

COVID-19: Next steps and transition planning

Who this is for: Anyone working in or with a local authority homelessness service

What it is: Principles and ideas to support local transition planning as local areas move through this next phase of the pandemic and develop transition plans

What it is not: A replacement or alternative to official (or other) guidance

See our [COVID-19 transition planning toolkit](#) for a range of practical resources to help implement the below. If you are based in London, you can signpost private landlords to our [dedicated team and service](#)

- It is critical that progress made and opportunities presented as a result of this unprecedented situation are not lost. Everyone supported should be made an offer of long-term, secure housing with access to appropriate support. [Housing-led solutions](#) offer the most **sustainable** way to end rough sleeping and a public statement from portfolio holders that commits to this is a vital start, alongside a cross-sector “system-wide” approach
- There is a future time limit on the availability of the emergency accommodation provided as part of the “Everyone In” initiative. Any offer of long-term accommodation must prioritise everyone helped through this in the first instance
- This will require ongoing planning and dialogue with contracted accommodation providers to ensure everyone is not moved out at the same time (e.g. mass evictions from hotels)
- As with the emergency response, transition planning should continue to utilise local partnerships and cross-sector approaches (particularly an integrated approach with health and care to secure access to services/ continuity of care)
- This should cover the following three areas to develop and implement a costed, ambitious and cross-sector [Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan](#)¹ that leaves no-one behind and is co-developed with people with lived experience of homelessness

Build a shared understanding of “everybody in” and what they need and want

- The quality of assessments for the “Everyone In” cohort have been understandably variable, due to both resource availability and the immediate pressures to offer everyone accommodation. The first step of exit planning requires a consistent assessment of

¹ Rapid Rehousing means a settled, mainstream housing outcome as quickly as possible. Time spent in any form of temporary accommodation is reduced to a minimum, with the fewer transitions the better. When temporary accommodation is needed, the optimum type is mainstream, furnished and within a community

those that have been temporarily accommodated, focussing on the nature, intensity and duration of support needs and the appropriate housing-led pathway for them

- This is a unique chance to engage people about their housing situation. People need to **feel they have choice and control** over whether and where they move, and trust that they will receive the support they need for as long as they need it. Decisions (affordability, location, tenure etc.) should be made jointly with the individual and strength-based approaches should be deployed by skilled assessors. Many individuals may be “known to services” with existing plans/ support workers. It is important to both engage them in the process and ensure consistency
- These assessments will need to account for health needs, eligibility, legal duties owed and benefit entitlements. We are seeking clarification from government on those that have been temporarily accommodated but are ineligible for statutory assistance. We encourage local areas to continue accommodating and supporting everyone using powers and alternative duties. Establish partnerships with refugee and migrant organisations, and law centres, where these are available. Ensure EEA nationals have access to support and advice to help them apply to the EU Settlement Scheme. Partnerships with the local voluntary sector should facilitate this (the home office have announced [further funding](#) for charities and local authorities to support this)
- Map existing support services and staff resources including: commissioned homelessness services and housing-related support, services commissioned by other statutory services and non-commissioned services. Areas are utilising surveys with local partners to address any gaps here. This should take a “cross-sector” view, reviewing and incorporating the service flexibilities that have resulted from the emergency response to date
- The output of this process should be strategic data providing a clear understanding of the required pathways and support models (housing first, permanent housing with floating/ resettlement support, permanent supported housing and residential care etc.) enabling the modelling of both costs, staff requirements and service provision to meet these

Develop housing-led solutions and pathways

- The availability of housing to meet identified needs should be addressed by cross-boundary partnerships in collaboration with social housing providers and social lettings agencies
- These partnerships should raise awareness of the scale of the housing ask, based on a strategic assessment of stock and access for housing-led pathways, including number of units and types of accommodation (location, tenure, within LHA/ outside LHA, self-contained, shared, accessibility etc.)
- Establish a central procurement team to support this effort

- Explore capacity in existing supported housing pathways and other commissioned provision (if identified as most appropriate for someone). Is it possible to free up units by quickly turning round empties/ voids? Are there existing residents that are ready and can be supported to move on?
- Social lettings: Many areas have suspended choice-based letting and 100% of general needs nominations and council lettings should be prioritised for the “Everyone In” client group, and for others who need to move from unsuitable, unsafe or overcrowded accommodation. Non-general needs lettings such as sheltered and supported housing should be reviewed to see if they can meet this need but shouldn’t be ringfenced without justification. The likely availability of one-bed properties within the existing stock, and new build homes due to come on stream in the short term, should be assessed and allocations restrictions flexed so people’s housing history does not prevent access to social housing
- Private rented sector: Areas should adopt a strategic approach to engage their existing portfolio of landlords and new landlords that have come onboard during the crisis, building on existing PRS access work and flexible offers for landlords. Working with social lettings agencies, local partnerships should assess the potential supply of lettings from the existing PRS stock. This should take into account the impact of raising LHA rates to the 30th percentile and the scope to attract private landlords to supply accommodation for this client group
- Exempt accommodation: it is critical that if used, local areas adopt a strategic approach to managing the sector and provide effective oversight. Consideration should be given to limiting the time spent in exempt accommodation, and to ensuring that residents who are ready to seek work are actively supported to move on to mainstream housing (or are assisted through rent relief schemes once they start work). See [this report](#) for best practice
- Other creative solutions to consider with partners: converting licence agreements, PRS leasing by local RSLs, the LA or private/ corporate supporters to set up or support social lettings agencies, acquisitions from the PRS or stalled sites, conversion from shared ownership/ affordable rent and bringing back empty properties.
- Where existing supply is insufficient to meet the scale of need, local partnerships should identify and share with central government the scale of unmet need and gaps in provision

Implementing the transition plan

- As with the emergency response, arrangements need to be established to manage and treat this as an ongoing process with gradual phases of transition and suitable flexibility. The uncertainty around peaks and troughs over the next 18 months and relaxing of lockdown restrictions strengthens the argument for this and a [housing-led approach](#). All

organisations (statutory/ commissioned/ non-commissioned) should be aware of and aligned to the plan and strategy. Routes to resolve issues/ barriers that emerge should be understood and agreed at the outset

- Local areas will need to respond quickly to opportunities and balance this with a sustainable, strategic and coordinated response. This process should start and signal a shift to a more comprehensive housing-led system in the medium term, and improvements in the local resilience to homelessness and response to homelessness. Can we facilitate a safe, scheduled transition away from any night shelter style provision entirely?
- Many areas are already starting to “wind down” the occupancy of emergency accommodation. Any sustainable move-on work that can happen now, including from existing pathways and provision to create capacity. Utilise virtual lettings, viewings and remote moving in support (adhering to current public health guidance on social distancing)
- There is an expectation that funding/ resources from RSI round 3 resources should be repurposed to support this process where possible. As outlined in the previous section, any funding shortfalls need to be clearly documented and communicated
- Commissioning strategy and access to support - there is an opportunity here to reconfigure the underlying systems/ existing commissioning of support and move to more flexible, integrated commissioning models. Looking at existing provision/ contracts for services that have seen decreased demand (outreach/ crisis), how many can be repurposed for new housing-led support models required post-crisis e.g. expanding housing first, floating support in PRS etc.? What lessons have been learnt from the emergency response in terms of how support has been delivered? Can you build on and maintain the flexible responses we've seen from housing, substance misuse, health, mental health and criminal justice services?
- Linked to the mapping exercise, make full use of community support and mainstream services, and integrate a commissioned support offer with these. Any transition arrangements should be made on the basis that they strengthen local capacities rather than develop parallel structures. This may mean investing in local organisations who provide support, adapting systems or increasing resources and skills to deliver
- Manage the transition - consider how you will practically prepare people for a tenancy and support their move to the relevant pathway, ensuring continuity of care and packages of support (including social care, primary care, mental health, public health and housing-related). Mechanisms should be in place to involve people throughout. Temporary facilities should start weekly case management MDT meetings looking at engagement, recovery and move on options for all clients, with a named member of health staff to support move on



- Equality impact assessments should be carried out for transition plans to ensure that particularly vulnerable or marginalised groups are not negatively impacted by the plans or face barriers to access enacted measures (e.g. women, BAME etc.)
- The phasing of move-on work will require careful matching, based on preferences and needs rather than rigid categories or eligibility criteria. A broad, flexible framework for allocation decisions should be included in the transition plan – this will then need to be referred to on a case by case basis