



Designing Out Homelessness

Bringing together organisations,
people and resources

Briefing Paper



**West Midlands
Combined Authority**

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 WMCA Homelessness Taskforce sees its primary 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.

The central purpose of the Homelessness Taskforce has been to bring together **organisations, people and resources** to support the work of our Local Authorities and other partner organisations working across the region to prevent and relieve homelessness. Our collaboration across the region, across sectors and disciplines sets out to enhance capacity, resilience, and knowledge; achieving complementary outcomes and essentially [adding value](#) rather than adding work.

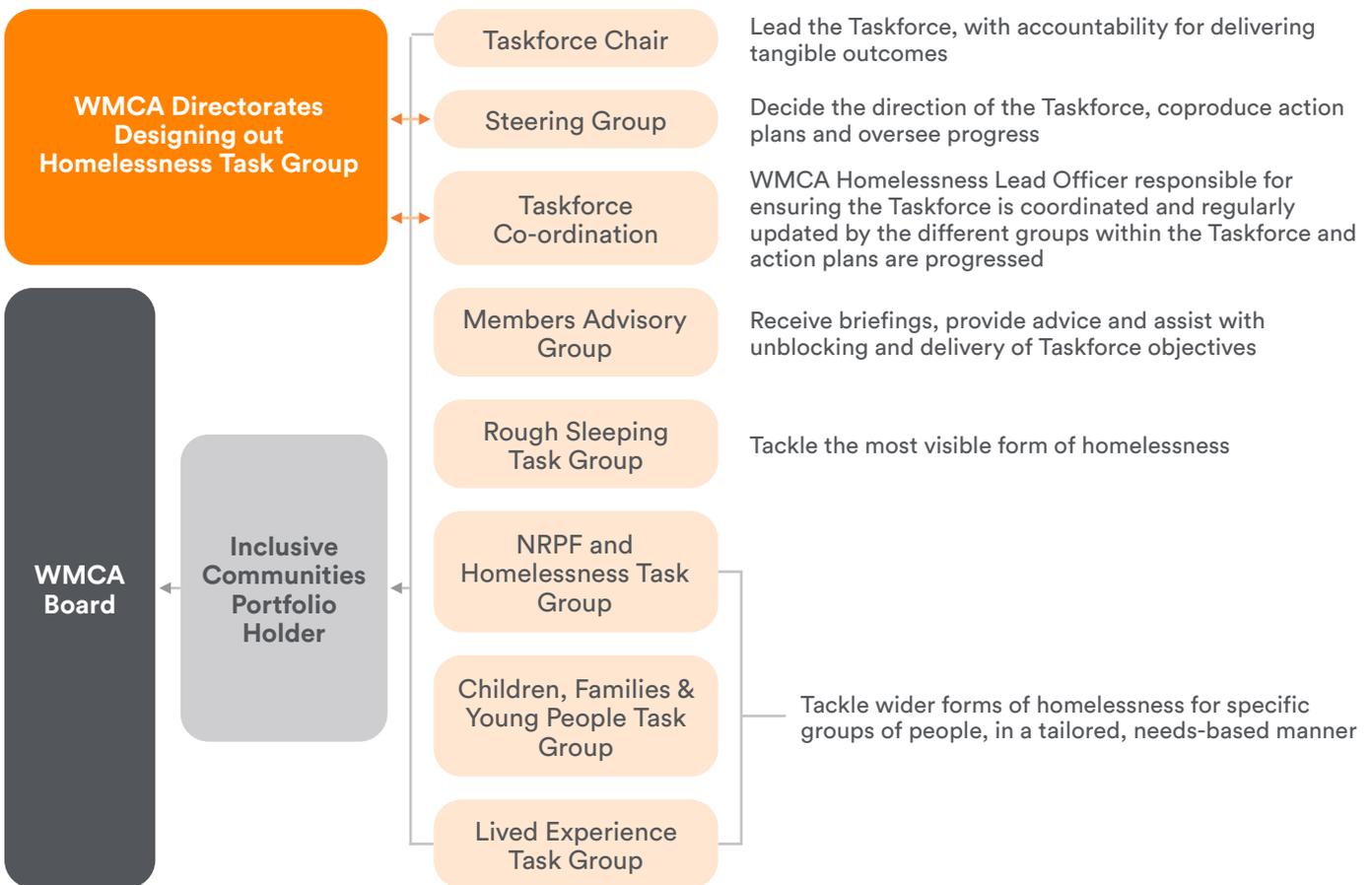
We have brought organisations, people and resources together through a continuous, perpetual and intentional process, creating conditions that facilitate coproduction, alongside co-ownership of challenges, solutions and successes. To allow for this way of working we developed a deliberate structure for the Taskforce, going beyond a conventional single steering group/board and chair.

This paper sets out how we have organised the Taskforce's structure and the function of its component parts, making up the WMCA Homelessness Taskforce as a whole - to actively support our work and joint ambition to Design out Homelessness in all its forms, across the region.



How we organise to help create systems change

Structure and function of the Homelessness Taskforce and related Task Groups:



We have arrived at the above structure through intentional design, reflection and coproduction. We set out to create a structure and set of relationships between the different elements of the Taskforce so that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

It is important to **note** that when we refer to the Taskforce we are referring to the structure as a whole and not to any of the individual component parts.

The role of the Independent Chair

One of the first decisions taken about the Taskforce's structure was to appoint an Independent Chair who would be able to act as a nonpartisan lead for the Taskforce. This is important as their role encompasses promoting genuine collaboration across services, systems and traditional geographical boundaries. Linked to that is their role as critical friend and change agent in what can be highly complex systems and services with often competing demands and objectives.

The role of the Independent Chair transcends the traditional role of chairing meetings. The Homelessness Taskforce's chair is responsible for setting work programmes, developing workstreams and is accountable for delivering tangible outcomes.

Steering Group

One of the most obvious components of the Homelessness Taskforce is its Steering Group, which can best be described as the ‘space’ where all the activity and energy is drawn together for direction setting, coproduction, co-ownership, reflection and overseeing progress.

The Steering Group has an extensive membership including the seven constituent Local Authorities of the WMCA, key public sector agencies, voluntary and community sector organisations and representation from the business community. This wide participation helps to ensure that a broad range of cross sector, cross regional organisations and partnerships have a stake in the work of the Taskforce.

Furthermore, there are five members of the Steering Group with lead roles, contributing expertise on certain thematic issues impacting on homelessness, as well as representing specific sectors and areas of work, as follows:

- Business Community Lead
- Violence against Women and Girls Lead
- Non-Commissioned Exempt Accommodation Lead
- Modern Slavery, Exploitation & Trafficking Lead
- Non-Constituent Local Authorities Lead

In its initial year of operation the Steering Group led on work to complete an extensive ‘mapping’ and ‘gapping’ exercise, using an adapted version of the Positive Pathway Model¹, to examine what the region had in place and where the gaps exist, for children and families, young people, and older people, paying particular attention to those who are serially excluded from service systems; and distilled its findings into five strategic objectives with the resolve to embed the designing out of homelessness into the mainstream strategies of the WMCA.

The Steering Group convenes five times per year and the areas covered at the meetings include updates on activity, emerging issues and trends in the region. Perhaps most importantly, the Steering Group provides a space for reflection, this is critical in setting the strategic direction of the Taskforce and in influencing Steering Group members to embed the learning within the mainstream strategies and activities of their own organisations.

¹Initially developed by St Basils to prevent youth homelessness.

Members Advisory Group

The Homelessness Taskforce is further connected to our Local Authorities through the Members Advisory Group (MAG), which is made up of Cabinet Members with responsibility for homelessness from each of the seven constituent Local Authorities of the WMCA, bolstering political leadership and accountability.

The MAG meets each quarter where Members receive briefings, provide advice to workstreams and contribute relevant local knowledge and insight into policy issues impacting on homelessness across the region.

The MAG critically acts as a conduit for embedding the work of the Homelessness Taskforce within local authority areas, taking responsibility for unblocking barriers to change.

The MAG takes a bipartisan approach and as such has demonstrated its effectiveness as a lobbying group with central government, and other national bodies, providing a cross party and cross authority perspective on often complex issues spanning homelessness and housing; employment and skills; and health and communities.

Task Groups

The Homelessness Taskforce is supported by Task Groups where greater time and focus is directed at work on a specific cohort of citizens at risk of or experiencing certain forms of homelessness e.g. families living in temporary accommodation. The Task Groups operate in an agile manner, offering a place for wider representation from organisations, groups and layers of service systems not directly represented at the Steering Group. In particular these groups allow for a mix of strategic and operational representation that enables us to create a praxis that can lead to prototyping the application of new and adapted approaches.

Currently there are four distinct Task Groups focusing on:

- Rough Sleeping
- People with restricted or no recourse to public funds (NRPF) and the impact of this on homelessness
- Children, Families and Young People
- Including the learning from people with Lived Experience

A significant part of the Taskforce's action plans are delivered through these Task Groups and as such they play a critical part of the overall structure.

WMCA internal structures

The WMCA Board agreed in 2019 to ‘mainstream’ the work of the Homelessness Taskforce, taking it from a Mayoral manifesto pledge into business as usual. At this stage, the Taskforce and its objectives were adopted within the mainstream structures of the WMCA. There is a direct link to the WMCA Board and the Inclusive Communities Portfolio Holder (an elected Member) which enables the Homelessness Taskforce to influence at this strategic level when that is needed and to also seek support to further the work of the Taskforce.

Within the WMCA there is further support for the work of the Homelessness Taskforce through the **Directorates Designing out Homelessness Task Group**. This group consists of officers working across the WMCA who meet on a monthly basis to help ensure that Designing out Homelessness is continually embedded in the work of the authority at a strategic, policy and practical level.

Through the internal structures of the WMCA, the Homelessness Taskforce is able to influence and contribute to its work. We are currently working with the WMCA Executive Board and the Leadership Centre² on further embedding the principles of Designing out Homelessness at a senior level in the organisation.

Underpinning the Taskforce

The overall design of the structure has been intentionally created to bridge the gaps between both service systems and organisations. The structure allows the balance of operational coproduction and strategic collaboration to shift and flex over time to reflect the environment we are working in and issues we are addressing. The design ensures that we never lose sight of the fundamental aspiration to end the ultimate exclusion that is homelessness by designing it out through identifying and seeking to address gaps in strategies, policies, procedures, laws, structures, systems and relationships that either cause or fail to prevent homelessness.

Underpinning all our efforts and the structural elements of the Taskforce is a way of working that is built on active and ongoing collaboration, stakeholder engagement and coproduction. This work is important, not always obvious or in plain sight, but extremely critical to the outcomes we are trying to achieve. This genuine and intentional engagement and collaboration is essential to the overarching work of the Taskforce and the way in which we carry out this work requires the investment of significant levels of resource and energy from the team supporting the Homelessness Taskforce, as well as from the membership of the Taskforce.

² <https://www.leadershipcentre.org.uk>

Does it work?

Creating change in established systems is not an easy or quick task. It is certainly an outcome that cannot be delivered in silos or by single organisations. The intentional design of the Taskforce's structure endeavours to take this into account and the way in which we support the activity of the Taskforce on a day-to-day basis to enable genuine collaboration and coproduction is rooted in the reality of making time to understand partner's perspectives, showing empathy and respect, being mindful about pace and acknowledging challenges through the lens of unintended consequences. It is our assertion that the combination of the different elements of the design all contribute to the work of the Taskforce in unique and complementary ways.

The evidence suggests that the Taskforce has achieved some significant outcomes, for example, bringing additional resources into the region (see the adding value briefing paper) as well as successfully creating a shared commitment to a radical agenda of change based on a shared desire to Design out Homelessness and end the ultimate exclusion of homelessness.

This work is ongoing and our assessment is that successful systems change relies on intentional and unceasing effort from those committed to achieving it. In short, the answer to the question 'Does the Taskforce work?' is 'Yes it does work, but it is still early days and there is much more to be done'.

A critical factor in the future success of this work will be the ability of the Taskforce and its constituent parts to learn, reflect and respond to the changing environment in which it operates and to continue bringing organisations, people and resources along with it as new issues and narratives unfold.



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