Alliance exCHANGE: Temporary Accommodation Flash Report

Introduction

The Glasgow Alliance to End Homelessness and partners from across the city came together on Thursday 17 March, for an Alliance exCHANGE session to explore the barriers and bottlenecks in entering and exiting temporary accommodation. We wanted to hear from the sector on what they see as the challenges around temporary accommodation to understand better the current situation and the opportunities to improve.

Below are some insights, themes and reflections from discussions on the day.

What are the barriers and bottlenecks in temporary accommodation?

Across discussion groups, there were a few frequently mentioned barriers when entering temporary accommodation.

Firstly, entrenched power imbalances and a lack of trust between people and staff were barriers for some entering temporary accommodation. Whether it's staff uniform and lanyards playing into negative perceptions of authority from people's previous experiences or operational procedures that don't recognise people's trauma (for example, letters distributed under doors re-traumatising people with experience of prison), this can perpetuate a sense of hierarchies and an 'us versus them' culture. Additionally, if housing officers had a negative attitude towards an individual, this could pose a bottleneck to them exiting into settled accommodation.

Data issues, frequently cited as challenges at previous exCHANGE sessions, were also a bottleneck for people entering and exiting temporary accommodation. Participants spoke of receiving information from assessments that were conducted months ago and are now outdated, preventing people from being matched up with the most appropriate service and potentially prolonging or exacerbating the situation. This feeds into barriers presented at a system level, such as the lack of partnership working.

The issue of 'hidden homelessness' was also mentioned as an ongoing challenge. People might not always be aware that they're homeless, for example, if they're sofa surfing, thus preventing them from getting the proper support. Another example was people who're working (and therefore don't fit the stereotype of 'homelessness') but have been forced into temporary accommodation due to the lack of available permanent housing.

Exiting temporary accommodation also presented a range of barriers and bottlenecks. A recurring issue was the lack of choice, control and options. More specifically, the lack of suitable accommodation to move people on to. Glasgow's lack of housing stock remains an uncompromising challenge.

Preparations to support a person to exit temporary accommodation was varied. People should feel tenancy ready, but examples were provided of Scottish Welfare Fund taking too long to come through, or homes not having the adequate fittings/furniture in place which prolonged tenants stay in temporary accommodation, sometimes resulting in rent arrears before they had moved into the property.

> *'We're not asking the right questions. It's not just a roof over your head, it's the wrap around support.*

More widely, participants pointed out that if we aren't addressing the root causes of trauma and addiction, it will be a recurring cycle. Asking better trauma-informed questions will help staff get the information they need and limit re-traumatising people. Across the sector, there is a recognition of the validity and impact of trauma-informed approaches. However, discussions indicated there is a feeling that staff teams are still not adequately trained to ask the 'right questions' with a trauma-informed lens.

What are the potential solutions?

Solutions to some of the barriers and bottlenecks were diverse, ranging from changes at a system level to enhanced training and embedding best practices.

Full implementation of trauma-informed services at a system level was identified as a solution to some recurring bottlenecks and barriers. This approach would include shifting to more asset-based language on documentation such as referral forms, notes, support plans, etc. Caseworkers and FHOSS staff should be trained together to support a system-wide upskill. This ensures that there is a clear standard across the sector and bringing together different teams helps staff to understand each other's roles/contexts better and facilitates partnership working.

Another system-level solution was to improve data and IT sharing to foster better partnership working and access to relevant, up-to-date information. This would support relevant matches between individuals and services and reduce the number of times an individual has to share their story, and the subsequent risk of re-traumatisation. Embedding the principle of 'What's

Best for People' into operations would also encourage better matching processes. To support this process of improved data sharing, participants spoke about looking across the sector to identify where data sharing seems to be working effectively and assess how this could be replicated for a temporary accommodation context.

An interesting point made in the discussions was that moving people through temporary accommodation quickly may not be the most appropriate response for some individuals. Sometimes breathing space is essential. Using access to temporary accommodation as a starting point to assess a person's needs and then better identify their options, rather than pushing them through the system would be beneficial. Prioritising 'soft skills' would positively impact addressing barriers like the lack of mutual trust and power imbalances between staff and people. Focusing on listening to people to understand their wants and needs fully and working with the individual to set goals and build motivation as part of their journey in temporary accommodation should be encouraged.

It was acknowledged that the wrap-around support in temporary accommodation is vital such as investing and prioritising access to support for physical and mental health and wellbeing. A more joined-up and connected system would enable this. Group discussions suggested that the Alliance could support these relationships in the short term by inviting these key contacts to exCHANGE events.

Developing starter kits were suggested as a solution by participants concerned about people who were delayed in exiting temporary accommodation due to furniture or fittings not prepared for their new tenancy. Starter kits would reduce delays, help tenants feel more prepared and free up a significant bottleneck in the system.

To address the historic issue of a lack of housing stock in Glasgow, a redirect of resources was felt necessary. For example, funding capital investments for new homes through money spent on B&Bs. Additionally, increasing the visibility of these available properties would create more choices.

What's next?

The findings from this exCHANGE will feed into future activity the Alliance undertakes regarding temporary accommodation.

If you have any questions about this session, any information in this flash report or would like a copy of the Flash Report, then please get in touch with hello@glasgowalliance.org.