

IMPACT REPORT

2020/21



WHAT WE DO

We exist to defend the right to a safe home and fight the devastating impact the housing emergency has on people and society.

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AN INTRODUCTION FROM MATT AND NOOR, TELEPHONE AND ONLINE ADVISERS

We both joined Shelter during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic to work on the emergency helpline, where we provide legal advice to help people understand their rights and options. We hear from people who need help with issues such as homelessness, domestic abuse and eviction.

When we started, we hadn't anticipated the number of calls we'd get relating to the pandemic. It can be heartbreaking when we speak to people who've had their worlds flipped upside down, but extremely rewarding when our advice completely changes their situation.

At Christmas, we spoke to a woman with a two-year-old son who was facing eviction and finding it impossible to secure alternative accommodation. Many landlords wouldn't accept tenants on benefits, and asked for unaffordable deposits. She ended up sofa-surfing with her child until they were asked to leave. She called us, and after we spoke to the council, it accommodated her family in a hotel. Now they have a safe home in a flat provided by the council, and are relieved to no longer have to live with others during a public health crisis.

Stories like these show just how bad things have got for private renters during the pandemic. Last year, more than four million new claims for Universal Credit were made, with many borrowing money or cutting back on essentials like food or heating to help pay their rent. Although the eviction ban provided temporary respite for some, for others, rent arrears are piling up. Our research with YouGov revealed that even back in November 2020, over 445,000 private renters in England had already been threatened with eviction in the previous month, or were falling behind on their rent. With few affordable properties available and limited hardship funds from local councils, many tenants are forced to continue living in unfit or overcrowded conditions.

In September 2020, thanks to a partnership grant from the National Emergencies Trust and additional support from other partners like Nationwide Building Society, we recruited 25 new helpline advisers. This made a huge difference to the number of people we reach. Before this, on any given day in August 2020, we answered an average of 61 calls. By the following January, after the new recruits were fully trained, this went up to 118 per day.

However, demand for the helpline continues to grow. In March 2021, we saw a 17% increase in calls compared to the previous March, so it's vital that we continue providing a lifeline to those who need it most.

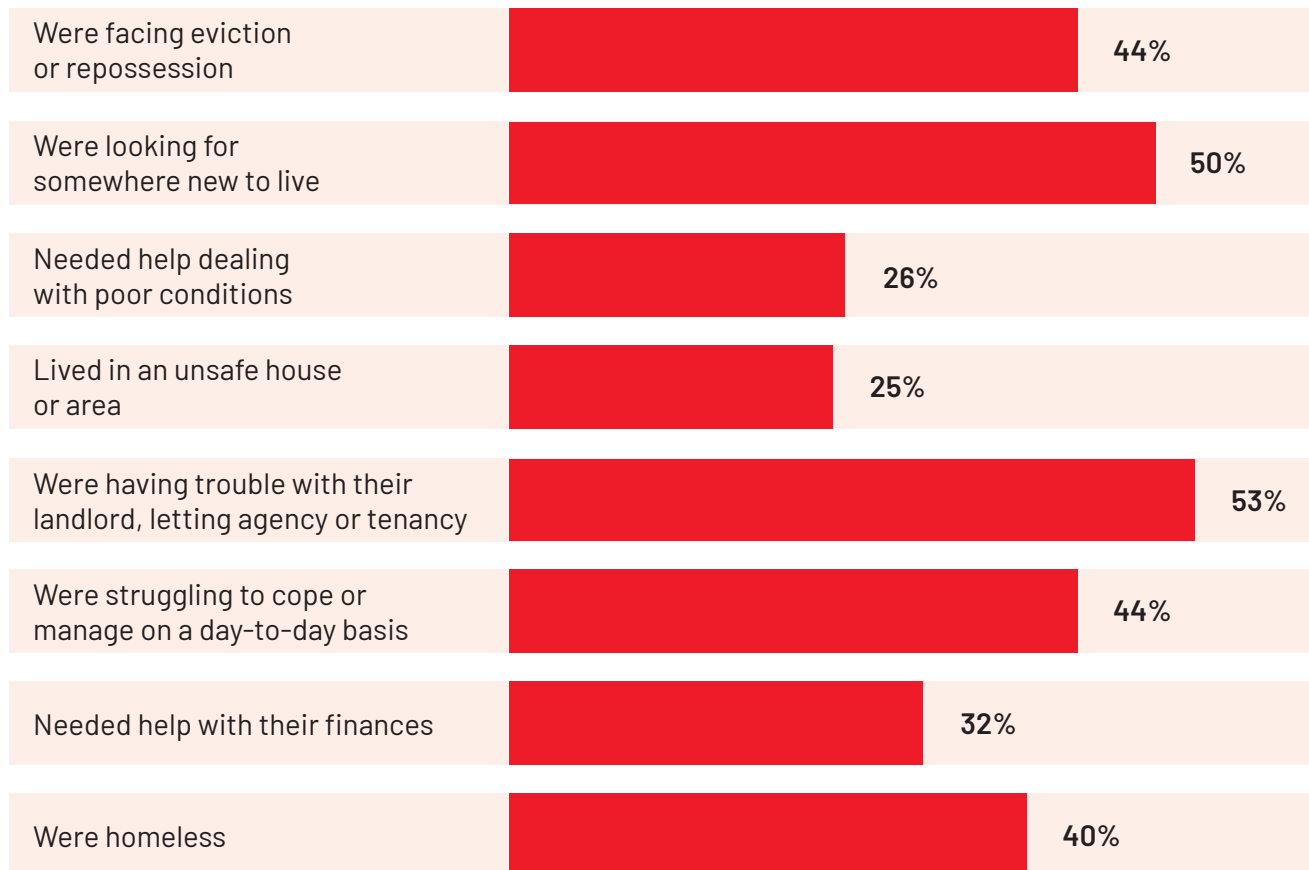
Our purpose is not only to be reactive, but also proactive. Together with our supporters, we are fighting to strengthen renters' rights and calling on the government to build more social housing. Meanwhile, our hubs are working with local communities to create systemic change, so that fewer people need to access our emergency helpline in the first place.



A woman with a two-year-old son was facing eviction... we helped them find a safe home.

OUR YEAR AT A GLANCE



BASED ON A REPRESENTATIVE SURVEY OF PEOPLE WHO CAME TO US FOR HELP IN 2020:

ACROSS OUR SERVICES IN ENGLAND IN 2020/21:*

22,644

Households received advice from our emergency helpline

6.5m

Visits were made to our online advice and services pages

18,590

Households were advised and supported by our local hubs**

2,105

Households received help and advice from our expert legal teams

19,170

Conversations were had on our webchat service

15,212

Queries were responded to by our professional advice services

7,651

People in custody were helped with housing, finance and employment needs by our justice services

1,941

People were helped by our justice services while they were completing a community sentence

2,050

Advice queries were answered through social media

The top five reasons people sought help through social media were:

1. Homelessness
2. Exploring options to find, keep or improve their home
3. Eviction
4. Finances e.g. related to Universal Credit or affordability issues
5. Disrepair, damp and mould

Almost all the queries were directly or indirectly related to the coronavirus pandemic.

* Previous years' impact reports have included data for England and Scotland. This report regarding 20/21 captures data for our work in England only.

** People were supported by our hubs remotely, with exceptions of face-to-face support for those most at risk.

IN 2020/21, THANKS TO HELP FROM SHELTER:**22,800**

Households saw a positive
change in their housing situation

10,400

Homeless households found
somewhere to live

3,700

Households saw their
poor conditions improve

12,000

Households are now
coping or managing better
on a day-to-day basis

8,700

Households halted their
eviction or repossession
proceedings and kept
their homes

3,500

Households that needed
to move home, found
somewhere to live

11,300

Households who were having
an issue with their landlord,
letting agency or tenancy
saw an improvement

7,600

Households improved
their financial situation

4,600

Households felt their
unsafe house or local
area had improved

8,900

Households felt their
worries or concerns about
the possible impact of the
coronavirus pandemic on
their housing situation
reduced or were put to rest

OUR IMPACT



Over the following pages, we have put our work into context to clearly show the outcomes of the help, support, and campaigning we've delivered in 2020/21.

More information about the numbers and how they have been calculated can be found in the Methodology section of this report.



WORKING FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE

A home is a human right. But for many, a home where they feel safe is out of reach. The pandemic has exposed just how precarious the situation is for the thousands living in unfit private rented or temporary accommodation.

Lockdown saw many in cramped temporary accommodation forced to juggle working from home or furlough with home-schooling and caring for family members. Often this would be in places with no space to learn or work, and without access to basics like the internet or a washing machine.

The economic impact of the pandemic has exposed the true cost of decades of failure to build the social homes we desperately need.

To make sure everyone can exercise their right to a secure home, we must effect change at a systemic level. We are campaigning for stronger rights for renters and more social housing to prevent people from falling into housing crisis.

By working with local communities to understand their housing needs and building grassroots movements, we aim to make each of our hubs a base for change in its community. Through influencing and collaborating with key organisations at both local and national level, we are creating a powerful movement to fight for a safe home.

PROTECTING RENTERS FROM HOMELESSNESS

Following the outbreak of coronavirus and lockdown, we rapidly mobilised our supporters to demand greater support and protections for renters, and to ensure a safe home for everyone who needed it during the public health emergency. Over 130,000 of our supporters signed the petition, calling on the government to:

- ban evictions, to keep people safe during the pandemic
- provide greater financial support for homelessness services
- publish clear guidance to ensure councils provide safe emergency accommodation to people sleeping on the streets
- offer financial support to renters in need of help paying off arrears caused by coronavirus
- review housing benefit rates and scrap the benefit cap, to prevent growing rent arrears and evictions



EVICTIONS

Our services reported that despite lockdown, people were being evicted with nowhere to go. In response, alongside other renting campaigning groups, we ran a campaign calling on the government to ban evictions during the pandemic. The government responded to the public pressure with various protections – including an eviction ban, which was extended multiple times throughout the year.

STREET HOMELESSNESS

We welcomed the government's 'Everyone In' initiative, which saw the government instruct councils to accommodate people sleeping on the street during the pandemic.

However, from the first lockdown onwards, we heard from people who were turned away by councils, or told they had to 'bed down' on the street to be verified.

This support lottery was caused by a lack of clear government guidance for local authorities on who should be accommodated and on what basis. For example, the government would refer to 'Everyone In' but remind councils that it was unlawful for them to accommodate certain 'ineligible' groups.

We co-produced a campaign with Rhys Otoo, who has lived experience of street homelessness and was supported by us.

Together, we called on the homelessness minister to publish guidance and provide adequate funding to councils to ensure everyone could get off the streets.

Rhys wrote an open letter to the minister, garnering nearly 18,000 signatures, and met with the minister to make the case for guidance and additional funding. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) provided additional funding at the start of the November and January lockdowns in the form of the Protect Programme. However, no guidance was published, leading to continued confusion.

WELFARE

In the spring, the Treasury restored housing benefit rates to cover 30% of local rents – something on which we have campaigned for years. It also introduced a temporary £20-a-week uplift in Universal Credit, to the relief of struggling renters. But as more people lost work and were forced to rely on housing benefit, unable to move somewhere cheaper because of lockdown, our data showed hundreds of thousands of renters were still unable to pay their rent.

Working as part of a coalition of cross-issue civil society groups, we applied public pressure to the chancellor, urging him to further strengthen the welfare safety net by temporarily increasing housing benefit to cover 50% of local rents.

This petition got nearly 150,000 signatures in just six weeks. Unfortunately, the government did not increase housing benefit further, but the retention of the £20 uplift was secured for an additional six months.

LEGAL ADVICE SERVICE AND STRATEGIC LITIGATION

We have unrivalled expertise in housing law. Our team of solicitors offers expert legal advice that helps fight repossessions and evictions and attends court to defend those at risk of losing their home. We challenge landlords who unlawfully evict people, or allow their properties to fall into a dangerous state of disrepair. We fight back against local authority homelessness decisions, and step in when councils aren't doing enough to support those in need of housing.

Our Strategic Litigation team selects specific cases for court that, when won, could set a legal precedent that changes thousands of lives. We successfully intervened in a case against Brighton & Hove Council by Timon Ncube, who had been made to sleep on the street during the pandemic after the council turned him away, citing that he was ineligible for homelessness assistance.

Following this important test case, we're now making sure councils are aware of the High Court's ruling: that they have, and must, use their powers to accommodate street

homeless people for the duration of the pandemic. Meanwhile, we continue to demand the government publishes guidance to help everyone who needs it.

NO DSS DISCRIMINATION

Our 'No DSS' campaign has secured several groundbreaking wins over the last year, including five court cases against housing discrimination on the grounds of sex and disability. As a result, 'No DSS' activities were declared unlawful.

These wins received extensive media coverage; securing praise from the government and the opposition, who said these landmark rulings were a positive step in protecting people from discrimination. In July 2020, the National Residential Landlords Association reminded landlords that they should not operate blanket policies that discriminate against tenants receiving housing benefit. In December 2020, online letting agent Spare Room announced it would remove all of its 'No DSS' advertisements.

Despite the rulings, these unjust practices continue, so we won't stop campaigning to call out this unlawful discrimination, and empower renters to challenge their agents and landlords directly.

DWP'S UNIVERSAL CREDIT DEDUCTIONS POLICY

In 2019, we found that many people who'd recently moved into settled accommodation, often after years of living on the streets, were hit with court fine payments that included fines for begging under the Vagrancy Act 1824. These payments resulted in high-level deductions to their Universal Credit personal allowance, and left people struggling to cover essential living costs, including food and bills.

This situation was not a one-off case of bad decision-making; for instance where a claimant's request to have the deductions reduced – as the law allows – was turned down. This happened because the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) had a blanket policy to cut benefits by the maximum amount possible whenever there was a court fine payment, regardless of personal circumstances.

In February 2020, we launched a legal challenge arguing against the policy on behalf of four people, all of whom had a long history of sleeping on the street and were affected by these 'maximum deductions'. On 17 March 2021, the High Court ruled that this inflexible policy and practice was unlawful, and ordered that the relevant section in the deductions policy relating to fines be amended to reflect the judgment.

SOCIAL HOUSING

In May 2020, we launched our 'Let's Build Social Housing' campaign. It demanded that the government pledge to build 90,000 more social homes per year, and urged our supporters to lobby their MPs on the matter. Over 95% of MPs received messages from their constituents as a result of our campaign.

Later that year, the government committed to increase the number of government-funded social homes built over the next five years, compared to those delivered in the previous five. Though positive, the amount it has agreed to build goes nowhere near the numbers of social homes needed, so our fight to secure significantly more investment in social housing continues.

We also challenged the government's planning reforms – particularly the proposal to increase the Small Sites Exemption (SSE), which would have allowed more developers to avoid building affordable homes. We launched an action encouraging supporters to get involved in the consultation, and over 2,500 people contributed their views. In March 2021, the government scrapped its plans to increase the SSE.

Our robust stance against these changes, and our supporters' voices contributed to the public pressure on the government to change its view.

WORKING FOR CHANGE IN OUR COMMUNITIES

Our Community Organising programme brings people together through our hubs. With the help of our resources and expertise, we work together to identify what needs to change; building a powerful movement to help end the housing emergency.

Last year, Community Organisers worked with local communities to identify key issues which informed manifestos for change in each area, with calls to action put to mayoral candidates in local elections. Each manifesto provides a clear agenda on what needs to be done in each community to bring about change.

In Birmingham, we focused on pushing for more social housing. Whereas in Bristol, we focused on how best to improve renting, which brought together renters from across the city as part of the Nationwide Foundation Tenant Voice programme. In Hackney, we worked with people in temporary accommodation to map out what would make the most difference to their everyday lives while also pushing for long-term solutions like more social housing. The programme continues to grow, with new Community Organisers joining the Newcastle, Norwich and Plymouth hubs.

We also support local grassroots campaigns; helping win commitments from developers for more affordable housing in Birmingham, working with a women's charity in London, and organising workshops to ensure renters know their rights in Bristol.

Next, we will use the programme to mobilise renters across the country in support of our Renters' Reform Bill campaign. We'll also join a national Renters' Reform Coalition, to launch a movement across the country that ensures the proposed reforms make a genuine difference to private renters.

SHELTER BRISTOL'S SERVICES FOR WOMEN

One of our key focus areas at Shelter Bristol is to support women and single mothers. In Bristol, single mothers approach the council for homelessness advice more than any other group – a trend which was shown in the 2019 rough sleeper count.

To gain a deeper understanding of this problem, in order to find solutions, we invited women with lived experience of homelessness to share their thoughts with us at a roundtable event. Also invited was Bristol's mayor as well as local housing and social support agencies that work primarily with women. We heard that organisations across the city were not linking up, leaving women and their families to fall through the gaps – and that there were issues with the support provided to women coping with trauma like abuse, mental health problems and substance misuse.

One woman summed up some of the issues homeless women face:



I had experienced domestic abuse but was placed in an unsafe, mixed-gender hostel by the housing service which wouldn't allow my children to visit. I spent months trying to move into more suitable accommodation that would enable me to meet with my children and get my life back on track.

We set up a Women's Action Group to identify the barriers women face when trying to access housing support, like a lack of childcare options and public transport costs. Barriers like these impact their ability to attend appointments with housing offices and advice services.

We've created an action plan to address these problems, ensuring that these women's voices are heard.

Several new partners are collaborating with the Women's Action Group and us to achieve the changes needed:

- Bristol City Council and eight other domestic abuse, mental health, and housing support organisations are exploring ways to make their service delivery more effective
- Turn to Us has offered to fund a pilot grant facility to cover the costs for childcare provision and travel when viewing accommodation
- The National Lottery is funding peer research to better understand needs and solutions

The Women's Action Group continues to reach out to women in housing crisis to offer support and involve them in the group's work; participating in a local podcast and holding an online event on International Women's Day to raise awareness.



SHELTER PLYMOUTH'S COLLABORATIVE SYSTEMIC INQUIRY

In Plymouth, we're collaborating with the city council to protect vulnerable people in social housing and prevent them from falling into rent arrears and other crisis situations.

After analysing our housing court desk cases in the area, alongside cases taken on by our hub's solicitors, we found that many people in social housing facing court action also had health and social care needs. We began a systemic inquiry, mapping out court cases and speaking to those involved. This revealed a complex social care and housing system that was challenging to navigate and failing to link people to the services they needed.

In most cases, if these systems had been working as they should and providing tenants with support, court action could have been avoided – as well as the financial cost and distress. Lisa's story (on page 20) shows just how devastating this failure can be. Thanks to our solicitor Cathy's continued hard work, Lisa was able to keep her home. However, this drawn-out, stressful series of interventions could have been avoided if Lisa had received appropriate, timely support for her health and social care needs.

We're seeing positive results from our inquiry, with key actors in the system joining us to protect people at risk living in social housing.

A new link worker post, funded by us, has been agreed with the council to maintain relationships between different parties involved and ensure the system works cohesively. Support is also being put in place more quickly than before, and we expect to see fewer stories like Lisa's going forward. We will continue to monitor how many easily avoidable cases like hers we see.

The systemic inquiry approach is regarded as best practice by senior staff in Plymouth's housing system, including organisations we aim to work with in the future. As a result, we are now part of Plymouth's new Homelessness Prevention Partnership, the main body trying to reform and improve homelessness in the area. Together, we'll use evidence and insight to understand where the system is failing, so we can work out solutions, and put them into practice. We've also secured funding for a Peer Research GROW trainee (see page 38), who will gather insight from the people at the heart of the housing system to present to the Homelessness Prevention Partnership.

However, more work is needed to ensure people with health and housing needs thrive in their homes. We'll continue to collaborate with other organisations to achieve even more reform, including working with those at the heart of the matter, like landlords who take action against social housing tenants.



This work is like a golden thread through complexity. Our regular meetings have reinforced the need for collaboration and made it evident that without strategic joined-up thinking and commissioning, we can't holistically support some of the most at-risk people in our communities.

TEAM MANAGER AT PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL

Lisa's* story, as told by her solicitor Cathy



Lisa lives with schizophrenia and substance misuse issues. She was facing a possession order due to an error with her housing benefit, which had caused her to build up rent arrears and left her at risk of losing her home. We provided emergency legal aid, gave instructions for her capacity to litigate to be assessed, and organised her housing benefit to be paid directly to her landlord.

We applied for a Discretionary Housing Payment to help her clear the arrears, and made the case repeatedly to the local authority and the court that Lisa didn't have capacity to manage her finances due to her mental health issues. We highlighted that she was vulnerable and badly needed support from the council, stressing the negative impact the situation was having on her mental health. An official solicitor was appointed to act on her behalf.

Despite this, the necessary steps were not taken to help Lisa, as the Adult Social Care and Mental Health services did not respond to our requests for joined-up support. With the arrears continuing to build, Lisa's mental health began to deteriorate, and she was sectioned at the local mental health unit. On discharge a few months later a community care solicitor was appointed to help.

There was now a real danger that Lisa would lose her home. Finally, after we took the drastic step of using a witness summons to ensure the head of Adult Social Care attended her court hearing, the local authority confirmed it would pay off her arrears.

*names have been changed for anonymity

THANKS TO SHELTER IN 20/21

52%

OF HOUSEHOLDS WHO WERE
FACED WITH EVICTION OR
REPOSSESSION STAYED IN
THEIR HOME

56%

OF HOUSEHOLDS WHO WERE
HAVING AN ISSUE WITH
THEIR LANDLORD, LETTING
AGENCY OR TENANCY SAW
AN IMPROVEMENT

STANDING BY PEOPLE WHO ARE STRUGGLING

We provide expert advice and support to people who need it, every single day of the year. The pandemic meant that the way we deliver our services has adapted, but our top priority remains the people we support.

HELPLINE

Our national emergency helpline helps us support people in crisis. Each conversation could be the difference between someone keeping or losing their home. This year, due to the impact of the pandemic on housing issues, we saw more calls than ever before.

In March 2020, almost 60% of calls to our helpline were directly or indirectly related to coronavirus. We spoke to people who had been threatened with eviction because their work brought them into contact with coronavirus patients, and regularly heard from households struggling with rent or mortgage payments because they had been furloughed or lost their jobs.

Based on a representative survey of people who came to us in 2020:

- 56% of households felt coronavirus and the response to the pandemic made their housing problem worse
- 57% of households felt the pandemic and the response to it had made finding a solution to their housing problem harder

Thanks to a partnership grant from the National Emergencies Trust, and other partners such as Nationwide Building Society, we were able to recruit 25 additional advisers to support our work on the emergency helpline. This made a significant difference in the number of people we have been able to support. In 20/21, 22,644 households received help from our England helpline services.

THANKS TO SHELTER IN 20/21

70%

OF HOUSEHOLDS WITH CONCERNS ABOUT THE EFFECTS THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC MIGHT HAVE ON THEIR HOUSING SITUATION SAW THEIR WORRIES REDUCED OR PUT TO REST



DIGITAL ADVICE

Our digital advice pages provide a wealth of regularly updated information, guides, tools, videos, letter templates and a webchat service, so people can access advice whenever they need it. We also built a dedicated page with coronavirus-related advice – including information on the eviction ban, illegal evictions, landlord access and other topics, alongside several new guides and templates.

Over the last financial year, we had 6.5 million visits to our Shelter England online advice pages – including an additional 500,000 visits to the ‘Get Help’ page – and 19,170 webchat conversations.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is a key point of contact for many seeking help. In 20/21, we gave tailored advice to 2,050 people on Facebook and Twitter and posted more advice content on our social media channels than ever, responding to the trends in the advice people seek.

HUBS

Our hubs across England offer advice and support on housing, welfare benefits, debt and more, often delivered in collaboration with local partners.

During the pandemic, we followed government guidance and took precautionary measures to protect our staff and those using our services by moving most of our face-to-face support to telephone advice, with exceptions for the most at risk. Our hubs worked closely with communities to ensure that those most in need were supported, especially people who were sleeping on the streets, in temporary accommodation, or living with multiple and complex needs.

In 20/21, 18,590 households came to our local hubs in England for advice and support. Here are a few examples of what our hubs did during the first lockdown:

- Shelter Sheffield, Bristol, Birmingham and Newcastle worked with local food banks to deliver food parcels
- Shelter Birmingham partnered with the Real Junk Food Project to provide food for families with school-aged children who might not have been able to afford to feed them during the day
- Shelter Newcastle and Sheffield provided mobile phones with credit to people so that we could remain in contact and provide welfare calls

AT OUR LONDON HUB, HERE'S HOW ADVICE SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE WORKER NIKI SUPPORTED SOMEONE IN URGENT NEED DURING LOCKDOWN:



A young woman who had lost her job because of the pandemic was served with a section 21 notice due to rent arrears. She tried to negotiate with her landlord, but they refused, and the council informed her they couldn't help as she was not priority need. The landlord applied for a possession order to the court and confirmed they'd follow the correct eviction process. When she approached Shelter she was very stressed. She didn't have support from family or friends and would have to sleep on the street if she was evicted.

I helped her apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment to cover the arrears and provided information on private renting and benefits. The council agreed to pay the deposit and one month's rent if she could find a private rented property. When she'd found somewhere to live, she sent this message:

I just wanted to say a big thank you for your kindness, support and all of the information you have provided me. The first real answers I received were from Shelter and I really appreciate it. The care you showed me during such a hard time made a real difference in my ability to find hope in a horrible situation. I'm eternally grateful.

SHELTER SHEFFIELD'S HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND RESETTLEMENT SERVICE

We're helping families, single people and multi-adult households in Sheffield find, keep and maintain their homes by providing tailored support through our Homelessness Prevention and Resettlement Service (HPR) and the Sheffield Intensive Family Support Service.

When the pandemic hit, our team moved their services online but left face-to-face on offer for the most vulnerable, ensuring they had access to food, medicine, and coronavirus tests.

In 20/21, the HPR Service supported 321 households who needed our help keeping their homes. As a result, 90% were able to avoid eviction, and 94% of those needing help liaising with their landlord or housing provider were effectively helped to do so.

To ensure the solutions we offer are long-term, the HPR Service provides support with any underlying economic issues or other compounding problems.

- 84% of people who had help managing their finances saw their income maximised
- 74% of people provided with mental health support were better able to manage their mental health

After people finish working with the service, we check in to make sure they're continuing to manage their accommodation. In 20/21, an average of 99% of people were still in their home when we checked in six, 12 and 24 months later.

We also have a Domestic Abuse Navigator Service, which saw increased demand during the pandemic and to date has helped 34 women and 53 children experiencing domestic abuse find a safer place to live.

THANKS TO SHELTER IN 20/21

61%

OF HOUSEHOLDS WITH FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES SAW AN IMPROVEMENT

66%

OF HOMELESS HOUSEHOLDS FOUND SOMEWHERE TO LIVE



Fiona's* story

When Fiona and her two children were referred to our Sheffield hub, they had been served notice due to rent arrears, a neighbour was causing them distress with anti-social behaviour, and their flat was in a very poor condition. They were living with a leaking roof, mould and damp, broken beds and cupboards, and a broken cooker.

The family's mental health plummeted, with both children self-harming. Communication with statutory services had broken down, and neither child had been to school for over a year.

Over six months, Support Worker Lucy helped them negotiate with the council for manageable rent repayments and remove the eviction threat. She followed up on the disrepair issues and reported the anti-social behaviour of the neighbour, which was subsequently dealt with. The family's home is now no longer dangerous to be in, and they are not at risk of homelessness.

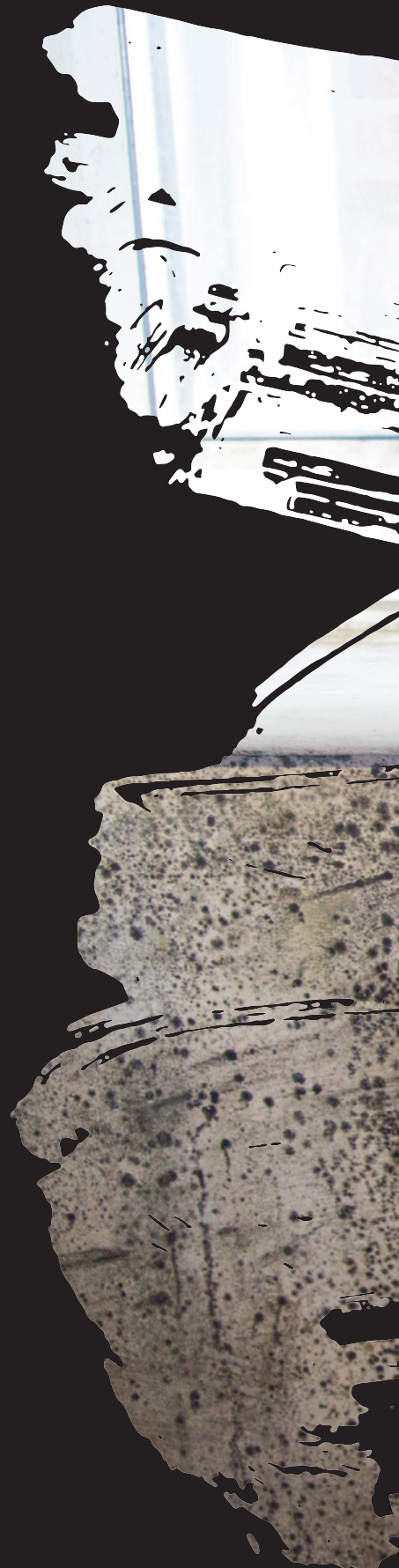
Lucy set up meetings with the school, with specialist provision for the children to attend agreed. The family's biggest improvement has been the positive impact on their mental health.



I don't know where I would be now if it wasn't for my support worker at Shelter.

FIONA

*names have been changed for anonymity





THANKS TO SHELTER IN 20/21

37%

OF HOUSEHOLDS SAW THEIR
POOR CONDITIONS IMPROVE

47%

OF HOUSEHOLDS FELT
THEIR UNSAFE HOUSE
OR AREA HAD IMPROVED

42%

OF PEOPLE SAID THEIR MENTAL
HEALTH HAD IMPROVED

50%

OF HOUSEHOLDS WITH
CHILDREN REPORTED AN
IMPROVEMENT IN THEIR
CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

B&Q DIY SKILLS ADVISERS

DIY skills advisers help people struggling with housing disrepair by providing practical support, basic DIY training and hands-on support – helping them turn unfit accommodation into safe, comfortable homes. We offer this service in England thanks to our partnership with B&Q, which funds the service through colleague and customer fundraising in stores and sites around the UK.

Following the outbreak of coronavirus in March 2020, the DIY skills adviser roles were adapted to complete over 240 emergency activities. They delivered food parcels, prescriptions and other supplies, and made wellbeing calls.

However, lockdown, social distancing and self-shielding measures meant that for much of the first half of the year, our DIY skills advisers weren't able to work and were furloughed. The tier system introduced in the autumn allowed some to return to work within the guidelines, but others remained unable to work and stayed on furlough.

Despite the disruptions caused by coronavirus, in 20/21:

- 113 households were helped by our DIY skills advisers
- Over 220 jobs were completed, including 43 that improved safety and security (e.g. door locks), 31 decorating jobs and 38 removals and deliveries



DIY skills adviser in action: Tom's* story

After coming out of residential rehab, Tom moved into a flat that was in a pretty depressing state. He wanted to create an environment where he felt happy and safe.

Tom made a start on some DIY but didn't have access to the right equipment. Our DIY skills adviser discussed with him what he was trying to achieve, and purchased the paint and decorating equipment from B&Q. Armed with the right materials, Tom was able to transform his flat into a comfortable space he can be proud of that will continue to support his recovery.

As well as making his flat a home, Tom said the project was invaluable in giving him something to focus on during the early stages of his recovery, and during lockdown. Tom has said he is incredibly grateful for all the advice and support we have provided over the last year.

*names have been changed for anonymity





SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITH COMPLEX NEEDS

All too often, people with homelessness, offending, addiction and mental health issues (collectively called 'multiple and complex needs') face barriers to the support they're entitled to. We have created innovative service models to ensure that we can provide ongoing, tailored support to people with multiple and complex needs.

IN 20/21, OF HOUSEHOLDS IN NEED OF MORE INTENSIVE SUPPORT

81%

SAW AN IMPROVEMENT TO THE
DOMESTIC ABUSE SITUATION
THEY WERE FACING

69%

SAW THEIR ABILITY TO MANAGE
MONEY AND BILLS IMPROVE

81%

SAW THEIR FAMILY LIFE AND
RELATIONSHIPS IMPROVE



OUR WORK IN THE JUSTICE SECTOR

Ensuring people transitioning out of the criminal justice sector are supported with their housing needs is essential to both their successful rehabilitation and tackling the housing emergency. We provide a range of services, including help to find or maintain accommodation – as well as finance, benefits and debt support. Our 'Through the Gate' resettlement service offers support from when the client is in prison, right through to when they're ready to re-integrate into the community.

During the pandemic, we increased our engagement with the people we support via regular emails and telephone calls, and offered targeted support to people with more complex needs and at higher risk of homelessness.

This year:

- 7,651 people in custody received support with their housing, finance and employment needs
- 1,941 people received support with their housing, finance and employment needs while in the community

As a result of our 'in custody' work:

- 52% of interventions resulted in people increasing their ability to find or keep safe, settled accommodation (3,983)
- 25% of interventions helped people find accommodation (1,926)
- 13% of interventions helped people stay in their homes (1,037)

With the people we supported in the community – either following release or because they were on community sentences – we saw:

- 792 interventions (37%) where people increased their ability to find or keep safe, settled accommodation
- 525 interventions (25%) where we helped people to find accommodation
- 225 interventions (11%) where we helped people to stay in their homes

Hannah's* story:

A new start

Hannah was in custody and had worked hard to overcome her substance misuse problem. She was completing her sentence in open conditions, which meant she could get a job outside the prison. Hannah began working at a supermarket and started saving up to rent a home on release, so she could have a fresh start.

When lockdown hit, the prison's open conditions were suspended, meaning Hannah couldn't work or view properties. We completed a duty to refer application with the city council so that they would help her find accommodation on release, which was accepted.

However, because she was in custody, Hannah didn't qualify for furlough and the supermarket suspended her contract. This led the city council to revoke its duty of care, as they claimed she no longer had a local link to the area.

We worked with Changing Lives to find accommodation for Hannah, completing a Homeless Prevention Taskforce (HPT) referral designed to help people coming out of prison find accommodation. Hannah was given a week-long stay at a hotel on release, during which time she managed to find a home. But the landlord requested six months' rent upfront, which Hannah didn't have, having not been paid since lockdown began.

We went back to the HPT, which provided further funding, and together with Changing Lives successfully applied to a number of different relief funds for the deposit. Hannah got the flat, was able to furnish it and – the last we heard – was due to resume working at the supermarket.

*names have been changed for anonymity

GETTING REAL OPPORTUNITIES OF WORK

Since 2015, we've been helping people with lived experience of homelessness, mental health problems, addiction, or with a history of offending back into work through our Getting Real Opportunities of Work (GROW) programme. GROW Traineeships are 12 to 18-month paid placements with work, training and personal development opportunities.

The GROW programme is one of the ways we aim to shift the power balance in favour of marginalised people. GROW trainees shape our services and campaigns through their lived experience and create change in their communities. We now have a GROW trainee working at Shelter to help others share their stories and support our campaigns.

GROW began in Manchester, and has expanded to London, Sheffield, Preston and Plymouth. We work with other organisations to run the GROW programme and are exploring more partnership opportunities. In December 2020, the programme won the Homeless Link Excellence Award for Co-Production during coronavirus.

Since the GROW programme began, 57 people have been enrolled. The current cohort consists of four people, with a further five completing their traineeship in 2020/21. A total of 49 GROW trainees have graduated from their traineeship into further employment, including jobs with not-for-profit organisations like our own, and setting up their own business.

STEVE, A CURRENT GROW TRAINEE, REFLECTS ON THE IMPACT IT'S HAVING ON HIS LIFE:



Being given this opportunity has enabled me to come off benefits, which has really helped my self-esteem. Coupled with that is the purpose that working has given me. I cannot state enough how important that is. It allows me to feel like a functioning member of society, something that I never thought I would be able to say.

INSPIRING CHANGE MANCHESTER

Inspiring Change Manchester (ICM), funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, offers long-term, personalised support to people with multiple disadvantages. We work closely with different service providers, ensuring the support on offer is joined-up. During coronavirus, we provided support through online, phone and video contact.

Since 2014, 429 people have used our support, and 75% of people surveyed have started to feel they could make a positive difference to their life and their future. An independent evaluation concluded that by investing in longer-term support, we save public money. As of 2019, the programme had saved up to £130,000 that was then available for wider public services.

One of the barriers to accessing support was that people had to retell their story each time they spoke to a new service provider. We therefore created GM-THINK, a shared database that coordinates staff to develop a support plan, now used by 20 organisations in Manchester.

We set up our Women's Voices Group to bring together women with multiple disadvantages to feel empowered to advocate to key policymakers. The group have influenced the re-design of local homelessness strategies to be more inclusive of women's needs.

ICM has also employed 49 GROW trainees who have helped shape and deliver the programme.

In the future, we aim to influence even more, building on our findings that:

- One in five people who use ICM have been in local authority care (compared to just 2% of the general population)
- Women facing multiple disadvantages are often overlooked when it comes to receiving long-term support
- Over one in three people we worked with have a recognised disability or learning need

Since its launch seven years ago, of those who have now left the programme, 124 people (41%) completed their time on the programme, which takes an average of 12 months, either finding they could now manage on their own or planning to move to other support. 184 people (59%) left the programme by disengaging or moving out of the area. We will spend the final year of this project exploring the reasons for this, focusing on helping people to transition into longer-term support.



SHELTER BIRMINGHAM'S NO WRONG DOOR NAVIGATOR SERVICE

The No Wrong Door (NWD) Network brings together service providers that help people with multiple disadvantages by improving the quality of support and making it easier to access. All services provided by the network require a single referral form, and there is a Navigator Service which offers support to people struggling to access services on their own.

An evaluation of the network found that people felt their care was badly coordinated, so the Navigators began running multi-agency meetings for people who were being supported by three or more service providers. The meetings ensure that all services involved in the client's care know which area they are responsible for, and which tasks they should be completing, ensuring joined-up support.

We've had positive feedback from both our own and other NWD Network members on this collaborative way of working, who said that it's been 'really useful to meet other staff involved in a client's care', that it made cases 'more manageable..[knowing] who is responsible for each of the actions on the client's support plan', and that 'there's less chance of a client getting confused or falling through the gaps'.

We now offer a resources pack and training to each organisation, so they can run their own multi-agency meetings.

Since January 2018 when the Navigator Service launched, we've worked with 645 people, 62% (401) of whom had three or more complex needs.

- 91% were homeless or at risk of homelessness
- 90% had mental health issues
- 62% were misusing substances
- 49% were at risk of offending or reoffending

After working with the service, 92% (595) of people had positive outcomes. Over half of these people (54%) successfully accessed the services they needed, and 35% were helped by a Navigator who directed them to the 'right door' for support from us or another organisation in the network.

Michael's* story

Michael contacted the NWD Navigator Service after outreach staff recommended he ask us for support with filling out forms to access welfare benefits.

Michael had tried to access housing support in the past but was told he wasn't eligible as he wasn't from the area. He'd also had negative experiences in shared accommodation which put him off getting help, as he felt safer on the streets.

Michael was struggling with drug addiction, so the Navigator found him a place at rehab. Without his Navigator to motivate him, Michael says he probably wouldn't have attended the initial appointment.

His Navigator put him in touch with Change Grow Live to get his methadone prescription, and helped him contact Trident for support with accessing benefits. Michael was very positive about his experience and said it gave him hope about accessing support services in the future.

*names have been changed for anonymity

HELPING OTHERS FIGHT THE HOUSING EMERGENCY

The wide range of professionals from outside Shelter who support the people we help, such as housing officers, advice workers and solicitors, are fundamental to our purpose.

Through our training and support, we help them tackle the housing emergency. Together, we can have a much greater impact, and better help people whose housing rights are denied or at risk.

During lockdown, our teams moved to homeworking. They continued to provide essential support to professionals across England who needed to find safe ways to keep helping people with housing issues while handling new challenges posed by the pandemic.

NATIONAL HOMELESSNESS ADVICE SERVICE

Funded by MHCLG, the National Homelessness Advice Service (NHAS) provides professionals with the latest information on housing, homelessness and social welfare law and policy, so they can support people as quickly and efficiently as possible. We offer this through free training, resources, an advice line and a webchat service, which can be accessed by local authorities, public authorities, and other local and national voluntary advice organisations in England.

In light of the pandemic, we moved all training online, providing webinars on a range of housing-related topics that included the impact of coronavirus. We also extended our webchat hours and published coronavirus-related resources on the NHAS and Shelter Legal websites and in our e-bulletins.

NHAS ADVICE LINE

11,873

Cases were handled by the consultancy helpline, with enquiries from local authority, public authority and advice agency staff

98%

Of the 2,597 users who responded to NHAS advice line survey were either happy or very happy with the service received

TRAINING

846

Training sessions (online webinars) delivered to over 16,029 participants

98%

Of the 6,477 users who responded to the NHAS training survey rated the overall training as excellent, very good or good

SPECIALIST DEBT ADVICE SERVICE

Our Specialist Debt Advice Service (SDAS) provides accurate, timely support and advice on complex debt cases to professionals through a helpline staffed with expert debt advisers, along with other resources.

During the pandemic, we saw more enquiries about issues caused by the Financial Conduct Authority's forbearance measures, such as payment breaks on loans, credit cards and mortgages.

In 20/21, we dealt with 3,339 complex debt enquiries from local Citizens Advice, local authority, housing associations and other advice agency staff. The top three enquiry topics were related to debt relief orders, bankruptcy and county courts, where we advise on how to deal with court judgement debts.

Of the 296 professionals who responded to our SDAS Feedback Survey:

- 92% were very happy with the overall service they received
- 90% told us the information and advice given was clear and helpful for their client
- 90% got what they needed from SDAS and felt confident with their next steps

In our SDAS Outcomes Survey, 84% of professionals who used our service said it helped them feel more confident in dealing with their current case, while 91% said they would feel more confident in the future with similar cases. In 65% of cases, the people the professionals were supporting found their overall financial situation was either a little or much better than when they first asked for advice.

TRAINING

Shelter Training equips professionals with the knowledge and skills to fight housing injustice by offering courses on homelessness, housing law, welfare and debt to both individuals and groups. We also provide a tailored consultancy service.

During coronavirus, we organised a comprehensive series of webinars on the latest legislative changes. In 20/21, 361 commercial webinars were delivered to over 5,000 delegates. Delegates attended from almost two-thirds of English local authorities, supporting our aim to improve the delivery of housing services.

In the last year, we've developed our Employee Housing Wellbeing programme for large employers, which helps organisations to identify, understand and offer support on any housing issues their staff may be facing.



ANTI-RACISM



IN OUR WORK

We are committed to becoming an actively anti-racist organisation and recognise we have not done enough in the past to tackle racism. We are now taking a variety of steps to improve the impact we have for people in marginalised groups, including People of Colour.



OUR RESEARCH: DISCRIMINATION AND THE HOUSING EMERGENCY

In May 2021, we published a major new report, 'Denied the Right to a Safe Home', which revealed not only the scale of the housing emergency, but also the gross inequality in the housing system. It showed that more than 17 million people in Britain are impacted by the emergency, and how those in marginalised groups are disproportionately affected.

Our research found that Black people are 70% more likely to be impacted by the emergency than White people, and Asian people are 50% more likely.

We highlighted the prevalence of discrimination in housing. Two million adults in Britain say they've faced discrimination when looking for a home.

'No DSS' policies and practices within the private rented sector create huge barriers to accessing private rented homes. This discrimination is more likely to affect women, disabled people, and Black and Bangladeshi families.

The government's 'no recourse to public funds' policy stops many migrants from accessing Universal Credit and homelessness assistance, and disproportionately affects People of Colour.

Structural racism and discrimination mean the odds are stacked. If you're Black or Asian, gay or bisexual, disabled, or a single mum, the housing emergency is much more likely to impact you.

These issues are linked to structural inequalities in housing. For example, many marginalised groups are more likely to be on a low income, so are forced into unsuitable homes.

And there is a long history of structural racism in housing. Historically, Black, Asian or other minority ethnic households were more likely to be offered poorer quality homes or 'steered' into certain neighbourhoods. Many of these already run down neighbourhoods haven't seen the investment they need and have declined even more over the years.

OUR GOAL: DISMANTLING RACISM IN HOUSING

Building on our report, we're working to gather further evidence that will give us greater insight into how racism impacts the people we help, and the housing system more broadly. This includes listening to people who have experienced racism and learning from others who have been working to dismantle it, looking to other third sector organisations' best practice for collecting and understanding data, and ensuring

we collect data from those who we support in a consistent and sensitive way. We also want to ensure that the data collection includes a number of characteristics in addition to race, such as gender, sexual orientation and disability.

Based on this evidence, we'll work with other organisations and in communities to provide tailored, more accessible support to marginalised groups through our services. And we're examining how we can improve our campaigning and communications to better tackle racism. For example, by

involving more people with lived experience from diverse backgrounds in our campaigning, and by working with other organisations to raise awareness and challenge discriminatory policies and practices.

As we work towards becoming an anti-racist organisation, our aim is to dismantle racism and the structures that uphold it in the UK's housing system, proactively making anti-racism part of our everyday work. We are determined to deliver a much stronger impact for all those affected.



METHODOLOGY

This report is informed by the following:

- The Outcomes Survey is a quantitative telephone survey that was carried out with approximately 2,000 clients from England by research agency BMG Research. The interviews were conducted at least three months after a case was closed with us (and no more than a year after case closure).
- The sample is broadly representative of our total client population, weighted based on type of service received (support, Advice Support Guidance (ASG), legal, helpline), and broad geographical regions (North, South and Central). Soft quotas were monitored to match the interview sample broadly to the profile of our clients on the characteristics of age, gender and the client's goal. Each client represents a household, which can contain multiple occupants.
- The incidence of issues people were experiencing was taken from responses in the survey, rather than management information we hold from our services.
- The proportions of people who achieved specific outcomes excludes those who said 'Don't know' or 'Too early to say', and the questions were only asked to those who said they had the problem.
- The absolute numbers of people either experiencing a problem or achieving a solution are estimates, calculated based on the proportions experiencing the issue, and proportions with a positive change. We apply these proportions to the number of cases closed in 2020 to produce conservatively rounded estimates.
- Data was also gathered from a number of services that collect routine information on outcomes and outputs throughout service use.
- Internal management information provides the figures on how many people we help each year through our helplines, digital, face-to-face and legal services.
- Two third-party social media management tools called Conversocial and Orlo have been used to internally monitor conversations on Shelter's social channels, including advice queries received.
- The technical report contains more detailed information.

**HOME IS
EVERYTHING**





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