



Communities and Local Government Committee

Oral evidence: [Homelessness](#), HC 702
Monday 18 April 2016

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Members present: Mr Clive Betts (Chair); Helen Hayes; Kevin Hollinrake; David Mackintosh; Jim McMahon; Mary Robinson; Alison Thewliss.

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Evidence from witnesses:

Questions 70 – 122

Witnesses: **Councillor Daniel Astaire**, Cabinet Minister for Housing, Regeneration, Business and Economic Development, Westminster City Council, **Jim Crawshaw**, Integrated Service Head, Homeless and Pre-Tenancy Services, Birmingham City Council, **Nick Hooper**, Service Director for Housing Solutions, Bristol City Council, and **Hazel Summers**, Strategic Director, Adult Social Services, Manchester City Council, gave evidence.

Chair: Good afternoon and welcome to the Committee's inquiry into homelessness and the evidence session this afternoon. Thank you all for coming to give evidence to us. Before I pass over to you to say who you are, I would just ask members of the Committee to put on record any particular, specific interests they have relating to this inquiry. I am a Vice President of the Local Government Association.

David Mackintosh: I am a Northampton County Councillor.

Helen Hayes: I employ a local councillor in my Westminster team.

Q70 Chair: That is us on the record. If you could just say who you are and the organisation you represent.

Cllr Astaire: I am Councillor Daniel Astaire, I am the Cabinet Member by Housing, Regeneration, Business and Economic Development at Westminster City Council.

Jim Crawshaw: Good afternoon. My name is Jim Crawshaw and I am Head of Homeless and Pre-Tenancy Services at Birmingham City Council.

Hazel Summers: Hello, my name is Hazel Summers and I am the Strategic Director of Adult Social Care at Manchester City Council.

Nick Hooper: I am Nick Hooper and I am Service Director for Housing Solutions and Crime Reduction at Bristol City Council.

Q71 Chair: Thank you all very much for coming. Some members of the Committee have to go in and out during the course of our evidence session, because there are other things going on unfortunately and members may have to go and see to other business as well. It presumably is not anything you have said during the course of giving evidence that has driven people out of the room, but I just wanted to say that in advance to you.

We have already taken quite a bit of evidence in this inquiry and one of the things that has come up throughout is people who are homeless or have a housing crisis and fear they might be about to become homeless are obviously pretty distraught. They may have other challenging issues like mental health problems as well. Sometimes the experience they have had, when they come to their local authority for help has not been all it should be. Do you recognise that situation where people walk in the door and feel they are not wanted and it is how quickly you can get rid of them?

Cllr Astaire: Not strictly, no. When someone thinks that they are going to be homeless or has recently been made homeless, they approach our housing options service, which is the service that we are currently in the process of redesigning and retendering. The new process is aimed to deal with precisely that scenario. It is looking at what other services you join up with, how you point people in the direction of employment and skills-related services, and how you make sure that homelessness—which is the symptom of other problems—is tackled in a more holistic way. We are more welcoming with people. We also recognise that when people are coming to the housing options service they are at their most vulnerable and your service should reflect that.

Hazel Summers: I have talked to a lot of homeless people about this and it really depends on what happens when you get there because when you come to a local authority you have a statutory assessment

for homelessness. If you go through that statutory assessment, are found to be statutorily homeless and you get service, your experience and your thoughts about how you were dealt with are much different than if the local authority says, "Actually, there is no statutory duty". There is, however, a duty to signpost them to other services within our city. I know from talking to homeless people that it very much depends on how that conversation and assessment has gone.

Nick Hooper: In Bristol, it has become more difficult to provide a welcoming and first-stop response to people. When somebody is homeless on the night, we will absolutely do the assessment and find them accommodation, but if somebody might be threatened with homelessness because they have had a notice served by their landlord, because of the volume of inquiries that we are now getting there is a temptation to ask the person to come back again at the point where the risk is greater. That is pretty unproductive. We need to try and deal with it at the first point of contact because the closer to the crisis, the more difficult and expensive it gets. There is a temptation, because of the volumes coming in, for that to be the case. I would agree that it is a mixed experience depending on how you are presenting and how far down the track you are.

Jim Crawshaw: We certainly recognise that in Birmingham. We will always deal with people on the day who are homeless but we rearrange appointments for those who are not. Mr Betts, your question is around gatekeeping without using the word "gatekeeping". Obviously the allegations and concerns of a number of voluntary organisations and others are around local authorities' gatekeeping. At Birmingham, we take around 6,000 homeless applications every year in terms of volume. We are one of the highest per thousand households in the country in terms of homeless acceptances and homeless applications. We look to make sure that that experience for the customer is as good as it possibly can be, obviously with the constraints that we have. In terms of gatekeeping, you may or may not be aware, but we recently won a significant judgment in a case where there were allegations of gatekeeping on our part as an authority. That was found not to be the case. We try and act legally and we try to make that as welcoming as we possibly can.

Q72 Chair: For people coming in who feel the authority ought to be helping them, what they are very often presented with is a series of hoops to jump through, as they will see it. Only when you have gone through all the hoops does someone say, "Okay, we are now prepared to help you". It feels a bit like an obstacle course where most people are going to fall at one obstacle on the way through.

Jim Crawshaw: The legislation is set up that way, as you are fully aware, in terms of those tests and what we call hoops in getting through. For young people in Birmingham we work in partnership with St Basils for our youth hub that Members are visiting next week. We provide that holistic, joined-up approach for anybody who walks through. They actually have that holistic interview with somebody from the voluntary sector first, where we then look at, if they are 16 or 17, whether they need social services intervention, the statutory homeless route or the voluntary sector. That is one way that we try get out of that need to be prescriptive in terms of the legislation. We will obviously always meet our duties where appropriate.

Hazel Summers: In Manchester, we have done something similar with young people where there is a single point of access for homeless young people. The Young People's Support Foundation runs that on behalf of the council. That works really, really well. It is certainly a welcoming place; they are really experienced at talking to young people and look for solutions for them, whether they fit with any legislative framework or not. We have also set up single points of access in two separate places in Manchester for people who are over 25, so people who are rough sleeping or otherwise can go and be welcomed into that place where there are staff from the voluntary and community sector. Council staff are there to give housing advice etc.

Cllr Astaire: The tick boxing exercise is not necessarily a bad thing. Once we have accepted a statutory duty to house somewhere we either have to put them in a permanent home, which we do not have—the waiting lists are what they are—or we have to put them into temporary accommodation. Temporary accommodation at the moment is costing the local council taxpayer £4 million over and above what we get in for it. There is a net cost of all of this to the council. At the same time as being a caring council and one that understands people's needs, we also have to make sure that we look after the needs of our city and our taxpayer.

Nick Hooper: People have different routes into services. As an example, our experience is that hospital discharge, either from acute services or mental health services, is done by arrangement from the local authority; it is same with release from prison. We have talked about quite differentiated services. Some people's experiences is as you describe it; other people have a very different kind of experience because of a managed route into services.

Q73 Chair: Can I come back to the non-managed one, then, and the one we referred to before about the increasing number of people who were coming saying, "My landlord is about to throw me out. I am going to

be homeless. What are you as a council going to do about it?" As I understand it, that is probably the most common reason for people presenting as homeless now. It is a growing number and putting enormous pressure on local authority resources. How far are you reacting to that by saying, "When you have got that notice kicking you out of the property, at that point we will regard you as homeless and deal with you"? Councils deal with this in a very different way. Some will say, "The landlord has started proceedings. Okay, we'll look at you"; others say, "Only when you've actually got the notice and are about to be thrown out on the street will we deal with your case".

Nick Hooper: There is a judgment about risk. Sometimes people say they have been given notice to quit when they have not—they have had an intention from the landlord. There are judgments to be made about that. It is certainly true that, in our experience, that is now the single biggest reason and the single fastest rising reason why people come to us. Equally, in terms of homelessness prevention, the single biggest thing we do is to provide a financial package to people who are in that position. If the landlord is saying, "I want to put the rent up", which is very often the reason, we can offer a financial package that can hopefully keep that family in that accommodation. Therefore, they are not necessarily waiting for the Section 21 notice to be served and to expire.

Hazel Summers: It is worth saying that in Manchester we have not had a massive increase in the number of people approaching the homelessness services over the last five years. We have seen a big increase in the number of people who are vulnerable and we have accepted as homeless. There has been a 17% rise in people that we accept as vulnerable and in need a full housing duty. That has been particularly greater with single people as well where there has been an increase of about 11%. The numbers of people who are approaching us has not increased, but the people who we are ordering eligible for full housing duty are greater because of their vulnerability.

Clr Astaire: In Westminster, it is absolutely the opposite. We probably had a level of 300-400 homeless acceptances a year. That jumped considerably in 2012 by doubling to 813 and has stayed around the 700 mark a year since then, which is putting significant pressure on all of us. Whilst we can discharge some of that pressure into the private sector now, finding something within the private sector that is within LHA boundaries is nigh-on impossible. When we place someone somewhere that we say is suitable—and we say suitability must include affordable—we are challenged every step of the way.

Jim Crawshaw: When somebody approaches us in the first instance when they are at risk of losing their private rented accommodation the first thing we will do on the day is check the notice to ensure that that

notice is the correct notice. If that notice is correct, we would then look at having that discussion with the landlord either on the telephone or we can send out visiting officers to that landlord to try and see whether we can keep that person in. If that is not successful and it is at that point that that person wishes to go down the homelessness route, we would then make them an appointment for that. If their tenancy was ending now, we would deal with that today. Again, it would be dependent on when their notice ends.

Q74 Chair: Could you do one thing that would improve your service within the existing resources?

Jim Crawshaw: We are about to do it, hopefully, subject to cabinet decision tomorrow. We are moving from currently having four housing advice centres across the city to one in order to consolidate all of our staff, ensure the consistency of that service and ensure that we do not have waiting times. We want to be able to deal with people when they approach, so no matter at what point they are going to homeless—whether they are at risk of homelessness in three months or whether it is tomorrow—they get to sit down with one of our advisers and have an interview on that day. The only way that we can see that happening is by consolidating our resourcing into one place. We are going on that journey in order to try and make sure that we cut out those waiting times that people are having to wait.

Cllr Astaire: A bleak answer: allow us greater flexibility to include sustainability, ie affordability of ongoing rent, as one of the key criteria in providing someone with accommodation and discharging our duty. It allows us to spend the same amount of money, but to spend it elsewhere.

Hazel Summers: We have found an increase of families who are in leased temporary accommodation and staying there longer because of the difficulties of moving people on into affordable accommodation. We need to be thinking about that. We are silting up some of our services and that makes it really hard to find people to move on accommodation.

Nick Hooper: Specifically in relation to service provision as opposed to wider systemic issues, we currently have a generic team that provides both housing advice but also does the statutory assessments. The thing we are now thinking of doing is to separate those functions. That will create a deliberate preventive early intervention function to try to make sure that we are seeing people at the first point of contact and doing as much as we can to keep them safe.

Q75 Alison Thewliss: Do your services operate on a nine-to-five basis or do you have out-of-hours services as well? Do you treat people differently if they present during the day or at midnight?

Nick Hooper: Ours is a nine-to-five service, Monday to Friday, and we have what is called an Emergency Duty Team, which I think is common in most authorities. It is essentially there for dealing with children and vulnerable adults cases, but it will also deal with homelessness cases. They are generally referred into that service by the police and we will get the case referred back to us at 09.00 the following morning. They may be accommodated directly by the Emergency Duty Team in nightly-paid accommodation. There are very few cases.

Hazel Summers: Ours is very similar in Manchester.

Jim Crawshaw: All local authorities must have some access 24 hours a day. Ours is done very similarly along those lines. We place, on average, every night at least two people into out-of-hours. There is that reason-to-believe test on the telephone, then they are placed and the next day they have to approach us, where we will do the completion of the forms and the discussions with them.

Q76 Kevin Hollinrake: You said in Manchester you have not seen an overall increase in homelessness, yet in Westminster you have seen a near-doubling. Presumably, you put it down to house prices or what is the reason?

Cllr Astaire: It is a combination of factors. It is a combination of the benefit cap, the high rents that can be charged by landlords, property prices, influx of buyers and the London market. We could spend hours and hours talking about the reason why the London market is stratospheric, but that feeds into this.

Hazel Summers: I just wanted to add to what I said about approaches to the local authority. Our rough sleeping problem has more than doubled in the last two weeks. If you look at the count, it has gone up to 70 and it was 40-odd before. That 70 is not a true reflection of what really happened. During our severe weather provision, we think we saw at least 200 individual people who were rough sleeping in the city.

Q77 Kevin Hollinrake: Does one not correlate to the other? If you have rough sleeping, are you not going to get more approaches?

Hazel Summers: That is not the way it has happened. I would say about 25% of those people who are rough sleeping are people with no recourse to public funds, so they are less likely to approach us anyway. We cannot help them. They are people who are EU nationals who have come into the country, had a job, lost their job, been evicted and ended

on the street. There is very little we can do in terms of supporting them. We also have a number of people who come from outside of Manchester. We are an incredibly vibrant city and we are in the centre of a conurbation, and we attract people from other parts of the town and other local authorities.

Chair: We will come onto those points in due course.

Jim Crawshaw: In terms of homeless applications, we take roughly 6,000 to 7,000 applications a year and it has decreased in the last couple of years, but in the last calendar year we did see a slight increase. We are seeing similar amounts of households coming through but we are preventing homelessness in more and more cases. Two years ago, we prevented homelessness in over 10,000 cases. In the last year that has finished it will be about 8,000 or 8,500. We are still seeing the volumes of people but we are looking where we can—where it is possible and legal—at preventing their homelessness first.

Nick Hooper: Our situation is not as extreme as Westminster's, but is similar. I would characterise it in terms of very significant rent rises and that is being fed by a population that 10 years ago would have been first time buyers, but because of access to credit, deposits and so forth their demand is being fed into the private rented sector. Insufficient supply overall is driving up rates in the private rented sector so it is not unsurprising that we have seen such a big rise in the number of people presenting who have lost or are in the process of losing their private sector tenancy.

Q78 Kevin Hollinrake: Can you quantify the homelessness numbers? Have your homelessness numbers increased?

Nick Hooper: Yes, substantially. They have more than doubled in the same period. For rough sleeping figures, five years ago we were counting five rough sleepers; we are now counting 97 rough sleepers on the annual count last autumn. Less than five years ago, we had zero households in bed and breakfasts; as of tonight, we will have 235 households in nightly-paid accommodation, because quite a lot is not a bed and breakfast. You can see that is broadly indicative of the trend.

Kevin Hollinrake: What about homelessness applications?

Nick Hooper: Homeless applications have gone up at the same rate.

Kevin Hollinrake: They have doubled.

Nick Hooper: Yes.

Q79 Mary Robinson: Increasingly, Councils are seeking to offer out-of-area placements. I know that Westminster City Council had a court case brought by a family who were offered a placement in Bletchley. Do you think that placing households in cheaper areas outside of your administrative areas should be made easier?

Cllr Astaire: You are referring to a case called Nzolameso. The Nzolameso case was not about whether or not we could house families outside of the borough; it was about the process that was adopted to get there. I do not think anyone is debating the principle of whether we can house people out of borough. In fact, we are the only London Borough that abides by our obligations to inform host boroughs when we moved people in; very few London Boroughs do that to the extent that we do. In fact, some house people a lot farther away than Bletchley.

It must be made simpler. It is incredibly important that we look at this not as a borough-by-borough issue, but in London, certainly, we look at this as a London-wide problem because there are parts of London—Hounslow, for instance—where there are housing zones that, if we were able to, we could buy into and work with. There are places around the M25 that are also suitable. I raised this earlier: we need to look at what is sustainable for that family so that once they are placed they are not then priced out again or they do not face the same problems again. That will happen within a central London area. We need to look collectively at the wider local area as a group of local authorities.

Q80 Mary Robinson: We talked about the process, because it was indeed the process that was questioned. Is it a question of looking at the process?

Daniel Astaire: We have looked at process, but we think it is more a question of looking at where we are allowed to use certain funds. For instance, a lot of our affordable housing fund comes from Section 106 agreements from planning gain, which we need to use at the moment locally. We cannot use them forward afield. We have been exploring this with certain London Boroughs, were it to be possible, and we have lobbied on the point. Could we spend our money and build houses outside of the borough, but within commuting distance if people have jobs and that is needed? Could we come to some bilateral agreement where we retain some nomination rights, we pay for public realm, and where there are employment support works put in place with our local authority funds as well? It is not dumping people in an area; it is contributing to and growing another community.

Q81 Mary Robinson: How far have those discussions taken you?

Cllr Astaire: There are other local authorities that are interested; we are hampered at the moment by guidance legislation.

Jim Crawshaw: In terms of Birmingham, since notifications commenced we have had around 130 households who we have been notified about through the homelessness legislation as being in temporary accommodation, rather than those where there may have been a prevention duty or where somebody has chosen and asked to move to the city. We work closely with a number of London boroughs now; we have had meetings and discussions around those placements. We have significant pressures on services within our city, particularly schools and particularly schools in inner-city areas. Therefore, if families are moving up, that is placing additional pressure on us, as well as those families not necessarily being able to place their children within schools in the areas where they are housed in the city.

Recently, we, as a very large city, have actually started to place some households outside of our city. When we have done that it has been very close. We have a 15-bed unit, which is only 400 yards across our border and we have some around two miles away. It is something that we have not done before and, politically, it is not something that we wanted to do. In a city the size of ours, people do not want to move from the north to the south, let alone be placed outside it, but certainly with temporary accommodation numbers increasing as significantly as we have experienced, we have had to look elsewhere for that accommodation.

In terms of London boroughs, we get notified by some. We do not know whether it is the full notification, but the cross-London homelessness group have now started writing to those authorities who are in the top 10—a top 10 that we do not necessarily want to get into—of where placements are made each quarter. For example, I received an email stating that we received 23 placements within the last quarter. That is covering any placement done by a London Borough. In terms of that joined-up work, it is happening more and more now, but it is placing pressure on us.

Hazel Summers: The kind of trauma placed on a homeless family who may live in Manchester, for instance, and then are placed in London or Newcastle—if you are away from your family you have already possibly already taken your children from schooling and moved them somewhere else—seems fairly drastic unless it is within a given sphere. I could understand it perhaps if it was within a set of London boroughs, within West Midlands or Greater Manchester, where we are a close-knit community. If you are moving people miles and miles and miles away, it is very difficult for that family to be sustained with no relatives and no community around them.

Nick Hooper: Our position is very similar to Birmingham's. We very rarely place out of boundary. Our built up areas are not contiguous with the local authority boundaries, so our neighbouring authority, which is South Gloucestershire, is part of the urban area, so we do a few placements there. Very occasionally we are at peak pressure. Last autumn, during the Rugby World Cup, hotel and bed and breakfast places in Bristol were under massive pressure and we ended up placing people to Minehead and further afield. We do not keep them there; as soon as a place becomes available within the city we will move people back for the reasons set out by my colleague.

Q82 Mary Robinson: What should take precedence in your view when finding accommodation for a household in need? Should it be affordability or the needs of the individual?

Cllr Astaire: I do not think the two are mutually exclusive like that and it is not as black and white as that. We need to look very carefully at all of it and we will. Are people in priority need? Do they need to be closer to the city because of the support networks, the health requirements that they might have and the jobs that they might be in? If they are in employment you certainly do not want to try and risk that, whereas if someone could cope slightly further away, affordability then becomes a greater part of the factor. We look at it sympathetically on a case-by-case basis.

Jim Crawshaw: We will always try and meet a household's needs; however, it is needs must in where we place them. Although we strive not to place people into bed and breakfast accommodation, sometimes we have to because we do not have anything else available on that day. Monday in particular is a very busy day for us. Although we will have other types of accommodation, we will struggle not to place households into B&Bs today. Although we will try and make sure that is as close to their schools etc as possible, unfortunately we are not able to.

Q83 Mary Robinson: Getting agreement with individual households may not always be easy. Do you think that it should be easier for homeless families to challenge an out of area placement?

Cllr Astaire: Practically every single placement that we have—and I can get you the figures on this—is challenged. I certainly do not think it should be easier to challenge; the challenges cost us a huge amount of money. We had 62% of our homeless placements reviewed last year. It is a huge burden on the local authority and the taxpayer.

Mary Robinson: Would that be the same for you?

Jim Crawshaw: We are only placing households a few miles outside Birmingham. For example, if we were placing in an authority to the east or west of us we tend to try and place households who lived in that part of our city so that it was closer. We get challenged on the suitability of those placements as well. I am not sure it should be made easier for people to challenge where, in our perspective, we are only placing fairly close to the city. That may be different for longer placements.

Nick Hooper: It is very much a London issue. If you had different authorities in the room you would be getting a similar view at this end of the table compared to the Westminster view. You need to think about policy making in relation to geography and whether you want blanket policy making for areas outside of London.

Q84 Mary Robinson: Is it area-specific?

Nick Hooper: It is very much a south-east England and London-specific issue.

Q85 Kevin Hollinrake: Where you have to make these placements out of area, what do you do to make sure these people are looked after properly, are able to settle in the new areas and put down roots? What do you do?

Clr Ataire: They are supported through housing options. We have talked about whether we have officers in other parts of the country. I am aware Camden, for instance, does that. We were told with Nzolameso that, if there are children, provision needed to make sure that there is a school place. That is next to impossible as my officer team will tell you. If you phone up the local authorities and say, "We have got children of X years and ages, is there a school place for them because they may be moving into the area?" they will not give you an answer. You cannot find that out until they have moved in. We provide as much back-up and support as possibly can.

Jim Crawshaw: I am certainly aware of an officer being based in Birmingham from a local authority who supports people who are placed there, and looks to support accommodation. I believe they meet them from the train or meet them to take them to the accommodation. There is a level of support for some households who are placed into the city. London boroughs also make sure that all cases are run through their children's services etc where children are involved. There are examples where boroughs are placing and do quite a lot of work around families to make sure that the placements are as sustainable and best as possible. I cannot say that happens in every case.

Q86 Kevin Hollinrake: That sounds good for an incoming local authority. What about one where the local authority effectively delegates the responsibility to you: are you getting the information you would like to be able to make that an easier transition?

Jim Crawshaw: I do not think we receive the notifications of all the households that are placed in our city. We receive some. I have had them on the day where people have been placed up to us from one particular London borough, but I am not convinced that we get them for all households. I genuinely do not know.

Nick Hooper: It is not really an issue for us. Our out-of-boundary placements are extremely brief; they are always in temporary accommodation rather than a permanent arrangement. Nobody in their right mind would be trying to seek to house people in Bristol because it is too expensive.

Q87 Kevin Hollinrake: We have heard evidence and I have heard evidence personally of cases with vulnerable children where the information around that case has not always been provided when the people have been relocated to a different area. Is that something you experienced?

Jim Crawshaw: I am not sure. I know that there is a duty on placing authorities where children are known to them if they are placing out to another children's services. I am not sure, but I can certainly go away and ask those questions to our children's services around if they are being notified of children in need or children with other known social services involvement.

Kevin Hollinrake: That would be useful.

Hazel Summers: I am the same.

Q88 Kevin Hollinrake: Speaking specifically about Birmingham, do you have a number of the amount of homeless households that have been placed in Birmingham by other councils over whatever time period?

Jim Crawshaw: Since we have started receiving them we have had approximately 130 official notifications.

Q89 Kevin Hollinrake: Over what period of time?

Jim Crawshaw: Probably close to three years. We had quite a lot from one borough early when the change happened; I do not believe they place in Birmingham any longer. We saw a reduction of notifications following what I call the Westminster case—I apologise. We saw, anecdotally from counterparts of mine in London, that in terms of the process and ensuring that the placements are looking to be as close as

possible, there may have been a reduction in cases. In terms of the London homelessness officers group, we were informed of 23 notifications in the last quarter; I think it was 19 in the quarter before; and around 28 the quarter before that. We get that unofficial notification because the London boroughs bring that all together. In terms of TA placements, where they have to or should inform us, the figure is 130.

Q90 Kevin Hollinrake: This is closely related to people coming from expensive areas, like London. Is this principally where you see this movement of people?

Jim Crawshaw: Yes, absolutely. All of the placements that we have been notified of have been from London, apart from one other that was in the south-east. We understand the reasons around why those placements happen. What we look to try and do is have that coordinated approach. One of the things I did not touch on earlier is that one of our big concerns is around the distortion of the market within the private rented sector market in Birmingham, at a time when we have great housing need. We are looking to work with London boroughs to look at whether we can have an agreed approach to what incentives are paid etc so that we know what the market is receiving. We are then in competition on a more level playing field with boroughs looking to place in the city.

Q91 Chair: Do you think it should be a requirement on an authority that is sending a homeless family to another area to discharge their responsibilities to notify the receiving authority of that?

Jim Crawshaw: Yes, I do.

Cllr Astaire: We do it.

Hazel Summers: Yes.

Chair: Some authorities do not, but that seems fairly unanimous.

Q92 Helen Hayes: How does the availability of social housing in your respective areas affect the levels of homelessness?

Cllr Astaire: 26% of housing in Westminster is public rented housing, traditionally called social housing. If I am looking at buying housing and I am subsidising it to the tune of about £250,000 a unit, my officers recommend it as good value. Play that out across the rest of the country. If you want a four-bedroom property, I have a 25-year waiting list. We have 4,500 households with priority need for social housing, so it is not all about building homes in central London; it is about solving that problem generally. There is good availability of social housing in

central London and 26% is not a figure to be embarrassed about in the slightest. We are involved in huge estate regeneration projects. Those are not only to build new homes, but to build bigger homes to deal with overcrowding, which is also a hidden problem here. We need to look at this far more holistically than just borough by borough.

Q93 Helen Hayes: Notwithstanding the level of social housing in Westminster, if it were not a supply and demand issue you would not be sending residents elsewhere because you would have available social housing in Westminster in which to place them. There must be an interaction between levels of homelessness and availability.

Cllr Astaire: The land is not there, so what can you do? We need to make sure that wherever we place people is affordable too; otherwise it comes straight out of council tax and is not paid for centrally. There is a huge balancing act. It is not just about the number of units that are there.

Hazel Summers: We have 66,000 social-rented properties—social housing—in Manchester, but what we found is the turnover has changed. There used to be a lot more lets every year. There is a less lot churn, which means that there are fewer properties for people to be able to bid on. I was specifically asking questions about one-bedroom places for singles because we have an awful lot of single homeless and rough sleeping people within the city. This week there are 22 general needs one-bedroom flats available and there are 4,616 people who are waiting for that flat who have a housing need of some kind. That has created a problem. It is not just social housing though; it is also about local housing allowances and where you can place people in bed and breakfasts and restrictions for people who are now 35 and under about the rents that can be paid. It is broader than just a social housing issue.

Jim Crawshaw: We have approximately 63,000 of our own council properties and on top of that we have total of around 100,000 social-rented properties between us and our partner RPs. I echo the statement that we are seeing less churn. Whereas historically we would have around 5,000-5,500 lettings a year, in the year just finished we had just over 4,500. People are staying in those properties, which is a good thing for us in terms of being a landlord in sustainable communities, but there are fewer properties coming back and that does lead to more people living in temporary accommodation and owed the full homeless duty awaiting that permanent offer of accommodation.

Nick Hooper: The position is very similar for us, which is that churn has gone down by about 30% over the last two to three years. Previously, we would have had about 3,000 lets across all social lettings

per year. In the year that has just finished it would be under 2,000 and a significant proportion of those are transfers for existing tenants. The other thing worth mentioning is that we run a single housing register for the whole city for all social landlords and a single rehousing policy. We are aware that housing associations and RPs are becoming understandably more concerned about risk and, therefore, it is more difficult to persuade them to take some sorts of households. Increasingly, our in-house landlords—we are a stock-retained authority at 27,000 homes—tend to take more households, both singles and families who have come through the homeless route, than housing associations do. Housing associations are increasingly looking for economically active households and particularly people who are going to pay their rent and so forth. It is an emerging significant issue.

Q94 Helen Hayes: Thank you. My next question was going to be about housing associations and the extent to which they play a role in helping you, as authorities, to house homeless people in priority need. You might also comment on—as you have started to, Mr Hooper—changes arising from the current policy environment in the way that housing associations are behaving. Do you think, as authorities, they have a philanthropic duty to help you in the challenge that you have to house people who are in priority need?

Hazel Summers: In Manchester, our registered providers of housing really work closely with us in partnership. They believe that they have a philanthropic duty towards helping us and, particularly, I can cite recently where we had a number of people sleeping in temporary accommodation where we had to move really quickly. They all rallied round and helped us to move people on very quickly. They are under pressures, as you rightly stated, in terms of their budget planning and their processes because of changes in their legislation that make it more difficult. On the whole, in Manchester, we have a good partnership with the housing providers. We can always do more, though. I think housing associations would accept more people if there was better wraparound support for people and families with complex needs once they have moved into their properties.

Jim Crawshaw: Again, we have very good close working relationships with our RPs and we also have historical nominations agreements where properties are let through our allocations scheme. We receive 50% of all one, two and three-beds in the city from our major RPs. They are let to people on our housing register, which would include the homeless, and we receive 75% of four-bedroom-pluses because of the demand on us, particularly with those size families. We get that and the vast majority, if not all, the RPs meet those nominations agreements. Certainly, without those properties, particularly with larger families, we

would have significantly more households in temporary accommodation and B&Bs. We have recently embarked on something that we are calling "housing Birmingham", where we are looking to forge those relationships even closer with the RPs. For example, there will be a group specifically looking at welfare reform, its impacts and how we look to continue to house homeless households. We need them to assist us to do that.

Cllr Astaire: We have a very mature relationship with our housing associations. We meet with their chief executives on a regular basis. It is far easier to deal with those who have large investments and large estates in the city. We have a substantial number of smaller housing associations that have the odd street property littered around. They want to consolidate their portfolios. Westminster is expensive; they can sell them and buy more elsewhere so they have the same conundrum that we do, but we do look to help them. For instance, with one of our housing associations recently, they came to us and said they wanted to turn a certain number of social-rented units into intermediate housing for a 15-year period because that would help their balance sheet and enable us to do other work with them across the city. We accommodate requests like that so it is a two-way relationship.

Nick Hooper: We equally have good relationships, but I definitely see housing associations are becoming more insular and concerned about their balance sheets. We have one in the city that is letting a number of properties through Rightmove rather than through our existing choice-based letting scheme. You are starting to see the signs of the way in which they are operating somewhat differently. Broadly, I would agree, but there are some things going on in the environment that make it more difficult. The 1% reduction in rent over the next four years means that a lot of housing associations are looking at what they invest their resources into. We are starting to see them talking about not being able to provide mental health support workers and those sorts of things that you might argue are not mainstream activity, but add quite a lot to the sustenance of tenancies. It is too early to say how much that is going to be translated into reality, but there are those sorts of straws in the wind.

Q95 Helen Hayes: I can possibly take a stab at what the answer might be, at least in some of your areas, but could you comment on whether people who are depend on housing benefit can afford to rent a decent home in your areas?

Nick Hooper: Almost certainly not. We are regularly checking the online availability every week. We have traditionally worked a lot with private landlords either to discharge the homelessness duty or to prevent the homelessness occurring in the first place. Three or four

years ago, we were typically working with about 600 lets a year; that has dropped to 300 lets a year. The gap between what local housing allowance will support and market rents is typically now very wide. I suspect it is nothing as compared to London, but we have seen a really fast rise in housing rents. It is very hard to get definitive figures, but there was one survey last year that suggested that Bristol and Brighton had seen the fastest rises during 2015, in the order of 18%. My colleagues are dealing with this day-to-day and that is their sense of what is going on. It is getting increasingly difficult.

We have just launched a package of new incentives for landlords, including things like rent guarantees. We have taken out an insurance scheme to guarantee rent payments, not for all households, but for some. Rather than increasing the number of lets we are getting it is holding steady the number of landlords and lets that we have with us. We had hoped there would be an increase, but it does not look like it will be.

Hazel Summers: I agree that the local housing allowance and housing benefit make it prohibitive for people to be rehoused in the private rented sector. There are 32 wards in Manchester. Of those 32 wards, I think in only five of them housing benefit would meet the rent that was required in those areas. That means that if people are placed there you are placing people with problems all in the same area, which is not a good outcome for those communities or individuals. I would definitely agree this is causing a major problem for where we can place people within the private rented sector.

Jim Crawshaw: In Birmingham, between the last two censuses, the private rented sector doubled in size in the city. However, in terms of people looking to access it on LHA rate, we find that it is dwindling in terms of where in the city they can do so, very much like Manchester. In terms of the 30%, we only have one broad market rental area, so there is one LHA rate for the whole city, and there have always been pockets of the city where you could not get a property at LHA rates. However, we are definitely seeing that number increase and, therefore, seeing more concentration of areas. Even in some areas where historically we could get properties at LHA we are now struggling to get them.

Clr Astaire: You know what my answer is going to be. To put some flesh on the bone, an average weekly one-bedroom in the city is £430 a week and an average four-bedroom is £1,100 a week rent. LHA rates are £260 to £417.

Q96 Helen Hayes: Thank you. You have all touched on the private rented sector and the role that it plays. We heard evidence at the last session on this inquiry from the voluntary sector, which said that the ending of a private tenancy is now one of the single biggest contributors to increasing applications to be recognised as homeless. Could you comment on that phenomenon and give us a little bit of detail from each of your areas?

Jim Crawshaw: The loss of rented accommodation equated to 16% of our homeless acceptances in both 2010-11 and 2011-12. That has now doubled for the year that has finished. It is up to 32%. It is not the biggest reason for homeless acceptances in the city.

Hazel Summers: I do not have the figures with me, but the situation is similar in Manchester. There has been an increase. I can certainly get the figures.

Nick Hooper: It is the same for me, definitely. There was probably a three to four-fold increase. In quarter two of the last financial year it accounted for about 60% of all households who presented to us, but not necessarily 60% of all cases agreed. It is now the single largest reason. That certainly was not the case about three or four years ago.

Cllr Astaire: The largest single reason for people approaching our homelessness service is eviction from the private rented sector.

Q97 Helen Hayes: How easy or difficult is it to source the temporary accommodation that you need to source, given some of those constraints and changes in the private rented sector?

Nick Hooper: Sourcing is not too difficult because there is a premium rate for bed and breakfast accommodation. When we talk about bed and breakfast accommodation, it conjures up a set of images that, certainly for us, is barely true anymore. Most bed and breakfast accommodation is self-contained accommodation where the landlord will deliver a loaf of bread and a jar of marmalade and that is breakfast, but actually the accommodation is much better than it used to be under the old bed and breakfast regime. We buy a lot of nightly paid accommodation and we are going through a procurement process to set up a framework to track housing associations into the nightly paid accommodation—actually, it may no longer be nightly paid—so we are getting better quality organisations that more effectively manage that and that we source additional accommodation of a better standard. We are taking steps on the basis that we know we are going to be in the place having to provide emergency accommodation for probably quite a long time yet.

Hazel Summers: In Manchester, we do not use bed and breakfast as much. There are 40 families in bed and breakfast and a lot more singles. In terms of families, we have a private-leasing arrangement with an organisation where there are about 412 families in that temporary accommodation. That is because we pay a premium rate for the rent. The problem is when you try to get somebody into more permanent accommodation, which would then come within those Local Housing Allowance rules.

Jim Crawshaw: When we went through a private sector leasing procurement around six years ago, our block contract was probably the best offer in the city and, therefore, we were able to get the accommodation that we needed. We re-procured that after three years. Again, the prices went up but the block contract was still a good option. We have reopened our block contract for providers to come forward and we have met with all of them. We are no longer in that option because they are stating that, with the buoyant private rented market, there are other options there.

We have approximately 180 households within bed and breakfast accommodation tonight; it was 182 last night. Over the last few months, we have resorted to having to use a well-known hotel chain to place people in, which is something that we have not historically had to do because when we had large B&B numbers, there were more providers of that type of accommodation. They are now looking at providing that type of accommodation for workers coming into the city during the week, so there is not that type of B&B accommodation like there was a few years ago when we reduced our numbers significantly. Now they have gone back up, we struggle to access that type of accommodation.

Clir Astaire: Because we have been spending over £4 million a year over and above our budget on temporary accommodation and because we are competing with every other landlord in London trying to find property, it is a struggle. We still house over half of our TA people in Westminster itself and a significant number in inner and outer London, but it is a struggle. We have looked at reducing our high-cost nightly accommodation rent. We have looked at purchasing and building around Grays in Essex, but it continues to be a struggle and we continue to look at ways of keeping the costs down and everyone housed.

Q98 Kevin Hollinrake: Mr Hooper, you mentioned some of the housing associations were using Rightmove instead of using choice-based lettings.

Nick Hooper: Just one.

Kevin Hollinrake: Is that to get more rent, to get full market rent on their properties or just to save costs?

Nick Hooper: I think it is to attract a different type of tenant. These are affordable rented properties, so they are not market-rent properties. They are seeing part of our housing register as not very attractive to those particular properties that they want to rent.

Q99 David Mackintosh: Have the number of economic migrants applying for homelessness support or sleeping rough increased in your areas?

Hazel Summers: Certainly in Manchester the number of people who are sleeping rough has increased substantially. Over the winter when we ran the severe weather provision, of the 200 people that we saw about 25% of them were EU nationals with no recourse to public funds. That has been a big increase.

Cllr Astaire: 75% of the people sleeping rough are economic migrants. You will have read the well-publicised issue we have around Marble Arch and central London with the Roma community. That is a big issue. There are also significant number of Eastern Europeans who are sleeping rough. Some you see long term; some are there for a night or two nights. It is a way to keep their costs down when they are in London and they often send more money back home. We cannot use public funds for those people. For every British and Irish person sleeping rough on the streets of Westminster we have hostel space and we have mental health and drug support services. The biggest visible rough sleepers are foreign nationals.

Cllr Astaire: We buck the trend in Birmingham. At our last count where we found 36 rough sleepers, the number of people who were migrants from outside of the UK was very small. I cannot say exactly the number, but it was less than a handful. It is not one of the main reasons for sleeping rough within the city.

Nick Hooper: In relation to rough sleepers, our outreach team does a weekly hotspot count. The average for last year was that 72% were UK nationals and 15% were from what we call central or Central and Eastern European countries. They would be from the A8 or the A10 countries. Amongst the population where we took a statutory acceptance, in 2011-12 77% were UK nationals and last year 75%, so it is roughly the same. Non-EEA nationals was 17% in 2011-12 and 13% last year, so that is dropping. The percentage of EEA nationals was 6% in 2011-12 and 12% in 2015-16. Those numbers are quite small, so that would be 17 people in 2011-12 and 120 in the last financial year.

Cllr Astaire: Can I just give a bit of context that struck me as to the difference in the figures that are being bandied about? To give you an idea we had, in 2014-15, 2,570 people counted sleeping rough on the streets of Westminster.

Q100 David Mackintosh: How do you think Councils can manage the arrival of non-UK nationals?

Cllr Astaire: With help from the police and UKBA. That is a question for central Government.

Hazel Summers: I do think we need more support from UKBA. I would agree with that. We have some schemes within Greater Manchester where we reconnect people back to wherever they have come from if they choose to do so. We have a scheme set up across the 10 Greater Manchester authorities that if people want to go back and they are homeless we will fund their plane fare for them to go back. That is one way you can do it, but we do need for support from UKBA in terms of what we can and cannot do. There is very little that we can do.

Cllr Astaire: We agreed with some of the Roma to put 600 of them on coaches back to their home countries. They stayed for two weeks and came back again.

Nick Hooper: There is also the issue of no recourse to public funds. Not all EEA nationals are non-recourse to public funds and some would be. That presents a difficulty in terms of reconnection, as to whether the local authority can spend its money on reconnection. The rest of our reconnection we would do through voluntary agencies. We have a similar reconnection arrangement.

Q101 David Mackintosh: Do you have any information on what some of the pull factors are? Why do people choose to come here?

Cllr Astaire: People generally come for work. Through talking to people, they have come here for work. They may well have been working, but then they have lost their job, their tenancy and then stayed. That is just through talking to people personally; I would not know if that was a broader picture, but certainly for people I have talked to that is what they have said.

Nick Hooper: That is true in Bristol as well. In the last three years, looking at the GP registrations—which is probably quite a reasonable guide—the largest single group of people is from the Iberian peninsula and they are largely young people who are coming to work in hospitality and similar trades.

Cllr Astaire: They come for work and, with certain communities from certain countries, there is a slight organised crime element to it.

Q102 Chair: You mentioned UKBA and the Home Office; what more could they do to help?

Cllr Astaire: Resource up; it is as simple as that. Help us get people who are not exercising their treaty rights properly off the streets and back to their home countries and that is not a burden for the local taxpayer.

Q103 Chair: Are there powers there?

Cllr Astaire: No. There are with UKBA, but not with us.

Q104 Chair: Do you have a link, a dialogue going on between yourselves and UKBA?

Cllr Astaire: We have. We have done several joint operations with them, particularly in the Marble Arch area, because that is where it is particularly visible in central London over the summer, but they just do not have the resources to sustain that.

Chair: Right, so it is resources on their part that they need.

Cllr Astaire: Yes.

Hazel Summers: We have a link with UKBA as well, but it is getting people there when you need them and I would agree it is a resourcing issue.

Nick Hooper: For us, the link is between them and our outreach team, which is a service provided by St Mungo's Broadway, who you heard from last time. As I understand it, they believe their relationship is quite good with UKBA, but there is potentially more that could be done.

Q105 Chair: If UKBA do not spend their money, even though you cannot spend money providing accommodation, it still is costing you money, as authorities, just dealing with the issue.

Hazel Summers: It is.

Nick Hooper: Yes, and all the time that people are on the streets there is a risk of them getting involved in crime, even if they are not fundamentally criminal, so there is a cost to the police service, to the health service and so forth. There are absolutely system costs.

Q106 Kevin Hollinrake: Looking at rough sleeping more generally, what actions are you taking to reduce it? I am particularly looking at early intervention.

Jim Crawshaw: In Birmingham, at the last count there were 36 rough sleepers on the one night. To give some perspective, the year before there were 20, before that 14 and the previous 10 years before that we were in single figures. In fact, one year we had two people through the official count who were sleeping rough. We have seen a significant rise at a time when we have more services for rough sleepers now than we would have had 10 years ago. We do more joined up work with the police force. We have a host service in terms of people who are begging, whether they are rough sleeping or whether they are not, in order to engage with them and target. Since last year, we have a rough sleepers' multi-agency partnership. For the first time, 18 months ago, we put local connection criteria on our supported accommodation units; previously, we did not have that.

As with all the cities, we are a place where people migrate in for services, so we look to try to ensure that those beds are available for rough sleepers, who have the priority to access their beds. We do a lot more multi-agency work in partnerships around rough sleeping. We have just recommissioned a welfare service for single people and housing advice, which is a local organisation called SIFA Fireside and Shelter in partnership, where they will be providing that support. As a city, we think we provide more and more services for rough sleepers, but we have seen those numbers increase significantly. Although they are obviously lower numbers than in Westminster, it is an issue for us in the city and is one of our priorities in terms of seeking to reduce it.

Hazel Summers: I would agree that we have probably more services now than we have ever had. We have increased our rough sleeping team within the council. We have a close working relationship with the police, similar to what has been described. We have set up single points of access for people. We have developed a Big Change campaign, which is trying to persuade people not to give funding to people who are begging on the street. We have had some success with that and made some money and paid for bonds with it for individuals. We have also had a multi-agency response to all of this through the development of a charter, which has been led through the voluntary and community sector. We have charities that are working with us that are not commissioned through the council, and faith groups that are working very closely with us to try to tackle this earlier on in a partnership way. However, despite all of that, everything we have put in, the numbers have increased drastically.

Q107 Kevin Hollinrake: Can you quantify that in terms of the numbers?

Hazel Summers: On the rough sleeper count, it had gone up to 70, but I do not think that is the real figure. I think the real figure is nearer to 100, based on our severe weather provision.

Cllr Astaire: I got into dreadful trouble a few years ago when we looked at talking about byelaws to ban soup kitchens in Westminster. Whilst that created a whole host of outrage, it brought a sensible conversation to the table, where we brought soup run providers around the table to start talking. The point was, when we have so many people who are sustaining life on the street by going out and giving food, we sustain the problem and make it worse. These are people, 44% of whom have mental health needs, about a quarter have drugs needs, and a third have a real alcohol dependency need. We need to get them into building space services where they can be offered bedding, support services and a route back to where they came from. We work very closely with a number of charities; we recommission it regularly—Passage is a big one that we work with, just around the corner from the building we are sitting in at the moment—to help people off the street and into service delivery and into the help that they need. It is making sure that that message is not contradicted by misplaced goodwill that keeps people on the streets.

Nick Hooper: I would endorse that, definitely. “Killing with kindness” is the phrase that some people have talked about; it is not necessarily killing, but you get the sense of it. I would offer a couple of other things as well, like having really strong protocols with prisons and hospitals. We have done a lot of work with our main acute hospital and the mental health hospitals and just recently with the prison service, because of the restructuring of probation such that pretty well everybody who comes out of the prison gate will now have an offender manager under an arrangement with community rehabilitation companies. It is very early days, but it looks as though the Through the Gate service in the main prison in Bristol is starting to have some real effects on a managed discharge. What used to happen to us quite often is, on a Friday afternoon, they would turn up at the housing advice point, having been sent there by the prison. Those are really important things to do, because they can be a source of rough sleeping.

The other thing I would say is that we put in place about four years ago a lot of services, as with the other authorities. We have something like 1,100 beds for people, and they are not necessarily all former rough sleepers, but they are all people who have formerly been homeless. There is a series of pathways through these services and helping those people into long-term, independent accommodation, which we talked about earlier, is really difficult. That silts up the pathway, so quite a lot

of our 97 people who were counted last autumn are there because we simply cannot get them into the services because people are no longer moving through the services.

Q108 Kevin Hollinrake: Do you have an idea of the number of your rough sleepers today versus, say, last year and five years ago?

Nick Hooper: The annual count last autumn counted 97. There are undoubtedly more people, so we would only ever call that an estimate. About four years before that, we counted five people using the same methodology.

Q109 Kevin Hollinrake: Five to 97 is a 20-fold increase. Are you accounting for that just because of the silting up of the pathway out?

Nick Hooper: No. That would be a potential solution if it was not so silted up, but there are other reasons, which we have talked about. Even amongst the rough sleeping population, losing a private sector tenancy is now a significant reason. There are complex reasons and people quite often come on and off the streets. We reckon about 10% of people who are on the streets have a tenancy or they have accommodation in a hostel or supported housing and their life is so chaotic and they have often been on the street for a long time, they find it very difficult to make that move from the street into stable accommodation. They will drift back and spend a couple of nights on the street and then go back into the hostel. Changing those long-term patterns for people is a really tough job.

Hazel Summers: I would agree with that. That is definitely true.

Q110 Kevin Hollinrake: There is a mental health aspect to this and you have mentioned it several times. In the forum we ran on this lots of people talked about the mental health issues. Are local authorities equipped to deal with some of these complex difficulties that people have to resolve these issues?

Hazel Summers: The thing with mental health is that, for people who are homeless, they do not always access help when they need it. There is a lot of money spent on mental health services, but they tend to be in the secondary sector and we are talking about services where you can get in much earlier for people. Whilst homeless people do have access to mental health services, it is often quite late in the day in terms of when they need to get the services. Local authorities tend not to provide mental health services themselves. They will be provided through a mental health trust or another provider, but making sure that those protocols are in place is really important. Based on what Urban Village says, which is our local health practice and an exemplar at

dealing with homeless health, a high proportion of people who come through those services have mental ill health and drug and alcohol issues. There are also new drugs on the horizon that are like legal highs, which are really difficult to deal with as well.

Nick Hooper: A significant cohort of the rough sleeping population or the marginal population have a complex set of issues and quite a lot of them are moving around and between services, so they will be on the streets and then in prison; they will be on the streets and then in psychiatric hospital. They are high users of A and E services and the critical thing is to enable those folk to have a comprehensive wraparound that they are engaged in and they are driving their recovery journey. We have a Big Lottery funded project in the city—I am not sure if it is in the other cities here at the table—which is called Complex Lives; locally it is called Golden Key. The idea there is not to provide additional services but to fundamentally change the way the system works. Rather than pushing people from one service to another, it is to bring the services together around the individual and let the individual then drive their recovery journey. It is early days, but fundamentally that is the right approach for people with these most complex needs.

Q111 Kevin Hollinrake: Is that a city council-based initiative?

Nick Hooper: No, it is a Big Lottery initiative, which is under a banner called Fulfilling Lives. They currently have two major programmes running: that one, which is around people who are in crisis services and have very complex needs; the other one is around social isolation amongst older people. We happen to have both those programmes running in Bristol and they are running in about 20 cities around the country.

Hazel Summers: We have one of those, called Inspiring Change, in Manchester and that is run by Shelter. Again, it is early days in terms of whether it will work or not and whether it can influence what we can do. It is where one key worker will bring the services around the individual.

Cllr Astaire: Our single homelessness pathway for young people and single people who are homeless provides that wraparound, tailored support. In fact, I would extend an invitation to anyone who wants to come to see the work that we do at our hostel in Newman Street, just off Oxford Street, where there are multi-agencies providing services. We also have learned from things like our family recovery programme about multi-agency working and it is all about having everyone joined up and together to holistically look at the problem. Again, it is about getting to people early. That is why I really liked the Mayor's No Second

Night Out project when that was running. Once you have someone right at the beginning, you have far more chance of solving the problems they can suffer than if they are left on the streets.

Jim Crawshaw: In Birmingham, our rough sleepers team is commissioned through Midland Heart Housing Association, which has run our rough sleepers team for around 16 or 17 years. They have very close relationships and will go out and do outreach services with mental health, and drug and alcohol services in order to engage with people. Often, the best way to engage with people is out on the street, because if you make them an appointment they are not necessarily going to turn up for it. That joined-up approach is best. In terms of rough sleeping, certainly for us—I do not know whether this is replicated—we are being fed back that benefit sanctions have had a significant impact. When I asked if there was an issue regarding immigration and rough sleeping, I was told no and that one of the biggest issues is around benefit sanctions.

Hazel Summers: We have exactly the same. That is what I have been told also.

Q112 Kevin Hollinrake: Given this problem, is there a general feeling that your offices have the skills and capability to deal with these problems where they exist?

Jim Crawshaw: Yes, in partnership, which is absolutely crucial. Our street outreach workers will not be experts in mental health or drugs. They will be aware of it and they will be able to engage, but it will be about working in partnership, as we have all said. Certainly for those rough sleepers, particularly the chaotic ones, you have to work together in partnership and get at the people on the streets often.

Hazel Summers: Similar to Jim, we have had a rough sleepers team in Manchester who have been working for a very long time. They are incredibly experienced. They know everybody out there. They have told me that this is getting harder and harder. When the numbers were under 10 of rough sleepers, they were able to go to people and get them moved through with a bit of a carrot and a bit of stick, saying, "We will help you, but you need to get into accommodation". What has happened since is that that plethora of charities and others that have grown up, which have made it easier for people to be sustained on the street, has created some problems. Whilst we have some excellent charities in Manchester, and I do know people do this from the goodness of their heart, it is not helping people.

Just a story, somebody said, "Why do you stay here? We can find you somewhere to live". He said, "Why do I have to move? Somebody

brings me a bacon butty in the morning; I have a tent to live in; somebody brings me a sleeping bag and a clean pair of shoes; and then someone brings me dinner later on. If I go into a hostel, I have to comply with some rules". There is something about making it easier for people to stay on the street. There is some of that, plus some of the things we have discussed about EU nationals, benefit sanctions, the spare room subsidy. There are a number of factors that have come together to create the problem that we have and we do know that it has worsened despite us putting more services in.

Q113 Kevin Hollinrake: How do you balance the support you want to give with the enforcement action that you need to carry out?

Hazel Summers: There is a big difference between people who are rough sleeping and begging and people who are homeless, maybe who live in temporary accommodation, and begging. Then there are some people who are in ordinary accommodation and tenancies who are begging. In Manchester they are a very generous bunch of people and you can make up to £200 a day begging. I have been told that by people who are begging.

Chair: That is not from personal experience.

Hazel Summers: I am thinking of taking it up as a career when I am sacked after this. That is a big sum of money, so if you have had a benefits sanction or whatever it might be, you can make money really easily in that way. We need to have a series of interventions that tackle those individual things. The courts probably need more powers to deal with begging; some of our legislation on begging is really old. I think people get mixed up. The normal person walking through Manchester, London or wherever it is will not be able to differentiate between somebody who is begging and somebody who is rough sleeping, and will think that they are the same group of people.

Nick Hooper: I completely endorse that.

Hazel Summers: The intelligence that we get through working with the police closer and better is to determine who is what. If you are sent to court for begging, because you know you have accommodation and we have offered you loads of support, you might get a fine and you can go out and beg to pay off your fine. There are some real issues around that and I am sure if my colleagues from the police were here they would agree that they do not have the powers and the courts do not have the powers that they need. It is important to work with incredibly vulnerable people and differentiate between them and their problems and work with their complex needs, and those people who are begging on the street who are different.

Nick Hooper: We have a separate enforcement team, which is a joint team between the police and our anti-social behaviour team. We have a distinction between the assertive outreach that the rough sleeping outreach team are engaged in, which is the positive assertive, and for those people who are causing a serious nuisance, aggressive begging and so forth. That is dealt with by a completely different team, so there is no confusion of roles about somebody helping me or somebody sanctioning me.

Jim Crawshaw: One thing on rough sleeping that I know happens, certainly in London and a number of other authorities, is the Housing First model. For those who are appropriate, it is about giving them a property first and then looking at what support is needed in order to keep that. We are working with seven other local authorities in the West Midlands on that approach. We have also launched an accreditation scheme, which is very much around what Daniel talked about in Westminster. It is concerned with the voluntary outreach services and getting them accredited and working together, so we do not have lots of different organisations out on the street giving food etc, but we are looking at doing that in a coordinated way. So, when people are coming in for things such as food, organisations try to get them advice and assistance and work with them to get them off the street rather than just giving them something that can help to sustain their life on the streets.

Nick Hooper: I would just draw attention to the figures from last November. Rather than looking at the raw figure, if you look at the figure per 10,000 of the population, you will see a quite surprising pattern. Instead of Bristol being the first outside London, it is about number 18 on the list. The City of London is the highest per 10,000 of population, but there are a number of others and they are all in the south of England, in places like Canterbury, Exeter, Surrey Heath and so forth. We have four big urban authorities here, but there is a different story that the rise in rough sleeping figures is telling us about what is going on in the country.

Q114 Chair: You were saying there were not the powers there to deal with the begging issue in a proper way. Specifically, what would you want to see?

Hazel Summers: It is about the courts being able to react to it in an appropriate way. I am no expert in the law, but what I do know is that the legislation is really outdated. The police say to me that when we have prosecuted somebody nothing really happens; they are given a fine. That is all that happens and then they would come out to beg to pay to pay off the fine.

Cllr Astaire: The police are relying on the Vagrancy Act of 1824. It is out of date, outmoded and does not really do very much. It is a resource issue again, because the enforcement requires a police presence and the police being on the streets and they have other things to do and there are not as many of them as there once was. It is also about what the courts can do, quite rightly. Can they push people into drug and alcohol programmes more than they are doing? Can they get people engaged with services rather than just penalties?

Chair: That is very useful and helpful, thank you.

Q115 David Mackintosh: Do you think the local connection rules should be revised?

Cllr Astaire: Yes. We need to look very carefully at the local connection rules. We need to ensure that there is a local connection. At the moment, someone having a local connection of having lived in Westminster for six of the last 12 months or three out of the last five years is something that is very easy for someone to fulfil and just gives sway to the big numbers that we have who approach our services. If we tighten that and make it a more locally based service for local families and local people, we manage the service and the numbers better.

Jim Crawshaw: I would disagree. As a very large city, about 14% of our homeless applications are from households that are outside of Birmingham when they approach us. Around 40% of those are because of domestic violence and we do have significant provision within the city for victims of domestic abuse. Although I understand Daniel's stance on that, I think that the local connection criteria work well in terms of legislation and I do not think there would need to be any changes to that.

Q116 David Mackintosh: Do you think it would be easier to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping if some of the things around local connection were changed, so if the catchment area, perhaps, was on a regional basis?

Nick Hooper: I am slightly struggling to work out what that would achieve. Clearly, people come into cities for services, where their connection might be elsewhere. They may then acquire a local connection because they come for work or whatever and have stayed. Is the suggestion that we might be able to return somebody to place of origin if the local connection criteria were much wider?

David Mackintosh: Perhaps, yes.

Nick Hooper: We work quite hard to get people back to where they came from anyway, so I am not sure that a regional or sub-regional definition would make that much difference, to be honest. I do not know what other colleagues think about that.

Jim Crawshaw: In terms of the homelessness legislation, if it was regional—and I have not thought this through, so I am thinking aloud, apologies—if anything, I would have a concern that more people may want to migrate into Birmingham from the surrounding areas rather than having a different impact on us. I am sat next to my colleague from Manchester, but we are the city of choice for a number of people coming into Birmingham. It is a city that is definitely on the up and has been for a number of years. I guess if it was on a regional basis, I would have concerns that more people would migrate in rather than fewer.

Q117 Chair: There might be a small district council that simply does not have the range of facilities that you can offer as cities. Is it not possible to have a more joined-up approach where maybe they pay for that service that is only available to someone in the city, even though their local connection is a small district down the road?

Jim Crawshaw: Currently, as I touched on earlier, we put local connection criteria on our single persons' supported accommodation within the city because of the demand from people from Birmingham. There would be potential to have those discussions with those authorities, but we would need to increase the provision in order to meet their needs. I guess we would then have concerns if those people were then looking to stay within the city, if they were all vulnerable people being moved into the city on top of the vulnerable people who we accommodate and house. I guess there could be discussions around that. It is not something that we have looked at, but we would need to increase our own provisions.

Cllr Astaire: There is a conundrum here, to an extent, because we value and we need the local connection and I have talked about that. If we did not have it, we would find significant migration, particularly into a borough like ours. At the same time, we need to see homelessness in the broader sense, not simply rough sleeping, as a London-wide issue, because the London housing market does not respect borough boundaries and we need to think about it on a more regional basis as to how we house people.

Hazel Summers: Under Greater Manchester devolution, there are opportunities there for us to think on a much broader, sub-regional type approach as to how we might do this. I do not think we are there yet, but it is certainly something that we will need to consider as we go

forward. As health and social care becomes integrated across all of Greater Manchester and mental health services etc, we would need to be thinking about how we might do that in a different way.

David Mackintosh: You have answered the next question that I was going to ask.

Nick Hooper: Given that Greater Manchester has some devolution around NHS services as well, it certainly creates an opportunity on a sub-regional basis.

Q118 Chair: I understand that there is different legislation in Scotland and Wales, which have adopted a slightly different approach in terms of who authorities have responsibility for when they are homeless. Scotland is not using the priority need criteria and Wales has adopted a different approach of providing assistance and advice to everyone in this situation. Have you looked at those alternative models? Do you have any views on them?

Hazel Summers: I have been giving it some thought. We would have concerns about the rules that Scotland has about rehousing people whether they are intentionally homeless or not, because people may see that as a route into social housing: "If I am made homeless, I am likely to be able to get some kind of social housing". That homelessness route into social housing is not something we would want to encourage.

Q119 Chair: I do not think Scotland has dealt with the intentionality, has it? It has dealt with the priority need rule; that is the one that has changed, is it not?

Hazel Summers: Yes, but if you open up the criteria for homelessness in that way, all that happens is that people will think, "That is my route to getting into a place nearby", so that would be a concern.

I would agree more with the prevention approach that they have adopted in Wales, but this needs to be a systems approach and not just a local authority. If there were some kind of prevention duty, we need to be thinking about the criminal justice system, health and much more broadly than local authorities. I know that you have a good system in Bristol, but there has been some publicity lately of people being moved out of prison with a sleeping bag and I do know that sometimes people are placed into really unpleasant bed and breakfast accommodation within Manchester because there has been no proper pathway worked out for them. I believe prevention is not just the role of a local authority; it needs to be more of a systems-wide approach.

Jim Crawshaw: Having looked through and read articles about the Wales legislation rather than its detail, it is certainly something in principle that I and, speaking as a city council, we would support. The ability to provide advice and assistance to everybody at the point of contact is something that we would strive to do. The devil is in the detail of this legislation or the thoughts around the legislation, but certainly we would be keen to be involved in that. As we would say, I believe that it would be a new burden on us as an authority. Therefore, we would need to look at how that could be resourced, but we certainly would support something in line or similar to the Welsh prevention model and think that it would have an impact. Having been at a conference and seen some of the figures coming out of Wales, for the first six months they have seen intentionality decrease.

There is an argument there for doing that support at the beginning and making it very much the balance between responsibilities and rights and working with those people who are intentionally homeless—for example, ensuring that they seek debt advice; that they do something positive about looking to change the behaviours that resulted in their becoming intentionally homeless. It is a really good idea and certainly has some legs in terms of worth. We would support something in line, but the devil is in the detail about what comes out of that and what impact that would have on us as authorities.

Hazel Summers: We would have to have the resource that would come with it.

Cllr Astaire: My officers have looked into the Welsh model and they like it. We would like to see a Welsh model pilot for London, but with two major caveats. One is that the local connection regulation is maintained, as we were speaking about earlier, and the duty to house. The second is that we break that borough by borough link, so that if we give someone an offer of housing and it is outside of borough, it has to be accepted.

Nick Hooper: We also broadly agree. We try to have a prevention model, as far as we can, but we think a prevention duty might be quite helpful. I have looked at the paper that you commissioned and looked at the other three countries' pieces of legislation and the duty to house, as it is in Scotland, would be highly problematic for us. It is already difficult enough when there is no duty to house and I am unclear where we would be able to find accommodation for the numbers of people we have coming to us. I would echo also the question about additional burdens. The current homelessness grant is paid as part of the business rate retention scheme and is un-ring-fenced, indeed. Obviously, business rate retention is going down over time, so the Government

would have to look at how that would work if local authorities were to be covered for the additional costs.

Q120 Chair: What about the idea of a pilot?

Nick Hooper: The idea of a pilot is a really helpful one.

Hazel Summers: We would volunteer.

Jim Crawshaw: If it were replicated nationally, the pilot would need to be across different authorities, both larger urban London and some of the more rural and districts, to see how that would work. Housing markets are so different it would have to be done in different places.

Q121 Mary Robinson: On that point, I wanted to ask Hazel, with devolution and the related discussion to it earlier, would the pilot be something that you would be asking for in the current process and the modelling that is going on in Manchester?

Hazel Summers: I would certainly take that back to my Greater Manchester colleagues, because it would be a way of testing something across a sub-regional area.

Jim Crawshaw: Certainly, I could take that back to Birmingham.

Q122 Chair: Finally, if we are going to address this problem, what is the biggest challenge? Is it the law, is it money or is it the wider housing market? If we are going to solve the problem of homelessness, what really needs to be tackled?

Nick Hooper: It is a wider housing market issue. In Bristol, I talk to people about how we have a housing crisis with homelessness consequences rather than a homelessness crisis. That is a bit glib, but is broadly true. If I am allowed one ask, changing legislation around private sector tenancies would be it, to give more security to people who are in private sector tenancies so that they can be confident that they are there for a much longer period of time than is currently the case.

Hazel Summers: It is a mixture of all of those things. If you talk to homeless people, it is a mixture of the fact that the housing market has changed, there is less access to social housing, private rented housing is more difficult to access, certainly if you are under 35 and the rental that is paid with that. People are in insecure work and that can cause tenancy breakdown. In addition, the people we deal with generally, particularly who are rough sleeping, have a mixture of complex needs. It is not usually just one thing; it is a range of complex needs that are

brought together. I should add EU nationals to that, which has changed the dynamic a bit as well.

Jim Crawshaw: For us, there is the potential overall impact of the Housing and Planning Bill around the longer-term provision of accommodation. The need for more social housing is definitely something that we would be looking for. In terms of the potential impact and some of the impacts that we are seeing already through welfare reform, there are concerns there for us, as an authority, in terms of increasing numbers coming through the doors as homeless and the potential for that. I am thinking particularly of the benefit cap being reduced to £20,000. We already have a large number of households, obviously not as many as colleagues in London, which are impacted by the £26,000 benefit cap. That will increase tenfold through the £20,000 benefit cap and, therefore, a number of those will end up approaching us for accommodation as an authority. It will, of course, be the larger families, who we do struggle to accommodate, because we do not have the stock of larger accommodation. Again, going on the back of what colleagues have said, it is all of those things that you said, Chair.

Cllr Astaire: It involves all three to a greater or lesser extent. I would not advocate the interference in the market that Bristol was, perhaps, suggesting, but I would say that the easiest win for us and the quickest way of dealing with some of the problems we have is a revision of statutory guidance on homelessness and placing people in accommodation, as pretty much put out in the written submission we provided. Amending that and freeing us up to spend our money out of borough, and freeing us up in the way that we can offer and consider out of borough placements would reduce the burden dramatically.

Chair: Thank you all very much for coming and giving evidence to us this afternoon; it has been appreciated. Thank you.