



Designing Out Homelessness

Briefing Paper



**West Midlands
Combined Authority**

WMCA Homelessness Taskforce

The WMCA Homelessness Taskforce's strategic objective is to design out homelessness, in all its forms, and to promote sustainable and meaningful INclusion for all citizens.

INclusion is the opposite of what many people experience where their circumstances, and systems responses to those circumstances, create a cycle of exclusion that results in being further and further away from creating and sustaining a meaningful and safe life, leading to the ultimate exclusion that is homelessness.

The Taskforce's ambition to design out homelessness is based on the principle that we need a shared cross sectoral approach to tackling structural inequalities focussing on how service systems respond to people's needs and how service systems inter-relate with each other so that service systems are inclusive of everyone, irregardless of life circumstances.

Homelessness and the risk of homelessness

The region is working towards a future where rough sleeping is prevented wherever possible, so it is rare, and where it occurs it is brief and non-recurring. However, homelessness and the risk of homelessness is not confined to rough sleeping, this visible form of homelessness is just the tip of the iceberg.

The Homelessness Taskforce is concerned with all forms of homelessness because the reality of homelessness is much broader than rough sleeping as there are many hidden forms of homelessness that are harder to see and measure including:

- 'Homeless at home' e.g. overcrowding, unfit habitation
- Squatting
- Families with children in temporary accommodation, refuge, hotels and B&B
- Individuals staying in night shelters, hostels and supported accommodation
- Sofa surfing (sleeping on friend's sofas) and other unstable solutions including intermittent hospital and prison stays



Homelessness and Systems

Having to make a homelessness presentation at a local authority or actually becoming homeless should never be the preferred or intentional route to housing. Too often, however it is the default outcome in a system where need hugely outstrips supply, resulting in allocations systems being forced to focus on those in the most desperate circumstances.

As a region we should aspire to an accessible, affordable, desirable housing offer which underpins people's ability to live, work, earn and learn - to make and keep a home and to be safe. Without that offer, the cycle of homelessness is perpetuated and activity remains focused on short-term crisis measures that often only delay the inevitable outcomes of homelessness and exclusion.

The Taskforce does not subscribe to the concept that 'we are all just a pay cheque away from homelessness'. It recognises that homelessness can affect anyone, but some people are more at risk than others, and that the majority of the population will have critical protective factors in place that mean they can overcome shocks and crisis. Whilst lifestyles and opportunities may change for them they will not become homeless. Protective factors include things like having a steady income, savings, positive social and family networks, secure housing tenure, and good health. People with these in factors in place, whilst their lifestyles and opportunities may change, are very unlikely to become homeless.

Homelessness, therefore comes about through a combination of structural and personal 'risk' factors; and the (in)ability of services and systems to come together to prevent and relieve homelessness. The structural factors at play include income distribution, supply of affordable housing and the insecurity of tenure. The personal reasons that impact on people range from physical and mental ill-health, domestic abuse, lack of family support and the absence of other protective factors.

What do we mean by 'designing out homelessness'?

- Designing out homelessness means ensuring that our mainstream services and systems are INclusive, and keep people IN their homes, jobs, communities, education, and connected to safe support.
- Homelessness prevention is treated as an intentional, perpetual process that promotes and enables the protective factors noted above.
- As much support and help as possible is focussed on preventing homelessness at the earliest opportunity.
- Where people have already experienced homelessness we should focus on making that a non-recurring experience and design out multiple exclusions for people.

To help make sense of this critical challenge, the Taskforce has taken a life-course approach using an adapted version of the Positive Pathway Model¹, examining what we have in place and where the gaps exist, for children and families, young people, and older people, paying particular attention to those who are serially excluded.

¹Initially developed by St Basils to prevent youth homelessness.

Positive Pathway Model



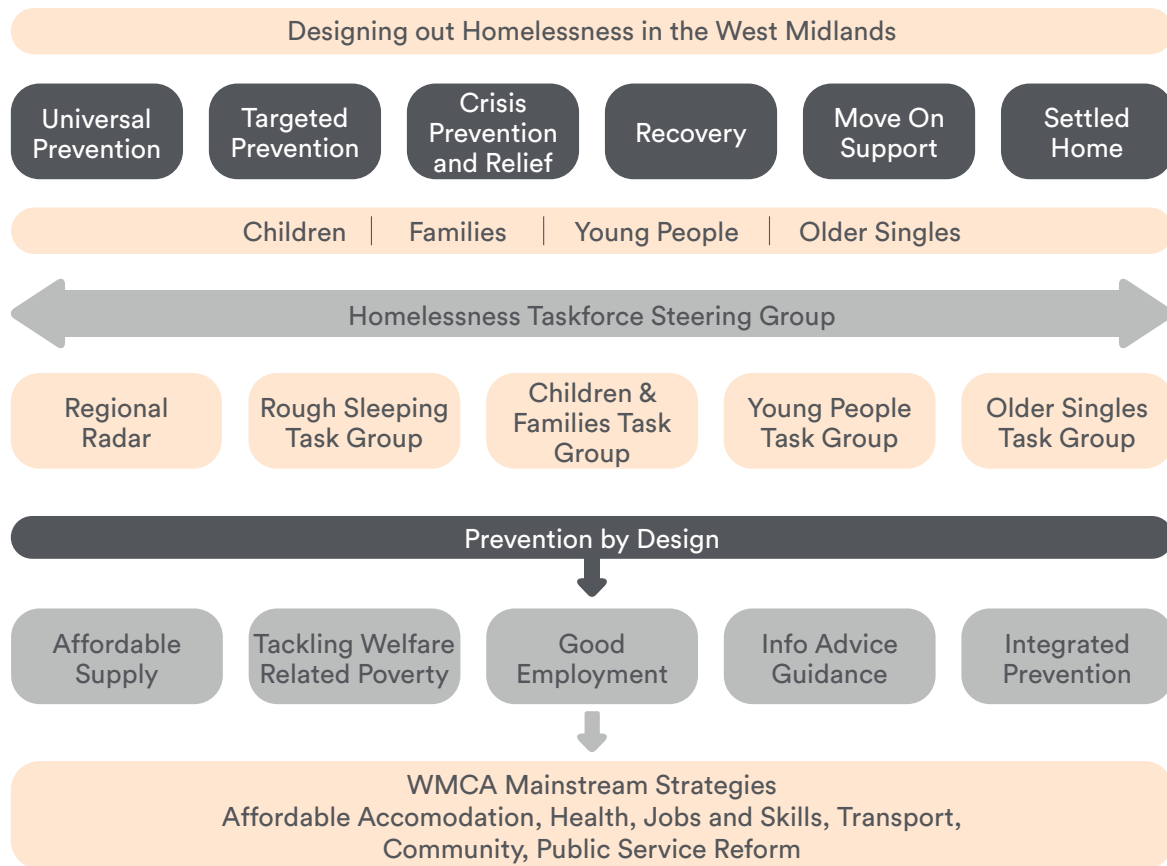
Most homelessness or homelessness-related services are focused on the ‘help’ space of the model, when people are either already homeless or at immediate risk of being so. This approach helps us to reflect and refocus our efforts on promoting protective factors for those at most risk of exclusion and to redeploy as much investment and activity as possible in what we refer to as the ‘universal prevention’ space.

The approach requires the wholehearted collaboration of service systems well beyond housing and homelessness services. It relies on the delivery of shared and joint up ways of supporting citizens so that there are fewer gaps and more bridges between service systems. It is about intentionally promoting and nurturing the positive community relationships and connections that build resilience and maximise people’s protective factors.

Designing out homelessness means that wherever possible we are intentionally planning, investing and delivering services that promote and sustain INclusion and promote protective factors for everyone.

Lastly it means encouraging and enabling service systems to harness their efforts so that their individual activity and interventions are adding intentional value to each other’s work rather than unintentionally undermining them.

What does this mean in practice?



The graphic above depicts the Taskforce’s ‘plan on a page’ which sets out 5 key areas that we are focusing our designing out homelessness activity on:

- Accessible Affordable Accommodation (housing supply)
- Tackling Welfare Related Poverty
- Access to Good Employment
- Information, Advice and Guidance
- Integration of Prevention Activity

Creating positive change in these 5 areas will lead to systemic improvement in the prevention of homelessness across sectors and geography. Below are a few examples of the actions we are taking to create that positive change:

- Lobbying for an increase in supply of ‘truly affordable’ and secure accommodation across the region.
- Promoting collaboration between service systems and helping them to prevent homelessness through the **C2C Toolkit**.
- Promoting joined up approaches between Children’s Early Help Services, Housing Services and providers so that collectively they promote protective factors for families and have a universal, as well as a targeted prevention offer.



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