

## Life Off the Streets Core Group

**In attendance** David Eastwood (Charing), Jamie Carswell (RB Greenwich), Michelle Binfield (LC), Kathy Mohan (Housing Justice), Jeremy White (Homeless Link), Gabrielle Smart (GLA), Chris Pelham (City), Luke Oates (GLA), Heather Clarke (WCC), Tom Preest (DLUHC), Jemma Gilbert (THP), Candida Thompson (LB Newham), Liz McCulloch (St Mungos), David Orton (GLA), Lorna Brooke (RB Kingston), Juliet Mountford (Crisis), Emma de Zoete (GLA), Liza Collins (THP), Saskia Prichard (MOJ), Ajitha Sajeev (LB Newham), Paul Davis (LB Lambeth), Petra Salva (St Mungos), Rianne Lowe (LC), Amy Withey (LC), Peter Smith (Homeless Link), Riad Akbur (LB Tower Hamlets), Rose Clewlow (LB Camden, Elizabeth Kirk (GLA), Ben Ridley-Johnson (LC) (minutes).

**New attendees** Steph Ratcliffe (St Mungos) Madeleine Kehrner (Southwark Law Centre) Alan Bull (HO), Jacob Graham (HO), Nadeem Ammed (HO), Stephen Miller (HO), Mike Fill (LB Tower Hamlets), Claire Portlock, Rachel Marshall (St Martin-in-the-fields Charity)

### **Apologies received**

Richard Chapman, Karen Tipping, Natalie King

### **1 Welcome and introductions**

David Eastwood (Chair) welcomed members and new attendees.

### **2 Minutes and Actions from the Previous Meeting (21 February)**

Emma de Zoete noted a minor correction on Sara Bainbridge's title in a section of the minutes presented. Chair thanked her and it was agreed with that noted the Minutes and Actions were agreed to be an accurate and true reflection of the last meeting.

### **3 Life off the Streets Strategic Data Advisory Group TOR – Luke Oates (GLA)**

Luke Oates presented on the proposal to establish a data advisory group for rough sleeping in London. The group would provide greater transparency and accountability for decisions regarding data and systems related to rough sleeping. The proposed group would cover areas such as the new strategic insights tool, changes to the chain recording system, changes to DLUHC systems, guidance on CHI indicators, and improving data usage across the sector. Jeremy Swain was proposed as an independent chair for the group.

Emma de Zoete suggested involving potential research partners from the start to maximise opportunities for collaboration.

Jamie Carswell welcomed the proposal and emphasised the importance of steering the development of the Strategic Insights Tool.

Chris Pelham suggested involving the Association of Directors of Children's Services and ensuring representation from boroughs across different regions.

Michelle Binfield reassured Jamie about the strategic oversight of the Strategic Insights tool and mentioned the existence of a steering group managing its development.

**Support for the Strategic Data Advisory Group indicated by Chair.**

**Actions:** Jeremy Swain agreed to be appointed as Strategic Advisory Group Chair. Any comments from Core Group on this group's activity to be fed into set up and meeting agenda by Luke Oates (GLA) and Ben Ridley-Johnson (London Councils)

**4 Workforce Activity Update – Pete Smith (Homeless Link) and Rachel Marshall (St Martin-in-the-Fields Charity)**

Homeless Link Workforce Survey

Peter Smith opened the discussion by acknowledging the collaborative effort involved in the LOTS Workforce activity, with support from organisations such as London Councils, GLA, Petra, and MUNGOS. He mentioned that the purpose of the discussion was to highlight the various work done by the group and sector in relation to the homelessness sector's workforce.

Peter provided an overview of Homeless Link's survey, conducted between May and June of last year. The survey had 3,000 respondents from various job roles and locations. It aimed to understand the workforce's perspectives on their careers, challenges, required skills, and recruitment/retention issues.

The survey showed that individuals were motivated to work in the sector due to their values and the desire to make a positive difference. However, challenges like workload and staff shortages, along with funding constraints, negatively affected their ability to support the homeless population effectively. The pandemic and cost of living crisis further exacerbated these challenges.

Despite the challenges, Peter acknowledged that organisations had implemented strategies to address them. These included promoting flexible working arrangements, recognising the value of the work being done, and providing opportunities for career progression. He also mentioned the importance of accredited courses and specific training to enhance the skills and qualifications of the workforce.

Peter concluded by discussing the upcoming Homeless Link workforce survey, scheduled for June and July of the current year. This survey aims to better understand the diversity of the homelessness workforce, their lived experiences, key skills, values, and knowledge required for their roles. It will also explore the factors influencing individuals to either stay or leave the sector and their aspirations for career progression.

Additionally, Peter highlighted the need to advocate for an inflationary uplift to commissioned contracts for homelessness services. He emphasised the importance of supporting charities with utilities and called for the unfreezing of the Local Housing Allowance in line with market rents.

Frontline Network Survey Report

Rachel Marshall presented on their latest Frontline Workers Survey, which received responses from 1,182 workers. She presented the specific responses from frontline staff in London.

Rachel highlighted some key issues faced by frontline staff, including time constraints, manageable caseloads, job security, and the need for preventative work. She emphasised the fundamental lack of suitable accommodation and the challenges in accessing mental health support. Rising living costs and staff members struggling to pay housing costs themselves were also significant concerns.

The survey revealed a need for training, with specific areas such as immigration advice, housing legislation, and physical health identified as gaps. The challenges faced by frontline workers were found to have a negative impact on their well-being, with 60% of staff in London reporting this.

Rachel concluded by sharing recommendations gathered from frontline staff, which included:

- Provide immediate support to services to address the cost-of-living crisis, including potential uplift in funding for rising costs.
- Equip frontline workers with necessary tools and training, addressing areas such as immigration advice, housing legislation, and physical health.
- Improve policy and practice to prevent homelessness, including mental health support, improving LHA rates, and linking up with health services.
- Continue to share the survey findings, inform internal strategies, and engage with policymakers, funders, and decision-makers to advocate for wider action.

Martin-in-the-Fields Charity plans to use the survey findings to inform their strategies and advocate for wider action. Rachel encouraged further engagement and collaboration with policymakers, funders, and decision-makers to address the identified issues. She invited participants to visit St Martin-in-the-Fields' website for detailed reports and expressed interest in discussing opportunities to share the findings and drive positive change.

#### Update on Workforce workstream activity

David Eastwood thanked Rachel and Pete and suggested that Petra or Peter could provide an update on the wider activities related to the workforce strand.

Peter Smith mentioned that they had planned to discuss the wider activities after Rachel's presentation. He mentioned that the workforce strand involved various organisations and highlighted the areas they focused on, such as retention. He mentioned a workforce well-being pilot by CHII that aimed to improve workplace well-being and reduce burnout among frontline workers. Thames Reach and St Mungos have expressed interest in participating. He also mentioned the development of a skills framework to support the learning and development of the housing and homelessness workforce.

Peter also highlighted upcoming relevant events, including a second careers fair supported by Bloomberg, St. MUNGOS, and other providers. The fair was scheduled to take place at Box Park in Wembley on July 10th. They expected around 70 employers, including voluntary sector organisations, substance misuse services, and local authorities. He also mentioned an open session organised by London Metropolitan University to encourage soon-to-be graduates to consider working in the homelessness sector.

Regarding recruitment, Peter mentioned a previous careers fair that received positive feedback, and they were planning a larger second event. He acknowledged the need to be

mindful of collaborating with organisations already working on solutions in the sector. He encouraged members to share their thoughts on addressing workforce challenges and suggested collective actions for advocating and addressing these issues. David Eastwood invited further questions on the item.

Lorna Brooke asked about recognition and whether it involved a combination of positive feedback and increased salary or solely financial recognition. Peter responded that recognition encompassed positive feedback, acknowledging job performance, and the importance of addressing the cost-of-living crisis in terms of salary.

Peter discussed the importance of empowerment and decision-making within homelessness roles, highlighting the need for training and support to enable officers to make informed decisions. Rachel Marshall added that recognition also involved partnership working and collaboration across sectors, emphasizing the skills and contributions homelessness professionals bring to the table.

Peter continued with Jamie Carswell's question about what more could be done at the system level. He acknowledged the importance of collaboration and mentioned ongoing efforts to enhance services without duplication. He highlighted the upcoming CHII pilot on well-being and the development of a skills framework as areas to learn from. Peter also emphasised the need to build upon current initiatives and gather insights from others to address workforce challenges effectively.

David Eastwood thanked Pete and invited further comments and points. Jamie Carswell expressed appreciation for the presentations and insights from the workforce subgroup. He emphasised the need for careful collaboration in addressing workforce issues, considering that different organisations have their own solutions and work processes. He highlighted the importance of making the entire system work effectively without hindering individual organisations' progress.

Jamie Carswell commended Rachel's survey for including various sector providers and local authorities. He mentioned the relevance of involving street homeless support workers and commissioners in the workforce discussion. He posed the question of what more can be done collectively that individual organisations are not already doing. He also mentioned the need to assess the pace and resource allocation of the workforce subgroup.

Peter Smith agreed with Jamie's point on collaboration and stressed the importance of understanding unknown aspects through surveys. He mentioned the significance of initiatives like the CHI pilot on well-being and the development of a skills framework. Peter acknowledged the possibility of requiring additional resources to support these efforts.

Petra Salva raised the issue of empowering commissioning and providers to change service delivery models. She suggested floating hub models where frontline workers have downtime to balance the high-intensity nature of their work. Petra also discussed the impact of caseloads on staff well-being and suggested stricter caseload management to maintain service quality. She emphasised the need to adhere to capacity limits set by commissions to avoid staff turnover.

Tom Preest supported Petra's suggestions, emphasizing their direct link to reducing the number of people on the streets. He proposed that recommendations should clearly

demonstrate how they align with government commitments. Tom highlighted the need for outreach services to be accessible and effective, which may require fundamental changes. He suggested focusing on key issues to improve outcomes.

Michelle Binfield reflected on the workforce workstream and mentioned the opportunity for others to get involved. She highlighted the need for a specific focus on rough sleeping in the group's activities. Michelle also emphasised the importance of volunteers in rough sleeping services and the challenges faced in securing their support.

David Eastwood thanked the participants and mentioned the need to keep the discussion on track. He acknowledged the limited representation of local authorities in the workforce workstream and the significance of maintaining a focus on rough sleeping. He also highlighted the importance of volunteers in specific services.

## **5 Pan-London Substance Misuse Programme - Emma de Zoete (GLA) and Alison Keating (OHID)**

Emma de Zoete and Alison Keating presented a joint update on the Pan-London Substance Misuse programme.

Emma de Zoete updated that the program was built upon the Pan-London work during COVID and received government funding of around £3 million. There are seven strands to the program: inpatient detox, rehab beds, outreach teams, social isolation and recovery, evaluation of detox provision, co-occurring conditions, and substance misuse treatment for individuals with no public funds. Challenges were highlighted, such as low utilization rates for inpatient detox beds, difficulty in commissioning rehab and stabilisation beds, and workforce issues. Ongoing efforts are being made to address these challenges and improve service delivery.

Alison Keating emphasised the need for supporting programs across London boroughs, workforce shortages, funding limitations, and the need for better coordination and solutions, including abstinence-based housing. A Pan-London Conference is planned to discuss future strategies.

Responding to a point and ask Alison made regarding the need for abstinence-based housing, Peter Smith offered to connect Alison to the PRS Landlord Forum to progress conversations.

Saskia Prichard offered to connect Alison to newly appointed Criminal Justice Health Coordinators and Alison thanked her, confirming she was recently put in contact with them.

David Eastwood thanked Emma and Alison for their presentation and offered the Core Group's strong on-going support for the work they had updated on, including with anything further that Core Group could do in this area in the future. He asked for a report on their work and stressed the value of evidencing the important role of the program in supporting people experiencing concurrent homelessness and substance misuse.

**Chair asked** Alison Keating to provide a short report to Life off the Streets Core Group on the activity and data related to the program's impact in London.

Peter Smith to connect Alison with PRS Landlord Forum

## 6 Home Office Update:

### (i) HO Escalation Stats Update – Alan Bull (CCU, HO)

Alan representing CCU presented the Home Office's Homelessness Escalation Stats and Referral Stats for February and March 2023 in a Q&A format. CCU's purpose is to support decision-makers to handle challenging cases in a more customer-focused and ethical manner to develop solutions and encourage and share best practice.

Please see paper 6, circulated, for the full statistics.

Starting with the headline figures for CCU's work, he highlighted the national number (263) and London number (260) of referrals for escalation of an individual homeless person's immigration case received between 1 February and 31 March 2023. He drew attention on the paper presented to the fact that of a total of 260 referrals received to his team in London, 63 had been granted/ BRP issued and 4 had been accommodated, results which he and his team were pleased with.

Alan commented to Core Group on figure of 130 cases received nationally before 1 February 2023 which were still outstanding. These were work-in-progress cases for them and he noted that progress had been made by the team in relation to these, some of which were inherited from the former homelessness team.

Zooming in on the London Referral stats, Alan noted firstly that the largest referrers to CCU were Immigration Advisors, London Boroughs and the GLA.

Alan answered earlier queries about their use of individual's personal data, assuring Core Group that they would not make individuals unknown to the Home Office known if this was the wish of the individual/ referring caseworker. Their handling of data would be explained in the updated user guide currently under development.

Moving onto performance, Alan advised Core Group that the average time to close a case had reduced to a quarter of the time it took in August 2022.

There were no RSSS referrals outstanding, after the last was closed on 20 March 2023. He closed by highlighting the stakeholder advisory panel meeting planned for 9 May, which invites had gone out to all relevant partners for.

Petra Salva and Madeleine Kelleher thanked Alan and asked questions respectively about the assignment by referrer name of cases and the no application cases respectively which Alan Bull answered briefly and offered to respond to written questions on.

David Eastwood invited Claire Portlock to add something to Alan's presentation. Claire commented on the term 'status checks', she set out the difference between a Home Office immigration status check and what CCU referred to it as, i.e., checking whether there were outstanding applications. Alan agreed to consider this difference for future KPI reporting.

### (ii) Update on Streamlined Asylum Process - Jacob Graham (Asylum Protection Unit, HO)

David Eastwood thanked Alan and handed over to Jacob, Policy Advisor from the Asylum Protection Unit.

Jacob provided a policy overview of the new Streamlined Asylum Process (SAP), which was established by a pledge made by the Prime Minister that the Government would clear the backlog of legacy asylum cases by the end of 2023. The SAP focused on cases of people who had

made claims before 28 June 2022 and who were of five nationalities: Afghanistan, Eritrea, Libya, Syria, and Yemen. The process involved sending questionnaires to those who hadn't been substantively interviewed, with the goal of processing their claims without interviews, where possible.

These cohort groups have received over 95% granting of decision rates in recent years. Where it was not possible for a decision to be made without an interview, the process would default to an interview as was usual prior to the SAP, using the information in the questionnaire to accelerate this interviewing process where possible.

Jacob explained that the decision-making teams were reviewing the returned questionnaires and trying to make decisions as quickly as possible. He handed over to Nadeem Ammed to dovetail the policy update with an operational update.

*[Secretarial note – the expected impact of this policy at the time of the meeting on Core Group's work would include that SAP results in a period of time this summer and autumn during which a large number of decisions granted to asylum seekers in London, acknowledged by Core Group to raise a high risk of increased homelessness applications to London boroughs, impact on Pan-London and borough services and potentially feed through further to flow of new rough sleepers in London.]*

Nadeem Ammed, Head of the Accommodation Transformation Program, introduced himself and highlighted that he was here to speak to their work in relation to the workflow decision service area for the Streamlined Asylum Process, provide information and take away views from the group about the future work in this area. A small number of decisions had been made so far and conversations were on-going with many local authorities, but the number of decisions would be increasingly rapidly over the next few months and engagement with local authorities would be matching this. He said they were trying to provide as much information to stakeholders as possible at this time, in order that LAs and DWP could plan to support those receiving decisions through the SAP.

David Eastwood thanked Jacob and Nadeem opened the floor for questions, starting with Paul Davis.

Paul Davis (Lambeth) asked if further details on the information that the Accommodation Transformation Program had asked of Local Authorities in relation to the SAP.

Nadeem answered that they had Heat Maps for each local authority providing a breakdown of numbers, nationalities and decisions under Support and Accommodation Programme. These were shared with local authorities. They had SLAs and streamlined processes in place with local authorities to notify them when a decision has been made, providing time, he said, to take appropriate measures. He underlined the commitment to and existing process for providing information.

Michelle Binfield acknowledged the heat maps and raised the case of London boroughs in terms of notice given under the SAP of a decision on someone's immigration status. If there were 100 people awaiting a decision in a hotel, how would a London borough know about one person who had a decision granted under the SAP, stressing the importance information sharing with local authorities when thinking about the 28-day notice to quit period for individuals? She asked if local authorities are notified about specific decisions and given time to help individuals avoid homelessness?

Nadeem answered that CRH – Clearsprings Ready Homes are contracted for this work by the Government and there are SLAs in place to provide the information the local authorities around the decision that is being made. He said this allowed sufficient time for them to act.

**David Eastwood asked if he could share a list of the contacts that the information and decisions are going to in London from Nadeem, by local authority. Nadeem was happy to speak with Clearsprings and provide this after the meeting as an action.**

David moved to the third part of the item.

C) Questions from Steph Ratcliffe (St Mungo's) and Madeleine Kelleher (Southwark Law Centre)

- (i) Staggered Decisions and Timeline: Steph asked if the decisions would be staggered and what the end date of this period would be, considering that there could be around 3,000 people potentially needing homelessness intervention. She also inquired if half of these individuals would be in need of intervention by September, as this information would be helpful for planning their response.

Nadeem explained that decisions are being processed as questionnaires come in, and while they aim to complete the process by September, operational factors may affect the timeline.

- (ii) Questionnaire Completion: Steph wanted to know how many questionnaires have been completed and returned within the given timeframe and how many have not been returned.

Nadeem acknowledged the importance of this information and noted that they would capture it as an action item to provide high-level management information.

- (iii) Risks of Falling Through the Net: Steph expressed concerns about individuals who may not have received the questionnaire or have been unable to return it due to various reasons. She emphasized the need to respond to these individuals who may potentially fall through the net.

Nadeem explained that efforts are made to reach out to those who haven't responded, and support wouldn't be withdrawn at the first instance. They have processes in place to notify the local authorities when a claim is granted and work with organizations like Migrant Help to assist with the transition and support services.

- (iv) Remit of Clear Springs and Migrant Help: Steph sought clarification on the role of Clear Springs and Migrant Help in terms of homelessness intervention. She asked if their responsibility is solely to alert the local authority or if they also support individuals in attending and delivering homelessness interventions.

Nadeem mentioned that Clear Springs and Migrant Help have a role in notifying the local authorities and assisting with the move-on process for individuals who have received positive grants.

- (v) Withdrawal of Claims: Madeleine asked for clarification on the policy regarding withdrawn claims where a questionnaire not returned in time.

Jacob explained that currently, they are not treating questionnaires that haven't been returned as withdrawn. They are working on reaching out to those who haven't responded through various contact methods and considering how best to support them.

- (vi) Substantive Interviews: Madeleine inquired about the timeline for those who are not granted based on the questionnaires and are scheduled for substantive interviews. This question was not answered specifically.

- (vii) Serving Decisions in Hotels: Madeleine asked Jacob and Nadeem to confirm if decisions would be served to individuals staying in temporary hotels, as it had been the policy of the Home Office not to serve decisions in this way in the past. Nadeem and Jacob answered that yes, this year they would be serving decisions under the SAP to people in hotels, contingency and initial accommodation, as a last resort.

Nadeem acknowledged that they needed to consider how to do this in a way that addresses pressures in different local authority areas.

- (viii) Clearing the Backlog: Madeleine sought clarification on clearing the entire backlog.

Jacob confirmed that the aim was to complete processing the SAP claims within the legacy cohort by the end of 2023, but it could be subject to operational factors and other priorities. There was a recruitment drive to increase the number of decision-makers working on this to 2,500 by the end of September, and work to specialise on certain cohorts groups was underway with the aim of increasing pace and efficiency.

- (ix) Request for review of cases under the SAP where notification allegedly not received by LAs: Dave mentioned that the GLA has had feedback from some LAs that notifications were not received to them from Clearsprings, could he share this list from GLA's migration team for a review of those cases.

**Nadeem was happy to review this and asked him to send the list.**

- (x) SLA timescales for notification of an LA about a decision: Michelle asked if Nadeem could confirm the timescales in the SLA with Clearsprings.

**Nadeem agreed to find this and share the timescale.**

David Eastwood thanked Alan, Jacob and Nadeem for their updates, presentations and the open and candid answers to the Core Group's questions, which were very much appreciated.

### **Actions directed by Chair:**

Nadeem Ammed to send Core Group the list of local authority contact addresses Clearsprings use for making notifications of decisions and sharing information

Dave Orton to send Nadeem cases where LAs advised no notification received, for review and with a response by Nadeem to Dave Orton

Nadeem to share to Core Group the specific timescale for notification of a decision on an individual to a local authority in the SLA signed with Clearsprings Ready Homes.

### **8. Date of next meeting**

Tuesday 6 June 2023, 15:00 – 17:00. Jamie Carswell to Chair.

### **Summary of Actions from meeting**

Jeremy Swain to be appointed as Strategic Data Advisory Group Chair.
Alison Keating to provide a short report to Life off the Streets Core Group on the activity and data related to the program's impact in London.
Peter Smith to connect Alison with PRS Landlord Forum
Nadeem Ammed to send Clearspring's LA contact list for decision notifications and info.
Dave Orton to send cases where LAs advised no decision notification received, for review and with a response by Nadeem to Dave Orton
Nadeem Ammed to reply to Q on SLA timescales for notifying a LA of a decision

