# Evaluation of place-based work in Brent

## Executive Summary

Campbell Tickell, January 2024

# Executive summary

The Berkeley Foundation has funded Crisis Skylight Brent to develop place-based work in the borough since 2019. Place-based work is 'a long-term approach to identifying, understanding, and addressing social issues rooted in the experiences, expertise and relationships that exist within a recognised geographic area'.[1]

This funding included an independent evaluation, conducted by Campbell Tickell, to evaluate the work carried out in Brent since 2019 and provides insight and learning in relation to:

**Strategic learning** - the extent to which efforts uncover insights that are key to future progress on place-based working in Brent and elsewhere.

**Systems change** – the extent to which efforts change the systems underlying complex issues.

**Individual change** – the extent to which efforts at a place-based level help to make the lives of people experiencing homelessness better.

The two intended outcomes for the place-based work are:

• to increase opportunities to end homelessness in Brent through strengthened, multi-agency partnerships and co-ordination of combined efforts to tackle the issues around homelessness

• to add to Crisis' learning about how ending homelessness can be delivered locally; and the role Crisis Skylights can play in achieving this.

The findings from the evaluation can be used to inform and influence:

• how the partnership between Crisis, the Berkeley Foundation and Brent Council might be **further developed to work towards ending homelessness** more effectively

• the development of Crisis' future place-based work in **other local areas**

• the ongoing development of a **Built for Zero[2] programme** within Brent.

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1   See work from Renaisi on place-based change and approaches. The quote is from Place-Based Change - Renaisi

2   Built for Zero is a data driven solution to ending homelessness in specific areas for different groups of people. It redesigns how systems and services work together in local communities so it's possible to respond to real-time need – and to prevent and end homelessness swiftly. **A key focus is the development of a 'by name' list of people who are homeless in an area** and working to resolve their homelessness.

## The nature of place-based work in Brent

Place-based work, funded by the Berkeley Foundation, in Brent has consisted of a number of activities:

- development of the **Brent Homelessness Forum** – consisting of around 200 members, 40-50 of whom meet bi-monthly

- a **Community of Practice** – established in 2021 to share learning and develop best practice and meeting monthly

- a number of **working groups and task and finish groups** – the rough sleeper working group, task and finish groups around migrant homelessness, mental health, youth homelessness, evictions, complex needs – this led to the creation of a complex needs panel which has led to the commissioning of a Supportive Multi-Agency Response Team (SMART) service

- **research on homelessness and health** addressing issues regarding health needs and access to health services by people experiencing homelessness in Brent

- **homelessness awareness sessions** for a wide range of organisations in Brent

- work on the development of a **Built for Zero community** and the recruitment of an officer to lead this

- opening **new premises** for Crisis Skylight Brent in Harlesden and opening of the Council's Turning Point Housing Emergency Centre for people experiencing homelessness nearby.

## Evaluation approach

The evaluation has been qualitative and mainly interview-based, using in depth semi-structured interviews with 22 stakeholders in senior and operational roles from public and voluntary sectors. The researchers also gathered quantitative data through a questionnaire completed by 31 members of the Brent Homelessness Forum (17 voluntary and community sector responses, 4 London Borough of Brent responses and 10 other statutory body responses).

Interviews with two individuals with lived experience of homelessness in Brent were conducted, using a visual approach to map their journeys. Examples were also gathered from stakeholders about the impact of place-based work on individuals experiencing homelessness in Brent. These testimonies illustrate how systems change has improved outcomes for individuals.

## Findings of the evaluation of place-based work in Brent

### Strategic learning

Place-based work, mainly through the Homelessness Forum, has helped contribute to the 'bottom up' development of Brent's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-25. The new Brent Homeless Health Plan, part of integrated care work, benefitted from being able to connect to the Forum to discuss needs early on and develop the plan with these insights.

The relationships – both informal networks and more formal funded partnerships – that have been established and nurtured through place-based work have enabled partners to respond quickly by using live information. For example, the partners were able to mobilise very quickly to respond to the recent accelerated termination of Home Office accommodation for Asylum Seekers; and have been able to share information on new rough sleeping 'hotspots' as they occur and mobilise a swift response.

The role of Crisis as a national charity in connecting national and international approaches to local place-based work is seen as an important factor in achieving buy-in from partners.

> *'Crisis is key to homelessness in Brent because it has a history, has built relationships, including with the council. Cabinet and [council] Members know of Crisis even if they don't have working contact – a recognised organisation and delivery partner'.*
> (Public sector)

One example where local work is underpinned by national support lies in the fact that Crisis is now trialling Built for Zero in Brent (the first place in the UK to trial this approach) building on the place-based work already carried out.

### Systems change in Brent

A key driver for systems change in Brent has been collaborative leadership between directors and managers across public and voluntary sectors. This enabled a number of joint working practices to be developed:

- joint recruitment panels for shared posts or posts where the voluntary and public sectors have a shared interest

- secondments, embedded staff, co-located staff across both the voluntary and public sectors.

- training and upskilling of public sector officers by voluntary sector staff

- outreach work carried out jointly, for example, in public spaces that have been identified as homelessness and rough sleeping 'hot spots'

- accompanied visits; or 'satellite' services that enable public sector services (primarily health and homelessness) to reach spaces and people that they would otherwise be unable to reach because they can work through 'trusted third parties' in the voluntary sector

- improved joint working on referral, assessments and decisions. Cooperation between service providers gives reassurance to staff and improved outcomes for individuals.

> *'It has helped to improve the support patients are receiving when they are discharged from hospital as we are more aware of services, we can link them into when they leave from here. I think it has probably reduced the risk of relapse into street homelessness/rough sleeping for some of the people we have seen.'*
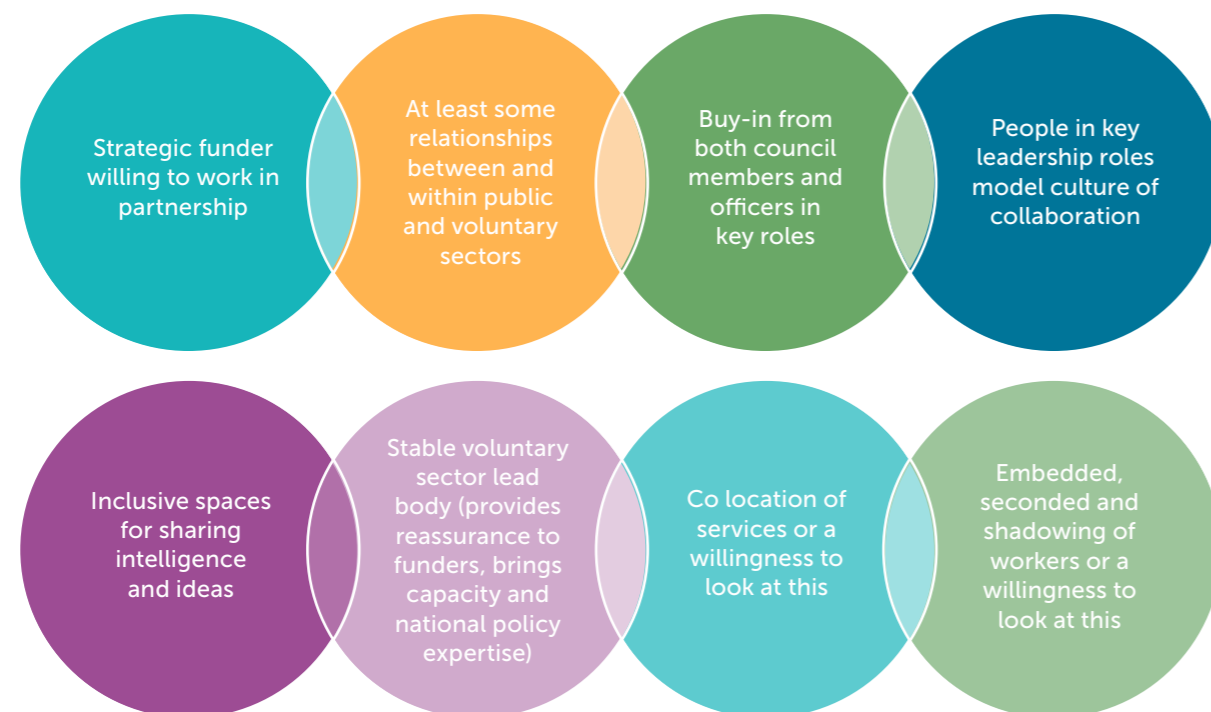> (Public sector)

### Individual change

Changes for individuals as a result of place-based partnerships (the local informal networks) and collaborative leadership across sectors include:

- Getting people the support they need quickly by cooperating over referrals, assessment processes and decision making; for some people this meant that they received help before the issues they face became more serious.

- Smoothing people's transitions between services – hospital to community, temporary winter or Home Office accommodation to other options – meant they were less likely to lose touch with the support services that could help them resolve their housing issues.

- Resolving Universal Credit claims that are cancelled or held up. Place-based working had led to sharing information and jointly investigating these issues.

- Finding accommodation and support for people whose needs and circumstances are complex and where no one agency alone is likely to be able to help.

- GP registration for people experiencing homelessness has improved and attention is now also turning to work with GPs that have a high number of patients experiencing homelessness so that individuals receive:
  - a health & wellbeing assessment
  - a referral to a social prescriber
  - flu jabs
  - a medication review
  - lifestyle advice.

- Working through the unintended consequences of statutory processes. For example, having a relationship of trust to find an alternative solution where a closure order would have led to homelessness.

The evaluation also included a survey of 31 members of the Brent Homelessness Forum. Responses were largely positive about their relationship with the Homelessness Forum and its impact on the sector:

- 97% of respondents said being involved with the Forum was very or fairly significant.

- 81% of respondents said it had strengthened their own relationships.

- 81% of respondents said it had positively influenced their own ways of working.

- 87% of respondents thought sector relationships had been strengthened.

- 83% of respondents thought the sectors ways of working positively influenced.

**Figure 1: Creating the conditions for change — based on learning about place-based work in Brent**



Strategic funder willing to work in partnership

At least some relationships between and within public and voluntary sectors

Buy-in from both council members and officers in key roles

People in key leadership roles model culture of collaboration

Inclusive spaces for sharing intelligence and ideas

Stable voluntary sector lead body (provides reassurance to funders, brings capacity and national policy expertise)

Co location of services or a willingness to look at this

Embedded, seconded and shadowing of workers or a willingness to look at this

## Implications and recommendations

Evaluating the place-based work in Brent has identified that the following create conditions for change (See Figure 1).

The emerging principles for place-based work are:

- A **strength-based approach** that builds on existing relationships and **creates safe spaces for agencies** to reflect, share intelligence, the most up to date insights and practices and to develop approaches to joint work iteratively.

- **Partnerships need to be nurtured to become well embedded** and there is a particular need to ensure smaller groups or agencies are kept engaged and aware of place-based work and their contribution to it.

- It is **important to recognise and value small incremental changes** as they are often the foundation for bigger change.

- The **active involvement of the Council in a two-way relationship** (as distinct from a managerial relationship) is critical.

- **Letting go of power by public agencies is necessary** to build effective place-based partnerships.

- **Voluntary agencies need to be willing to look beyond their individual services** and understand system constraints and how to impact on these.

## Recommendations for Crisis

To further develop place-based work Crisis needs to:

a. **resource leadership across the sector to avoid reliance on a few key individuals, who drive change**

b. establish and **promote communication and engagement with the widest possible network of agencies** both through representation of marginalised and minoritized parts of the community and to strengthen the role of people with lived experience in place-based work

c. **continue to maintain the connection between local place-based work and national housing and homeless policy** and ensure a flow of information in both directions so that one can influence the other and vice versa.

## Recommendations for the partnership between Crisis, Brent Council and the Berkeley Foundation

- Continue to work as a partnership with Berkeley Foundation's welcome commitment to being an engaged funder. The benefits and impact of the funding so far are clearly shown through the evaluation, but place-based work requires a long-term commitment.

- Continue to build leadership capacity in both the public and voluntary sectors based on the evidence that this will help develop and sustain place-based work. This needs to include funding key posts.

- Consider how to use the evaluation findings and wider Brent Homelessness Partnership expertise to develop work in in Brent and promote this type of approach in other areas.

**Recommendations for a Built for Zero approach**

- **Challenges:** It will take time for the concept to be understood and supported; for frontline teams to overcome barriers to sharing data. These challenges are compounded by external pressures including a shortage of affordable accommodation, and the rising scale of homelessness.

- **Being focused and realistic** about what can be achieved through the initiative and getting the pace of the work right is important. Regularly sharing back progress, making visible the stages and steps involved and promoting positive change will all help with this.

- **Work towards a good, shared understanding of Built for Zero** throughout homelessness organisations including frontline staff and volunteers. This will help ensure that new systems are used effectively throughout the homelessness system. One way to achieve this which is already working well is for senior leaders to model their commitment to it.

Crisis

Together
we will end
homelessness