide distribution of the findings.

### What next

The approaches we have taken to date have been effective in nurturing the beginnings of a coherent and collaborative approach across the region. The feedback we have received from partners is that we are adding value rather than adding work and that overall, our collaborative approach is making a valuable contribution to promoting homelessness prevention and to the more complex task of designing out homelessness at a system level.

We intend to continue focusing our time, effort and resources in this value-added approach. Further information about our areas of work can be found [here](#).