

Designing out Homelessness with Faith & Community Groups



West Midlands
Combined Authority

Mayor of the
West Midlands



Introduction

Homelessness is harmful to individuals, families, communities and society and its causes are complex. It can happen to anyone, but we know that people are at an increased risk of homelessness when certain factors are broken or lost; including good health, good work, supportive relationships and safe, affordable accommodation.

Across the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) region the top three reasons for homeless applications to local authorities consistently include:



Being asked to leave the family home, or the home of friends



Loss of a tenancy



Fleeing domestic abuse

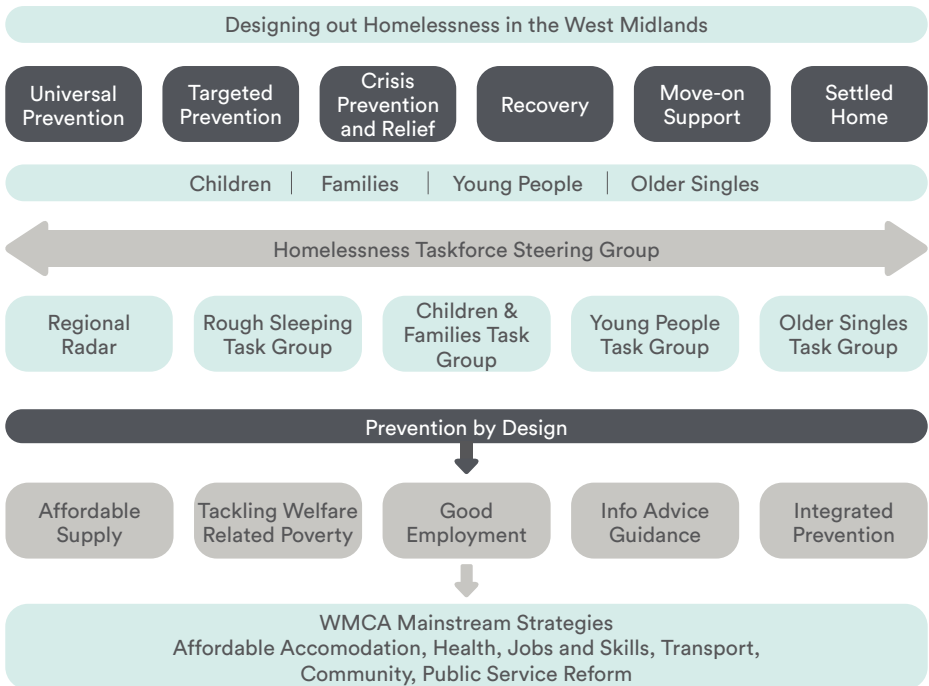
Designing in preventative measures through ensuring the right systems, policies, procedures and partnerships are in place, can mean the difference between homelessness being prevented and someone finding themselves in crisis.

Designing out Homelessness

The WMCA Homelessness Taskforce was established in 2017, with the aim to design out homelessness. The Taskforce membership includes all seven constituent local authorities, representation from non-constituent local authorities, key public sector agencies, voluntary, private and charitable organisations, working together to prevent and relieve homelessness.

The purpose of the Homelessness Taskforce has been to ensure that we are drawing on our collective resources to tackle homelessness, in all its forms. The Taskforce recognises that homelessness can occur in many ways, including rough sleeping, sofa surfing, night-shelters, B&B, temporary accommodation, hostels and squatting.

Our collaboration across the region, across sectors and disciplines, has led us to focus on and tackle the troubled systems that contribute to homelessness and replace with approaches and processes which prevent and design out homelessness.



The work of the Homelessness Taskforce is integral to the mainstream activity of the WMCA. The WMCA has no statutory duties, powers or resources around homelessness, but in designing out homelessness, is committed to identifying and addressing gaps in policies, procedures, laws, structures, systems and relationships that either cause or fail to prevent homelessness.

We recognise the importance of working in partnership with faith and community groups to design, coproduce and deliver new approaches to the prevention of homelessness. Together we can successfully design out homelessness.

A Positive Pathway Approach

The headline rough sleeping trends for the WMCA area showed an increase in rough sleeping between 2010 and 2018.

In the past two years rough sleeping across the WMCA region has fallen by 32% in 2019 and a further 62% in 2020. The figures for the WMCA region in the 2020 rough sleeper count showed a decrease in rough sleepers from 115 to 44. The lowest number in 10 years.

The situation on the streets has changed considerably over the past year due to the impact of Covid-19 and the 'Everyone-In' response. Additional resources, changes in practice and a greater emphasis on cross sector partnership working has provided a unique opportunity.

While it is important to highlight what has been achieved in working towards these reductions there has been, and continues to be, a flow of individuals coming onto the streets. This flow includes individuals who have never slept rough before as well as those people that have returned to rough sleeping.

To reduce rough sleeping to as close to zero as possible we need to develop new preventative approaches that work as part of a positive pathway which is designed to help as many people as possible to avoid rough sleeping in the first place. The positive pathway, which we describe in greater detail below, will work best when we collaborate and harness the unique contributions that partners of all types and sizes can bring to the critical task of preventing homelessness.

Universal Prevention

The knowledge, resilience, options, and opportunities that stop homelessness

Targeted Prevention

Right person, right time, stepping in quickly and effectively so no homelessness results

Crisis Prevention & Relief

Reducing harm & time homeless with everything pointing out of crisis

Recovery

Caring, learning, rebuilding, establishing

Move-On Support

Transitioning practical help, making things work, overcoming isolation

Settled Home

Community, protection, opportunity, growth, flourishing in a settled home

The positive pathway approach is a flexible framework that can be used in developing planned approaches to homelessness prevention. It is recognised that homelessness is not a linear process or experience, the positive pathway approach therefore looks to ensure that support is provided across all areas where someone may need it. Consequently, the WMCA Homelessness Taskforce seek to work with partners in ensuring approaches and support are developed across all areas of the pathway. This contributes in working towards our overall aim of designing out homelessness across the region.

The challenge now is to continue and sustain the reductions in rough sleeping by developing new and innovative prevention focused approaches. It is clear that for faith and community groups, homelessness across the region is a cause of enormous concern, and an area of great action. Historically support has been focused on street-based interventions. We now need to work on delivering provision that enables people to thrive within their homes and feel part of their local communities, including:

- Digital inclusion activities
- Developing employment skills
- Befriending and mentoring
- Activities that support with improving physical and mental well-being
- Activities that develop social networks and a sense of community
- Activities focused on developing independent living skills

We know that faith and community groups can provide a positive and unique contribution to supporting individuals who are rough sleeping and as importantly for those who are at risk of rough sleeping.

We are still at the start of this important journey towards prevention. To help us gather and sustain momentum, this booklet contains suggestions for how faith and community groups can support and help shape that journey.

Our Commitment to Collaborate with Faith and Community Groups

Homelessness was highlighted as a key theme in the Mayoral Faith Action Plan in 2018. Since this time, we have been exploring and developing ways in which the Homelessness Taskforce can collaborate and work in partnership with faith and community groups to design out homelessness across the region.

As part of that collaboration there is a clear offer to faith and community groups to work together with us to design and offer targeted support and activities, promoting best practice and offering involvement with [Change into Action](#), the region's alternative giving scheme.

Faith and Communities Development Officer

In 2020 the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), as part of the national Rough Sleeping Initiative programme, funded the appointment of a WMCA Faith and Communities Development Officer for Homelessness.

This role is key in building our approach and offering a range of opportunities for collaboration and coproduction including the following:

- Training and opportunities to upskill volunteers, staff and trustees
- Practical advice and guidance in how to support individuals who are rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping
- Sharing and promoting best practice and supporting changes to practice
- Funding opportunities
- Developing and facilitating both new and established partnerships

Engagement with Faith and Community Groups

We know that an important part of collaboration is listening and learning, so as part of the Faith and Communities Development Officer role a coproduction event took place in August 2020. The aim of the event was to both outline the offer of support available for faith and community groups but also to listen to groups so we could identify some of their needs and develop a shared work programme for the following year.

Some of the key themes that came out of this event directly informed the package of training that we delivered in 2020/21, for example workshops on Governance and Accountability, Psychologically Informed Environments and Impact Measurement.

Discussions at this event helped us to identify how we can develop new activity in partnership with the wide range of groups that work across the region and through that partnership deliver the shared aim of designing out homelessness.

The event was the start of ongoing engagement with groups which is helping us all understand and articulate examples of some of the excellent support that is being provided already and importantly highlighting where there are gaps.

This dialogue is helping us to identify some of the needs of groups across the region and creates an opportunity to support their development, improve relationships and increase shared understanding.

The collaboration between faith and community groups and the Faith and Communities Development Officer has led to a variety of positive outcomes. Examples of this include the delivery of a small-scale Innovation Fund, support with coordination of emergency food provision and improving relationships between groups and commissioned outreach services.

Testing Innovation

Collectively we have been able to create opportunities for faith and community groups to test out new and innovative prevention-based approaches to working with individuals who are currently rough sleeping or are at risk of rough sleeping. Over the past twelve months we have worked in collaboration with six faith and community groups to develop and test new types of support that focus on prevention. Here are just two case studies that highlight this in more detail.

Case Studies

The Good Shepherd, Wolverhampton

The Good Shepherd was established by the Brothers of St John of God, a religious order who have supported the local community for over 40 years in Wolverhampton. They have run a food and support service for people who are homeless in Wolverhampton since 2003 and over the last two years expanded the support they offer to include a day centre, meaningful activity programme, housing first service, and private sector supported lettings scheme. They also host a multi-agency hub bringing together a wide range of agencies including health, education, training, and support services.

In January 2021 The Good Shepherd delivered a three-month photography project looking specifically at “discarded objects” and “urban waste”. The aim for this project was to support individuals through this medium in developing new skills and reducing social isolation. The people involved took cameras out to find images that met the brief, they spent time with a professional photographer on some of their field trips and participated in post-production work.

Not all of the group were interested in photography so those who weren't either researched relevant quotations or engaged in creative writing. Several pieces of work were taken as tutorials and all the actions were digitally recorded so they can be used as educational tools illustrating the processes involved. The same practice was applied to the video produced where all the production methods have been retained and can be used in training.

For one of the people involved, the project was used to support and engage them in working towards the move away from rough sleeping. At the start of the project the focus was on working on what the person wanted to express so they discussed whether they would initially want to photograph the tent they were staying in. By starting with the person's experience and building their engagement the sessions and informal support offered helped develop trust and created opportunities to discuss their circumstances in more detail. Through the trust that was developed the person was able to sustain better engagement with other agencies and has ultimately led to them securing permanent accommodation, building increased confidence and improved well-being.

The project had a variety of positive impacts for attendees, it was successful in showcasing skills, had therapeutic value and supported in engagement with other services. Initially the project was due to be completed with an exhibition but given the restrictions on social gatherings during the pandemic an online exhibition is now being developed with an accompanying book to promote and show case the work of participants.

Tabor House, Birmingham

Tabor House, as part of Father Hudson's Care, provides accommodation and support for up to eleven individuals who have been rough sleeping in Birmingham and is operated by a team of staff and volunteers. The project initially opened as a night shelter in 2017 and since 2020 has operated as a Covid secure accommodation project across two sites. The initial night shelter itself has had space converted into individual pods operating 24/7 and a three bedroom move on house has been introduced. Tabor House also deliver outreach provision within the city of Birmingham and have worked in partnership with the local authority in delivering support to individuals accommodated in emergency provision during the "Everyone In" programme.

In February 2021 Tabor House began the delivery of creative arts sessions for residents. The medium they used was a series of drum workshops which aimed to improve well-being and to create the space for improving English language skills.

Through discussion Tabor House residents had voiced a desire for additional activities as a way of coping with the emotional impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Staff worked with residents to coproduce activities based on people's aspirations. During the first weeks of the programme residents were apprehensive, however over the following weeks they remained engaged and began to enjoy the activity. Once trust was established the facilitator worked with residents to discuss how they were feeling during the pandemic. Through coming together over the weeks residents began to share their thoughts which was then used to cocreate a poem. On the final week of the programme this was then performed with the drum rhythms that had been learned.

This activity helped to reduce the risk of people abandoning Tabor House and returning to rough sleeping by actively offering residents the opportunity to engage in an activity that they had helped to design that was aimed at improving their well-being and increasing their skills. Importantly using their own experiences as the start point for dialogue.

A good example of the impact is demonstrated by the experience of one resident who had experienced rough sleeping after losing their job. Initially they did not want to engage with other residents and had difficulty expressing their feelings. Through attending the drum workshop they had the opportunity to begin to feel part of a group with staff and other residents.

This was important given ongoing worries about their ability to obtain new work and to keep them engaged and safe while support was being offered to them to obtain a bank account and accessing benefits. Similarly, the opportunity to improve their English language skills had a significant impact and with the support of staff the person was encouraged to keep on working on this during their stay. The combination of both the activity itself and development of new skills had a significant impact on increasing their confidence which supported their engagement with other agencies and helped them work towards moving on from Tabor House in a positive way.

The successful delivery of this programme with residents at Tabor House has had numerous positive benefits. Taking the learning from this Tabor House are aiming to continue the development and delivery of activities for residents that are coproduced in this way and focus on preventing rough sleeping by increasing people's sense of well-being, relevant skills and by helping people develop new and positive relationships.

WMCA Ask and Offer

The case studies presented in this booklet demonstrate good examples of both best practice and innovation in offering new types of support. **Our ask** of faith and community groups is to continue to work with us in developing and designing these new, creative and innovative approaches to prevent homelessness.

When thinking about developing new support options or changing practice here are some questions that can be helpful to ask yourselves as a starting point:

- What other support exists in our area and do we risk duplication?
- Is there a known and identified need for this support?
- How can we engage with our local authority and other organisations as part of a positive pathway?
- Will the support we offer reduce and prevent rough sleeping, and other forms of homelessness or will it inadvertently sustain it?
- What are the people we are aiming to support telling us is important to them?

Where an individual is known to be rough sleeping or at risk it is important that they are able to receive support as soon as possible. **Our ask** of faith and community groups is to continue to work with local authorities and to support local strategies and referral pathways to ensure individuals are able to get the support they need.

Access to good and trusted support at the right time can act as an important protective factor. [StreetLink](#), a website, mobile app and phone service for England and Wales can be used to connect individuals rough sleeping to local support services that can help to end their homelessness. Any member of the public can submit a referral, and this acts as a key way in which local authorities and local partners can engage with and identify individuals rough sleeping and ensure they get the relevant support and can access accommodation.

Another way in which you or your group or organisation can support individuals who are rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping is through [Change into Action](#). This is an alternative giving scheme that has been created in partnership by the Mayor of the West Midlands, the Homelessness Taskforce, local authorities, voluntary sector organisations and business representatives.

Change into Action has three objectives:

- Providing the public with information about homelessness
- Providing the public a way in which to give money to support people who are or have been rough sleeping or who are at risk of rough sleeping
- Enabling the public to identify and locate individuals rough sleeping so that they can be connected to local support services

We are committed to working in partnership with faith and community groups to reduce and prevent rough sleeping as part of the broader drive to design out homelessness. This means that we are making the following **offer** to faith and community groups:

- We will **work together** to develop new prevention focused support for those at risk of rough sleeping
- We will **support you** in developing strong relationships with local authorities
- We will **help you** to contribute to and understand local authority strategies and rough sleeping pathways
- We will **promote** the provision of practical advice and guidance in supporting individuals who are at risk of rough sleeping
- We will help by **sharing learning** and best practice
- We will help by providing **partnership working opportunities** with both voluntary sector and other faith and community groups
- We will **coproduce and facilitate** new training and learning opportunities for groups

To find out more about how we can work together please contact us by email: homelessness@wmca.org.uk



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