



Faculty of Business and Law

Action Homeless 'Accommodation Plus' Project Evaluation

De Montfort University, Leicester

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Executive Summary

Accommodation Plus is a service provided by Action Homeless for people who have experienced homelessness in the past, and are at risk of falling back into homelessness. It was developed after consultation with homeless people and aims to provide them with stable, long-term accommodation that allows them to break out of the revolving door of homelessness.

It is differentiated from similar services in its focus on the provision of long term, rather than temporary accommodation. It follows on of the main principles of Housing First in that tenants are offered tenancies and are not expected to move on, as is the case for most traditional homeless accommodation.

It works with people who have relatively low, but still complex needs, and have had a history of repeated homelessness. They have largely followed a pathway from hostel accommodation provided by Action Homeless and other providers in the City. The service aims to meet the housing needs of those who cannot readily access social housing as they are not considered to be in 'priority need' by the local authority.

It aims to offer a secure foundation on which to build stable, fulfilling lives as citizens in a community and to avoid the costs associated with falling back into homelessness and associated social problems by:

1. Providing **sustainable, dignified living conditions**;
2. Helping them achieve a sense of **permanence and security** that enables them to plan for the future;
3. Enabling them to make **positive life changes**;
4. Supporting them to be **better integrated** into community life; and
5. Helping them achieve sustained **higher living standards** and quality of life.

A key element of the service is that they benefit from living with others who share similar experiences and offers peer support-reducing isolation. It also offers high quality property management with light touch support services and signposting.

The accommodation is based across the City, comprises of single flats, family houses, and shared accommodation. All of the homes have been renovated to a high quality, but they also are designed to giving tenants privacy and choice in how they live their own lives.

The properties have been acquired through long-term leases with private owners, or acquired by Action Homeless who have bought themselves. There are now 56 units for singles and 7 houses, which provided a home for 10 children.

Outline of the Model

Ingredients	Expected Outcomes
<p>Accommodation Plus has the following key ingredients:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tenancy Agreements: offering long-term security• Quality Accommodation: high standard of accommodation offering privacy and dignity• Range of Accommodation: including self-contained flats, family homes and shared properties• Tenancy Sustainment Officers: provision of assistance to maintain tenancy• Wider Opportunities as part of Action Homeless: clients can engage in voluntary work with Action Trust and also access to food bank if necessary	<p>There are four key intermediate outcomes expected of the Accommodation Plus approach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clients have sustainable, dignified living conditions• Clients plan and execute positive life changes• Clients are better integrated into community life• Clients achieve sustained higher livings standards <p>The findings of the evaluation support positive progress against all four of these outcomes. Clients may not use the same language as the organisation does, but they report feeling happier, more secure, better wellbeing, better connected to others.</p>

Research Evaluation Methods

The Evaluation started in the early Spring 2019 and completed at the end of August 2019. Following a desk-top review of documentation, interviews were undertaken with staff and clients. A total of 23 clients of Accommodation Plus were interviewed, 16 males and 7 females. These clients lived in a range of Accommodation Plus housing including family houses, single occupancy properties and shared housing. Only adults over the age of 18 were interviewed, but participants did offer responses from the perspective of their family, where children were part of the homeless family unit benefiting from the housing led approach.

ACCOMMODATION PLUS



- Long-term secure tenancies
- Quality accommodation
- Good landlord services



NUMBERS

29

Properties

61

Current Tenants

3

Tenancy officers

TYPE



FAMILY HOMES



SHARED HOUSES



SINGLE OCCUPANCY

139
CLIENTS



78%
MALE



22%
FEMALE

OUTCOMES



IMPROVED WELLBEING



INCREASED EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION & TRAINING



GREATER INDEPENDENCE

Conclusions

This evaluation reached the following conclusions:

1. The benefits reported by clients included feeling safe, secure and having higher perceived levels of wellbeing
2. For the city, there is benefit in this homeless service, which fills a gap in the current homeless provision for those, particularly single men, who are not seen as in 'priority need'
3. The sustainability of the programme would be supported by a more accessible private rented sector or social housing market – if there is nowhere sustainable and affordable to move onto then there will be limited availability in the current stock to help more homeless people
4. Action Homeless has the understanding and the specialist skills in its workforce, to provide this housing and support service – underpinned by housing first principles and delivered in a theory of change which supports a client-led, coaching approach.
5. The cost of renovating the property and providing the 'light touch' support service offers good value in the longer term, according to the reported benefits by clients and service providers.
6. There are benefits to the Accommodation Plus model from being situated within a charity model that has different approaches and funds to draw on. Clients of 'Accommodation Plus' regularly follow a pathway from hostels provided in the Accommodation Assist service; they can also benefit from small grants from the charity to fund things like bicycle repair or similar small-scale but essential needs.
7. The Accommodation Plus approach allows clients to think about the longer term – this is vital to wellbeing, and escaping the 'revolving door'. Security of the accommodation allows clients to think about 'home'.

Recommendations

Accessing the Service

1. People spoke about finding out about Accommodation Plus, and Action Homeless by 'luck' therefore more work needed in referral system and closer links with the Council.
2. An enhanced communications plan, to widen knowledge of Action Homeless and Accommodation Plus would help more people access the services, but this may be problematic unless there is growth in supply in the service.

Growing the Service

- 3 There is a real need for this provision for homeless people, the charity should continue to work with central and local government to purchase and lease more properties to include in Accommodation Plus. It is also recommended that Action Homeless leads talk with regional housing associations to see whether properties in their stock might be brought in to add capacity to the Accommodation Plus service.
- 4 Action Homeless has been successful in applying for grant and in securing properties through purchase and lease with property owners. It is recommended they continue to expand this model of property acquisition and also work with private and public property owners to utilise housing for the Accommodation Plus service.
- 5 It may be appropriate to purchase some accommodation for shared rentals. The preference for clients is to have their own space, but there are real benefits from peer support in shared property. Action Homeless could find out more about these benefits from schemes like the 'Peer Landlord' service for homeless people¹.

Reporting the Benefits

- 6 There are many benefits reported by Accommodation Plus clients. The service represents good financial and social return on initial investment and these lessons could be shared with others. There are similar models to 'Accommodation Plus' (for example another project that the PI has evaluated is run by Elmbridge Rentstart who have similar ingredients (accommodation + bespoke client-led support, also access to charity fund for small essential items to support people back to work, or for maintaining their home). Collectively, such services could learn from one another, Action Homeless could take the initiative in liaising with others to develop a learning network, that looks beyond 'Housing First' and which brings together schemes that are adaptors rather than adopters of this model.

¹ <https://www.commonwealhousing.org.uk/static/uploads/2018/07/2017-Peer-Landlord-report-v6-final.pdf>

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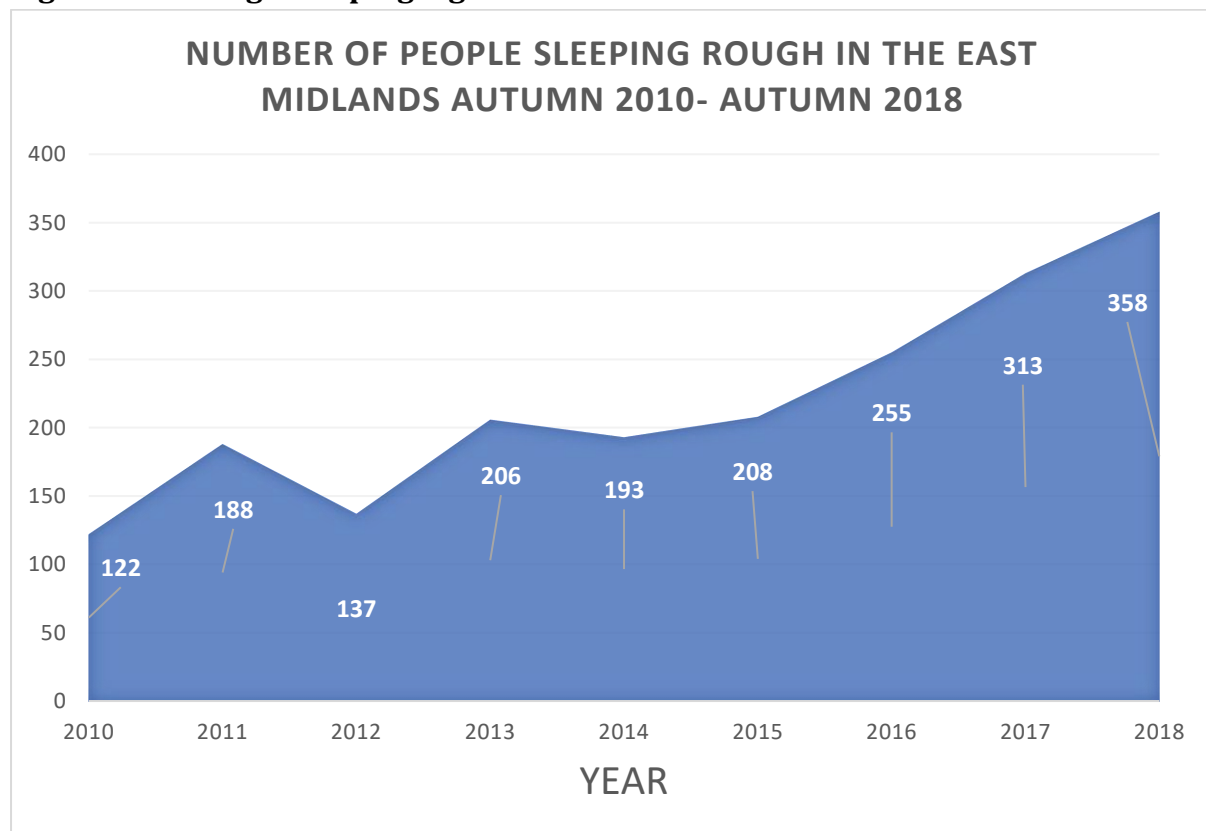
Introduction

Homelessness in the UK

Homelessness in the UK has increased markedly in the past eight years. Official statistics place figures of rough sleeping at 4,677 last year, although charities within the sector suggest the actual numbers to be much higher than this. Analysis from Homeless Link in 2018 reported an increase of 165% in rough sleeping in the last eight years, with rough sleeping in the East Midlands up 14% since 2017, (Homeless Link, 2018). Alongside the increase in rough sleeping, the homelessness organisation Crisis suggested around 160,000 people were experiencing homelessness (Crisis, 2018).

The government has pledged to eliminate rough sleeping by 2027. The Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) came into force in April 2018. This placed responsibility on local authorities to prevent homelessness, but initial analysis suggests the adoption of this has been mixed (Reform, 2019).

Figure One: Rough Sleeping Figures for the East Midlands



(Data Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, *Rough Sleeping Statistics Autumn 2018, England (Revised)*, February 2019)

In November 2017, a count and survey of homeless people was carried out throughout the city of Leicester as part of the European End Street Homeless Campaign (Richardson, 2017). In total, 93 homeless people were surveyed and the majority of these individuals had medium to high vulnerability scores. The study found that

homeless people in Leicester face multiple and complex health needs. More details of this study can be found at: <https://actionhomeless.org.uk/eshleicester/>.

Homelessness in the UK has traditionally been 'managed' in a responsive mode, and solutions are restricted for those who are not considered to be in 'priority need'. Action Homeless 'Accommodation Plus' approach is different in that it looks to support those who fall through the statutory homeless 'net' because they are not seen to be in priority need for council assistance.

This report sets out an evaluation of the 'Accommodation Plus' story so far. In the next chapter (two) we outline the methods approach, then, in the third, we describe the ingredients of the 'Accommodation Plus' intervention. The fourth chapter outlines the key findings, and then we finish with a brief fifth chapter which makes some recommendations for the future.

Aims and Methods

Aim of study

This research report aims to evaluate the 'Accommodation Plus' approach, used by Action Homeless in Leicester. The 'Accommodation Plus' approach is based on the principles of Housing First, but is adapted to ensure it meets the needs of clients that Action Homeless see in the city. The report seeks to understand and define the model and to examine the benefits of this approach compared with the more traditional 'stair-casing', responsive-mode approach of managing homelessness - which has been seen to create, for some, a revolving door in and out of services. Accommodation Plus is a longer-term sustainable approach, requiring more investment at the start, but potentially offering more sustainable results for clients and for services.

Methodological Approach

The research team² were commissioned in early Spring 2019. Work started on a desk review of available materials relating to project descriptors and frameworks (such as the coaching approach and the Theory of Change model). The primary research was undertaken, predominantly during May and June – through interviews with a sample of clients and with colleagues from Action Homeless who were involved in the delivery of 'Accommodation Plus'.

Interviews were carried out with clients of Accommodation Plus and Accommodation Assist, as well as staff of Action Homeless to provide the research data for this study. A total of 23 clients of Accommodation Plus were interviewed, 16 males and 7 females. These clients lived in a range of Accommodation Plus housing including family houses, single occupancy properties and shared housing. Only adults over the age of 18 were interviewed, but participants did offer responses from the perspective of their family, where children were part of the homeless family unit benefiting from the housing led approach.

The interviews were semi-structured, based on a list of themes established from the desk-review, particularly analysing the Theory of Change model. Clients were asked about their housing history to establish their previous experiences of 'revolving door' homelessness; the effect of Accommodation Plus on their lives and the specific ingredients of this service that have had an impact.

The interviews with Accommodation Assist clients provided a 'control group' type of effect – not replicating the method of an experiment, but offering an alternative viewpoint from clients of Action Homeless, but not within the 'Accommodation Plus'

² Jo Richardson and Frances Maguire

approach. A group interview with three Accommodation Assist clients was conducted, to give a comparative flavour. These clients shared their experiences of the staircasing model of homelessness services. This provided a point of comparison with the Accommodation Plus clients.

Additionally, Action Homeless staff were interviewed to understand the service from the point of the provider and identify the main ingredients of Accommodation Plus. This included speaking with Tenancy Sustainment Officers.

The interview data from all participants was coded and themed, predominant themes listed for focus in the findings and evaluation. These emerging themes are discussed further in the next chapter and again later in the findings chapter of this report.

What is Accommodation Plus?

Accommodation Plus

'Accommodation Plus' is a 'housing first' type approach to resolving homelessness. Action Homeless has rethought its approach to chronically homeless people in Leicester with the implementation of Accommodation Plus. It starts with the premise that accommodation should be provided first, along with assistance to manage and sustain the tenancy provided to clients. This approach provides secure, long-term housing and associated services for clients in the middle of the risk/need spectrum. The aim is that through providing this service, clients gain a solid foundation on which to build stable lives in the community and avoid falling back into homelessness. This service provides accommodation to individuals, couples and families in a range of accommodation. Currently, there are 29 properties within Accommodation Plus, seven of these properties Action Homeless own independently and the rest are on long-term leases from private landlords of between five and ten years.

Accommodation Plus was initially developed in response to clients of Action Homeless expressing the need for 'move-on' accommodation. The shortage of local authority housing and the difficulties of getting private rented properties meant that Action Homeless clients had few options from which to move out of hostels. Alongside this, Action Homeless had the opportunity to receive grant money through the Empty Homes initiative. This involved renovating properties that had fallen into disrepair or stood empty for a period of time and renting them on long-term leases from private landlords. Subsequently, Action Homeless have also bought a number of properties themselves to expand the service. Owning properties and obtaining others on long term leases enables Action Homeless to let clients stay in their accommodation for as long as they wish. Action Homeless provided an extra 100 'units' in 2018 and plans to continue to expand the service.

Accommodation Plus is one of three accommodation options that Action Homeless provide.

- (1) crisis accommodation for single people at risk of sleeping on the street.
- (2) Accommodation Assist, provides temporary housing for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. This consists of small shared houses, bedsits and self-contained houses. Currently, the majority of clients in Accommodation Plus have been referred internally from the Accommodation Assist service.
- (3) Accommodation Plus – the project evaluated in this report.

Housing First

Accommodation Plus shares many of the same principles as Housing First approaches to homelessness. The underpinning idea of Housing First is that homeless individuals are given stable accommodation first, to then enable them to engage with support services. This contrasts with the traditional staircasing model used to tackle

homelessness, whereby 'someone must engage with support services and demonstrate housing readiness before they can move to permanent accommodation' (Crisis, 2018). A recent report published by Crisis advocated the nationwide adoption of Housing First approaches. The report identified the following key principles of Housing First:

- People have a right to home
- Flexible support provided for as long as it is needed
- Housing and support are separated
- Individuals have choice and control
- An active engagement approach
- Based on people's strengths, goals and aspirations
- A harm minimisation approach

(Crisis, 2018, p.32)

Housing First has been described as the 'the most important innovation in tackling homelessness of the last few decades' and has been shown to end homelessness for around 80% of people with high support needs (Crisis, 2018; Feantsa, 2018). Several studies also indicate Housing First solutions are cost effective, in addition to being beneficial to the individual (Crisis, 2015).

Housing First strategies have been adopted in several European countries (most notably Finland) as well as the United States and Canada. Within Europe there is a growing consensus that Housing First approaches are the best way forward for tackling homelessness and whilst Housing First approaches have been adopted by local and voluntary bodies, it is yet to receive substantial political backing in many places (Feantsa, 2018).

Indeed, Housing First has gained some traction in the UK, but implementation had remained relatively localised (Crisis, 2015). Homeless Link, which represents the homelessness sector in the UK advocates the use of Housing First approaches, as do the leading charities Crisis and Shelter. Recent analysis on integrating Housing First into homelessness strategies in the UK argues that whilst Housing First offers a positive intervention, it is not a 'panacea' and warns that such approaches must not be adopted at the expense of existing services that may have strengths of their own. Pleace (2018) advocates the adoption of Housing First as part of an 'integrated homelessness strategy' that includes prevention measures.

This has been the approach for Action Homeless, who have adapted 'Accommodation Plus' on the principles of Housing First, but have recognised existing contexts and the need for adaptation to best fit what is needed in the area.

Theory of Change Model

Figure Two outlines the Theory of Change for the Accommodation Plus approach at Action Homeless, displaying how the intended aims of the programme will be achieved.

The following analysis will consider each aspect of the theory of change and outline the specific inputs into Accommodation Plus.

Figure Two: Accommodation Plus ‘Theory of Change’ Model



Accommodation Plus Activities

The key elements of Accommodation Plus centre on (1) accommodation and (2) support:

- Provision of affordable, stable rented accommodation with good landlord services.
- Provision of light touch support services and signposting

The use of assured shorthold tenancy agreements, rather than licence agreement gives clients a greater sense of stability and security – we heard time and again that clients felt ‘secure’.

Accommodation Plus is a second stage service and, therefore, is focused on tenancy management rather than more formalized support. The coaching approach means that support is client-led and focuses on existing strengths. Tenancy sustainment officers provide assistance to clients to help them stay in their properties, this includes help with benefits claims and any other issues that may arise. This is light-touch service compared to the more intense support with their Accommodation Assist service.

An overarching framework to the Accommodation Plus approach is 'asset based' – drawing on the strengths that clients have, rather than focusing on a needs model. Accommodation Plus uses a coaching approach to provide client-led support, coming from a base of strength.

Accommodation Plus takes on 'lower-risk' clients. Whilst this is decided on a case by case basis, rather than any formal criteria, it typically means that clients will not have any ongoing drug or alcohol dependency issues, but may have had them in the past and if they relapse they are supported to address their needs. Furthermore, these clients have often been living with Action Homeless for a period beforehand. Therefore, they have been living in a hostel, or shared house, under a licence agreement for several months and have demonstrated they would be suitable for a tenancy agreement. It is from this service that most clients are recommended for Accommodation Plus.

The assistance that Tenancy sustainment officers provide, includes:

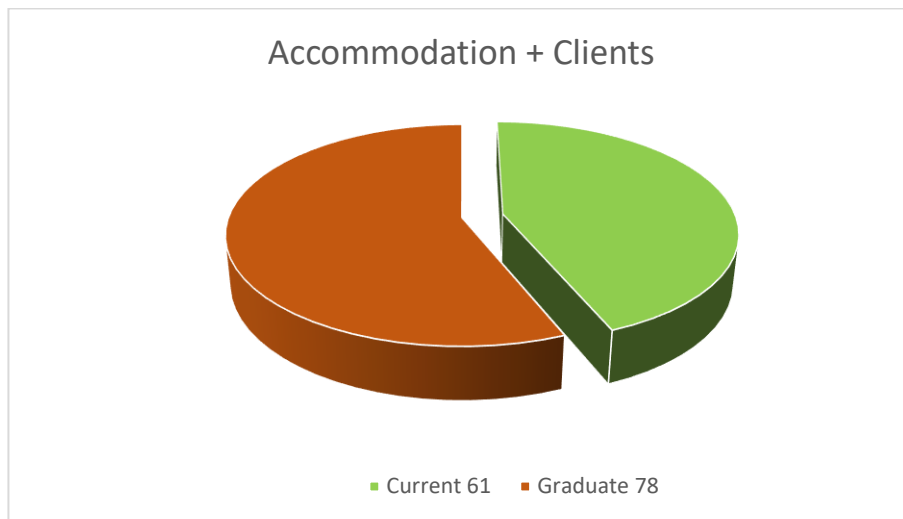
- Resettlement support: viewing properties, assistance with paperwork, sourcing furniture and making adaptations to properties.
- Signposting to Action Trust which provides volunteering opportunities to gain work experience.
- Coaching model: staff provide support and challenge to encourage and motivate
- Money management: assistance on how to pay rent and service charge; how to budget on benefits or wages; taking responsibilities for debts
- Health and wellbeing service: providing access to GP and specialist drug/alcohol services and mental health services.

Action Trust holds external cleaning contracts with companies in Leicester and volunteers also assist with the clearance and restoration of other properties that Action Homeless manage. Additionally, there are also volunteering opportunities in the kitchens at Action Homeless hostels and at the Food Bank operated by the organisation.

Clients

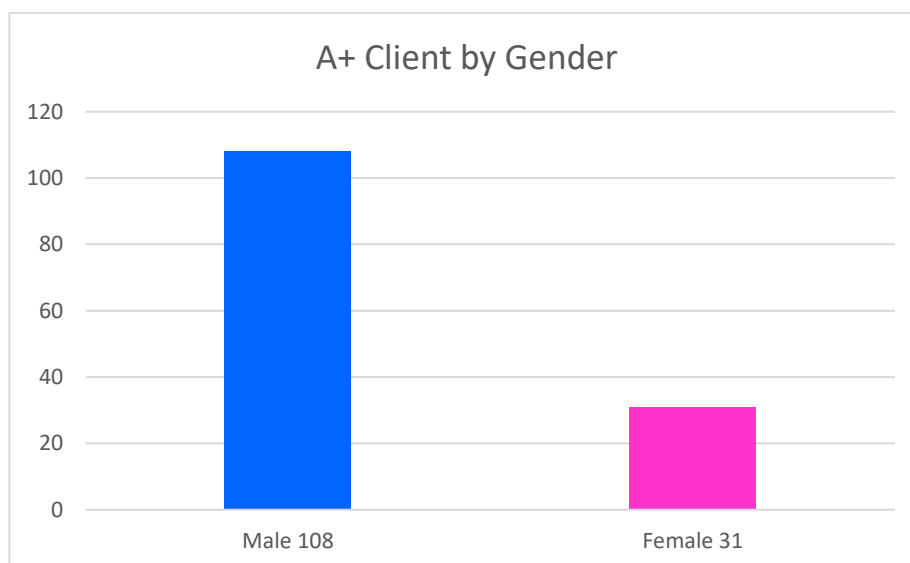
The Accommodation Plus project has helped a total of 139 clients over the five years it has been operating. Sixty-One (61) of these are current clients, Seventy-Eight (78) have 'graduated' from Accommodation Plus.

Figure Three: Accommodation Plus Clients



The Accommodation Plus project helps more men than it does women, for further analysis of the reasons for this, please see the findings chapter and the commentary on Accommodation Plus compared with other statutory homeless services.

Figure Four: Accommodation Plus Clients by Gender



The following table provides details of the Accommodation Plus clients interviewed for this study. To protect the confidentiality of clients they will be identified by the following key that distinguishes between male and female clients. The second column provides details of the type of Accommodation Plus property they are living in and the following columns indicate the length of time they have lived in their current property and how they were initially referred to the service.

Table One: Clients Interviewed (Anonymised)

Client	Type of Accommodation	Length of Occupancy	Method of Referral
F1	Single occupancy flat	6 months. Previously lived in shared A+ house.	Referred from hostel.
F2	Shared house	3 years.	Referred from hostel
F3	Shared house	1 year	Referred from an AH hostel
F4	Family house with child	1 year	Independent referral
F5	Family house with child.	3 years	Referred from women's shelter.
F6	Family house with partner and two children.	5 years	Referred from an AH hostel.
F7	Family house with partner and children.	5 years	Referred from an AH hostel.
M1	Single occupancy flat	6 months	Not previously with AH
M2	Flat with child.	6 months. Previously lived in shared A+ house	Referred from an AH hostel.
M3	Single occupancy flat	6 months.	Not previously with AH
M4	Single occupancy flat	6 months	Referred from an AH hostel.
M5	Shared house.	3 years	Referred from an AH hostel
M6	Shared house	2 years	Referred from an AH hostel
M7	Single occupancy flat	2 years. Previously lived in a shared A+ house	Referred from an AH hostel
M8	Shared house	1 year	Referred from an AH hostel
M9	Shared house.	5 years	Referred from an AH hostel

M10	Shared house	2 years	Referred from an AH hostel
M11	Shared house	2 years	Referred from an AH hostel
M12	Shared house	4 years	Referred from an AH hostel
M13	Shared house	6 years	Referred from an AH hostel
M14	Shared house	4 years	Referred from an AH hostel
M15	Shared house	3 years	Referred from an AH hostel
M16	Family house with partner and children.	5 years	Referred from an AH hostel

Intermediate Outcomes

There are four key intermediate outcomes expected of the Accommodation Plus approach:

1. Clients have sustainable, dignified living conditions
2. Clients plan and execute positive life changes
3. Clients are better integrated into community life
4. Clients achieve sustained higher livings standards

The Accommodation Plus Impact Management report gives a series of indicators and targets for these outcomes (p.8). The data source for these measures are the Customer Management System and the Client Survey. Of those in an Accommodation Plus property, this includes the target that 30% of tenants are in employment, 20% in training/education and 20% actively looking for work.

The data from the interviews with clients provides evidence of the extent to which these intermediate outcomes have been realised. Interview data is pertinent for highlighting the 'softer' outcomes of the service in terms of wellbeing and outlook.

Aims

The key stated aims of Accommodation Plus are that:

- Excluded individuals and their dependents are leading stable, fulfilling lives, as citizens in a community
- 'Costs of failure' avoided (homelessness, unemployment, poor health, crime, substance abuse)

The evaluation data from clients and officers working in the project, suggests that these aims are being met. The first aim – that individuals have stability in their lives is met through the use of tenancy agreements which, if conditions are adhered to, provide a home for as long as the individual needs it. In conversation with the tenancy sustainment officer there was a reflection on the fact that clients are staying in Accommodation Plus properties for long periods of time - demonstrating that this scheme is providing long-term stable accommodation. The officer reported that on average they are forced to evict one tenant per year and that this is usually due to rent arrears.

The reports from clients certainly suggest that improved health and wellbeing is felt by them, as a result of the accommodation, but also the support from Action Homeless, and from one another through informal peer support.

Similarities and Differences with Housing First Approaches

This analysis of the Theory of Change for Accommodation Plus, highlights some similarities and differences with other Housing First approaches. Wider analysis of Housing First strategies highlights that whilst approaches share a common set of principles, there will be operational differences between strategies in terms of the level of support provided and the costs of these services (Pleace, 2018). The provision of long-term secure accommodation combined with assistance from Tenancy sustainment officers shows similarities in Accommodation Plus with Housing First principles. The following points highlight particular aspects of the Accommodation Plus approach;

- Most clients in Accommodation Plus get referred from Accommodation Assist within Action Homeless. Therefore, they have demonstrated that they can live effectively in temporary hostel accommodation for several months and then get recommended for long-term accommodation. Clients have attained a level of stability before entering Accommodation Plus, rather than coming directly from the streets, which is an adaptation from other Housing First approaches.
- The opportunities that Action Homeless provide as an organisation may go beyond the existing definitions of Housing First approaches. The volunteer opportunities given via Action Trust, the residents fund available to clients for additional needs (e.g. a bike to get to work or work boots for volunteering, as well as the food bank) goes beyond accommodation and tenancy support.
- Housing First has been cited as model designed to support homeless individuals with complex needs (Pleace, 2018, p.25). In contrast, perhaps, the clients within Accommodation Plus are classified as 'lower risk', but still have multiple needs and barriers to living independently.

- The provision of accommodation for different groups e.g. individuals, couples and families in Accommodation Plus contrasts with some other Housing First services that only provide accommodation for single adults.

Ingredients

Accommodation Plus has the following key ingredients:

- Tenancy Agreements: offering long-term security
- Quality Accommodation: high standard of accommodation offering privacy and dignity
- Range of Accommodation: including self-contained flats, family homes and shared properties
- Tenancy Sustainment Officers: provision of assistance to maintain tenancy
- Wider Opportunities as part of Action Homeless: clients can engage in voluntary work with Action Trust and also access to food bank if necessary

Key ingredient – properties to rent

Action Homeless has acquired new properties to provide the Accommodation Plus service through a number of routes:

(1) Leases from private property owners

In 2013 Action Homeless embarked on a programme to acquire properties through the Government's Empty Homes Community Grant Programme. This fund allowed housing organisations to offer investment to property owners, who were struggling to bring their properties back into use due to their poor condition. Working in partnership with Leicester City Council's 'Empty Homes' team, Action Homeless identified a number of properties that had been left empty for considerable periods (12 months or longer), that were unlettable. Action Homeless worked with the owners to identify the necessary improvements and carried out the work to bring them up to lettable standard. In return the owners were required to commit to a minimum six-year lease, with rents set at affordable social rates. Action Homeless took on responsibility for all aspects of the property's management including liability for maintenance, voids and bad debts. The average cost of renovating these properties was £17,158 per property (£7224 per unit). Action Homeless secured 38 units through this process.

The majority of these initial leases have now reached the end of their terms, however all of the owners have agreed to continue with the agreement with Action Homeless and with only a small increase in rent. This is despite being able to let them commercially for higher market rents, or to sell them.

(2) Purchase

In 2015, round two of the Empty Homes Grant programme was launched and this round allowed monies to purchase properties. Action Homeless took the opportunity to acquire a number of houses using this grant and its own reserves. In June 2016 Action Homeless was also successful in securing a grant of £140,000 from the Nationwide Foundation and these monies, along with loan finance secured from Charity Bank enabled Action Homeless to purchase 7 houses with a total of 31 units.

The cost of bring these houses up to standard, along with the purchase cost, was £50,000 for each new unit of accommodation. This compares favourably with the cost of new social housing builds, especially given that they were all developed in the inner City. There is also that benefit that all the properties were empty at the time of purchase.

Costs

Rent prices vary according to the type of property. Accommodation Plus provides a range of accommodation including shared houses, family homes and single occupancy flats. The costs for the newest independent flats on Paddock Street, Wigston, as at end July 2019, is as follows:

1 bed: Core rent (£86.30) + management fee (£76) = £162.30

2 bed: Core rent (£109.98) + management fee (£76) = £185.98

All clients pay a management fee on top of their rent. This management fee is inclusive of bills and tenancy sustainment services. The purpose of charging a flat rate for utility bills is to ensure clients felt able to heat and power their homes without fear of the cost, which has a positive impact on the clients and is also beneficial for the upkeep of properties.

Included in the management fee is the cost of the service that the Tenancy Support Officers provide. Officers are paid 1.5 hours per week, per tenant, for sustaining tenancy. Additionally, the Accommodation Plus office is open Monday to Friday each week and clients can ring or drop in at any time. The management service acts as a warning signal if things are going wrong.

Whilst clients commented that the management fee on top of the rent made the properties more expensive than some private rented options, many felt that it still offered value for money because of the quality of accommodation and the service provided. In contrast, clients from Accommodation Assist commented that if they get a job, the cost of staying in their hostels becomes an expensive option because of the impact of coming off benefits.

The average cost of renovating properties for the Accommodation Plus service is £55,000, which includes purchase, bringing the property into social ownership and renovating it to a suitable standard.

Summary

Accommodation Plus is based on Housing First principles, but adapted for local context. It provides security of accommodation through the use of tenancy agreements, rather than licences and it offers client-led, coaching-style support for clients. The service is provided within a portfolio of other services and includes a key pathway of 'move on' from the 'Accommodation Assist' initial hostel service. The service tends to help more men than women – it fills a gap in support for those not seen as 'priority need' by the council.

Findings

The following key themes emerged from interviews with Accommodation Plus workers and then with clients of Accommodation Plus.

Themed Findings – Service Provider

Interviews with Action Homeless staff identified the following key themes about the Accommodation Plus service. These findings are illustrated with corresponding short quotes from service users to support the claims.

Security

Clients with a history of homelessness are offered a secure long-term tenancy. This removes the worry about where their next home will be and they are able to stay in this accommodation for as long as they want to. As a result, clients are able to make other positive changes in their lives without the pressure of where they will have to move on to next.

F3- “feeling that you can stay is good...gives you peace of mind”

Quality

The accommodation available provides safe and secure premises in which people can live with privacy and dignity. Even in shared properties, clients are given self-contained rooms with washing and cooking facilities.

F6- “we had nothing...they gave us everything...everything you need for a house”

Good Management

Regular visits are made to clients. This engagement with their landlord helps them to feel confident that they will be able to maintain their tenancy. It also enables early signposting to be made if any issues arise.

M6- “[they] give you the support not just a place to live”

Place

The location of properties is an important consideration for Action Homeless. Properties are chosen with good access to local amenities and, crucially, in socially mixed areas. Typically, properties are town houses in diverse areas. This enables clients to feel comfortable and, crucially, part of a community. They will not stick out as ‘homeless’ people and will be able to get on with their lives. In turn, the work of Action Homeless to renovate houses that may have previously been uninhabitable benefits these local areas, raising the quality of the housing stock.

F4 "its quiet here and the two neighbours are so lovely...the place is just lovely"

Sustainability

Together these components ensure sustainability in both the service provided and the tenancies of clients. Quality, well-managed accommodation can provide positive outcomes for individuals with homeless histories, which enables them to make constructive changes in their lives.

M11- "They do brilliantly well at rehousing people... I've probably been the longest here...really lucky to get into one of these ones"

Themed Findings – Service Clients

The rest of this chapter focuses on the themes of findings emerging from interviews with Accommodation Plus clients.

Individualised Assistance

A key theme that emerged from the interviews was the high-level assistance provided to the clients of Accommodation Plus. Clients remarked on how supported they felt, commenting that it often went above and beyond anything they had received before. The contrast between this and the experience of many clients that had at some point been in private rented accommodation or in the Council system was stark.

F6- "you know the support is there...someone with a general knowledge of how things work...things to do with the Council...I wouldn't have known"

Several clients spoke of support they had received to claim the correct benefits, general assistance with their wellbeing, as well as help to establish and maintain their home. Moreover, they also spoke of the support they had received if they had got into arrears with rent payments due to late benefit payments and other money issues. Rather than the termination of tenancy for non-payment, clients were given manageable repayment plans, which ensured that they repaid an amount each month, but still had enough money to live on. Clients often spoke about the flexibility and trust they were treated with.

M7 – "you feel grateful but they don't make you feel like you owe them"

The quality of the staff working in the Accommodation Plus was highlighted as crucial to this support and the provision of the service as whole. Clients spoke extremely highly of the staff, particularly, regarding their availability and approachability. Tenancy sustainment officers had built positive relationships with clients and treated clients with respect and care. There was a sense in which clients felt that there was always

someone they could contact if they had any kind of problem, whether to do with the accommodation or with their own wellbeing and that they were listened to. Strong communication was a key facet of this. Clients spoke of being well- informed of any changes taking place, their options for moving on and when staff would be visiting properties to carry out any maintenance or checks. Again, this was often spoken about in direct contrast to experiences with the Council, in which they felt like a number rather than a person.

Security

F1 – “you know you’ve got security for not one month, one year”

The use of tenancy agreements rather than licence agreement gave clients a greater sense of stability and security. These leases enable clients to stay in properties for as long as they want to. This was evident in the length of time some clients had been in the service and the intention of clients to stay long-term. Clients also spoke of the fact that the flat rate charged for utility bills removed worry about unexpected bills and falling into arrears.

M9 – “it’s piece of mind ...everything included ...I think I’m quite lucky”

This sense of security was also linked by clients to being able to start making positive changes in their lives. Many commented on the advances they had made because of having a permanent address. Most notably, their increased ability to get, and hold down, a job. Several of the clients interviewed indicated that they were in/seeking employment or training. This greater security and sense of feeling settled was also linked to re-establishing relationships in their personal lives. Clients spoke of connecting with family and friends as they had a place where people could visit and stay.

“M2 – when I shut my door I feel safe”

A sense of security and safety was also provided through the consistency of staff. Some clients who had previously experienced trauma spoke of feeling safe because they knew the staff that would be coming into their property. In particular, the in-house maintenance team that Action Homeless retains meant that clients felt safe having workmen into their properties to carry out maintenance that they were familiar with and trusted.

Home

Clients commonly referred to their accommodation as ‘home’. This is linked to the previous point. The security provided by tenancy agreements enabled clients to settle long-term and create a home.

M5 – “I’ve got a home for life”

Case study 1

F6 has lived in an Accommodation Plus house with her partner and two children for nearly five years. Prior to this she and her partner had lived in one room of a hostel for over a year. It was from here that they had been referred to the Accommodation Plus service and were moved into one of the first homes provided by the service.

Both F6 and her partner had a history of homelessness and her partner have been in other Action Homeless hostels. F6 spoke of approaching the Council when she had first come to Leicester and needed accommodation and had found them unhelpful. She had later tried to get on the Council housing list but was unsuccessful.

When they moved into the Accommodation Plus house it was fully furnished and they have since decorated it. After securing the house, her partner found work and is fully employed. The Tenancy Sustainment Officer helped F6 claim the correct benefits. She described the property as their first proper family home that enabled them ‘to make a life’.

F6 and her family are just about to move out of Accommodation Plus housing into a private rented property. She said that she did not really want to move, but felt it would be good for the children to have more space and it was time for another family to get the opportunity they had had with Action Homeless.

As both her children will be at school soon, she plans to get a job and start saving so that one day they will be able to buy a house. To help get some experience to put on her CV she is considering volunteering with Action Trust. She credits the support she received from her Tenancy Sustainment Officer over the years with giving them the confidence to move on and equipping them with the skills and knowledge to be fully independent.

M7- “I’ve been allowed to turn it into my house”

Indeed, the allowance for clients in houses to make changes they would like to their properties enhanced this sense of home. Clients spoke of the way in which they had been able to choose furniture and decorate their properties. They had been able to make their accommodation their own.

Quality Accommodation

Clients spoke of the high quality of accommodation in contrast to their previous experiences with the Council or private landlords. They noted the quality of the finish in properties and the fact they had been equipped with more than the basics. For example, clients were given kitchenware, TV's and other items, which contributed to their sense of being home. Shared houses are also given cleaning products (e.g. washing up liquid, surface cleaner) to help maintain communal areas. Clients recognised that they paid more than they might do in private sector because of the additional management fee charged in addition to the rent. However, many felt that the quality of accommodation offered and the wider service provided gave value for money overall.

F5 – “They gave me furniture for the house...there was nothing for me to get”

Linked to this was the up-keep of properties, which was managed by Action Homeless' maintenance team. Clients spoke of the fact that any problems were dealt with quickly.

Wellbeing

Many clients linked their placement in Accommodation Plus with an increased sense of wellbeing. This was variously linked by different clients to both mental and physical wellbeing.

F1 – “It's the relief of no panic as well, not being left high and dry”

Clients commented on the fact that Tenancy Support officers had helped them with aspects of their wellbeing. This included instances in which clients had been signposted to support services such as Engage to receive help with alcohol or drug problems. Crucially, they felt able to speak to staff about these issues without judgement or the threat of their tenancy being terminated.

F2- “I've had a lot of support...through depression and when I've had problems”

More than a roof

Clients spoke positively about the wider ingredients of Accommodation Plus. The volunteering opportunities given via Action Trust enabled clients to gain some work experience to enhance their CV's which helped to find future employment. Moreover, clients spoke of the positive impact volunteering had on their emotional wellbeing and general confidence. It helped them get out the house and meet people.

M11 – “I volunteer at the food bank... good fun, passes the time away”

The residents fund provides small amounts for specific items that Tenancy Support Officer apply for on behalf of the clients. For example, one client spoke of being given money to get art supplies, which enabled them to submit work to a local exhibition, whilst another received money for new work boots so that they could continue volunteering with Action Trust. Meanwhile, the foodbank has been used by clients when in need, such as when awaiting benefit payments.

M7 – ‘over Christmas get food parcel even though I’m in my own place now...this is a really nice thought’

These additional services provide support that goes beyond accommodation alone. Several clients commented on the hamper they receive from Action Homeless at Christmas and used this as another example of the way that this was more than just a housing service.

Case Study 2

M2 moved into a newly refurbished Accommodation Plus flat six months ago. When he came to Leicester over 15 years ago, M2 was initially homeless and placed in an Action Homeless hostel. He then met a partner and moved out. When this relationship ended some years later he was made homeless again and returned to the Action Homeless hostels. He was then moved into an Accommodation Plus property that was a shared house. When the flats were being renovated, M3 was given the opportunity to look around the properties and subsequently offered a two bed flat in the complex.

M3 has known his Tenancy Support Worker for several years as result of his time in Action Homeless services. As a result, he felt able to speak to her when he was having problems with alcohol and she got him access to the support services he needed.

Since moving into the new Accommodation Plus property, M3 has been able to have his son live with him full time. He says this has changed his life and his son has settled in the area and now attends the local school.

In addition to the assistance from the Tenancy Sustainment Officer, M3 commented on the support he gets from having other Accommodation Plus clients living in the same complex of flats. He commented on having people near that he could talk to and reflected that they help each other out.

House-renters and room-renters

Findings from the interviews suggest a difference in outlook between those in Accommodation Plus who had their own flats and homes and those in shared accommodation. There may be a need to distinguish more clearly between these different types of Accommodation Plus clients in subsequent analysis and provision.

M8- "I want my own flat...I don't want to share anymore"

Clients in their own properties seem more positive about the possibility of staying in their property for the long term and expressing that their property is a permanent home. Whereas some clients in shared properties expressed discontent about being in shared accommodation for the long-term and indicated that they would prefer their own residence. Clients in shared accommodation expressed that they did not want to stay long-term (despite having already been in this scheme for several years) as they wanted their own properties. Furthermore, they indicated frustration about the fact that they were not going to be offered single occupancy accommodation through Accommodation Plus, however their current housing situation also prevented them from getting a Council property as they were deemed 'adequately housed' by the Council. As such, they were less positive about feeling that they were settled and had a feeling of having a 'home'.

M15 - "It's not brilliant as I'm still here... Council won't do anything now because I'm not 'homeless'"

Contrast to Council

As already noted many clients contrasted the level of support they received from Accommodation Plus with their experiences with various local authorities.

M7 "no criteria you have to meet with Action Homeless unlike the Council"

In addition, many spoke of the hoops they had to jump through to get Council accommodation and the fact they had not been deemed eligible for various reasons. In contrast, they spoke of the straightforward process of the Accommodation Plus service, remarking about the speed in which they had been offered a property and moved in.

M3 "[At the Council] You're not a person...just a number"

The shortfall of council housing in the UK is a significant factor contributing to homelessness. As already noted, Accommodation Plus was developed in part because people in Action Homeless hostels were unable to move on as there was no adequate housing options either from the private sector or the local authority. Managers at Action Homeless spoke of the fact that many clients believe, initially, that they will get a council

property and reflected that ‘...it’s almost as if they need to go through the process of being rejected to realise they are not going to get it’. This is often the case for both families and single individuals within the service.

Indeed, a significant difference between clients from the control group who are currently in Accommodation Assist and those in Accommodation Plus was the pursuit of council housing. Whilst none of the Accommodation Plus clients interviewed were actively bidding on council housing, those in the control group continued to bid and the pursuit of a council house came up at several points during the interview. One commented, ‘... I’m looking for a Council house but I’m Band 3... I don’t know how long it will take... every Wednesday I go to the Council and bid’, another confirmed that ‘I’m bidding every week for a council house’. The continued bidding for council property by these clients in contrast to Accommodation Plus clients may in part be because of the length of time they have been in service and their current situation on a licence agreement in a hostel. Clients in the control group may not have been in the ‘system’ as long as Accommodation Plus clients (who have often been through the hostel system) and, therefore, still believe they can get a property. Furthermore, the fact they are in hostel accommodations puts a greater impetus on these individuals to bid for council properties, as well as look for private sector rental properties, as they are supposed to be temporary.

Many of the Accommodation Plus clients interviewed for this study commented that they had been unsuccessful in getting a council house as they did not sufficiently qualify under their requirements. Broadly, the reasons for being deemed ineligible fell into two categories. The first were single males who were too far down the council priority list to qualify for a property. The second were individuals (and in some instances families) who had not lived in Leicester for two or more years and, therefore, were not under the jurisdiction of care of the local authority. This failure to qualify for council housing was often the main reason that these clients felt Action Homeless was their only alternative to homelessness. Therefore, Accommodation Plus in many cases is dealing with the shortfall in local authority housing and, moreover, demand continues to outstrip supply.

Clients also spoke of complexity of navigating the housing system at the local Council. Many spoke of the fact they had all but given up on trying to get a council property because of the length of time it takes to get anything due to the amount of people on the waiting list before them and the stress of continuously bidding on properties and being rejected. Those that did still consider pursuing local authority housing (although none were actively bidding) reasoned that it remained a cheaper option as they would not have to pay a management fee on top of rent as they do for Accommodation Plus.

It could be suggested that the lack of council housing can reduce the ability of some clients to move on from Accommodation Plus as quickly. Clients spoke of the fact that they are now deemed ‘adequately housed’ by the Council and, therefore, are not a high

priority for local authority housing, which vastly reduces their chances of getting a home. Furthermore, council housing may not provide the quality or choice that Accommodation Plus provides, leaving clients less inclined to move on. Therefore, Accommodation Plus, is, in some ways, a victim of its own success, whereby the lack of local authority housing coupled with the quality of service and properties offered by Accommodation Plus means that demand will continue to continue to outstrip supply.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

This evaluation report on the benefits of Accommodation Plus as an approach to resolving homelessness, has reached the following conclusions:

1. The benefits reported by clients included feeling safe, secure and having higher perceived levels of wellbeing
2. For the city, there is benefit in this homeless service, which fills a gap in the current homeless provision for those, particularly single men, who are not seen as in 'priority need'
3. The sustainability of the programme would be supported by a more accessible private rented sector or social housing market – if there is nowhere sustainable and affordable to move onto then there will be limited availability in the current stock to help more homeless people
4. Action Homeless has the understanding and the specialist skills in its workforce, to provide this housing and support service – underpinned by housing first principles and delivered in a theory of change which supports a client-led, coaching approach.
5. The cost of renovating the property and providing the 'light touch' support service offers good value in the longer term, according to the reported benefits by clients and service providers.
6. There are benefits to the Accommodation Plus model from being situated within a charity model that has different approaches and funds to draw on. Clients of 'Accommodation Plus' regularly follow a pathway from hostels provided in the Accommodation Assist service; they can also benefit from small grants from the charity to fund things like bicycle repair or similar small-scale but essential needs.
7. The Accommodation Plus approach allows clients to think about the longer term – this is vital to wellbeing, and escaping the 'revolving door'. Security of the accommodation allows clients to think about 'home'.

Recommendations

Accessing the Service

1. People spoke about finding out about Accommodation Plus, and Action Homeless by 'luck' therefore more work needed in referral system and closer links with the Council.
2. An enhanced communications plan, to widen knowledge of Action Homeless and Accommodation Plus would help more people access the services, but this may be problematic unless there is growth in supply in the service.

Growing the Service

3. There is a real need for this provision for homeless people, the charity should continue to work with central and local government to purchase and lease more properties to include in Accommodation Plus. It is also recommended that Action Homeless leads talk with regional housing associations to see whether properties in their stock might be brought in to add capacity to the Accommodation Plus service.
4. Action Homeless has been successful in applying for grant and in securing properties through purchase and lease with property owners. It is recommended they continue to expand this model of property acquisition and also work with private and public property owners to utilise housing for the Accommodation Plus service.
5. It may be appropriate to purchase some accommodation for shared rentals. The preference for clients is to have their own space, but there are real benefits from peer support in shared property. Action Homeless could find out more about these benefits from schemes like the 'Peer Landlord' service for homeless people³.

Reporting the Benefits

6. There are many benefits reported by Accommodation Plus clients. The service represents good financial and social return on initial investment and these lessons could be shared with others. There are similar models to 'Accommodation Plus' (for example another project that the PI has evaluated is run by Elmbridge Rentstart who have similar ingredients (accommodation + bespoke client-led support, also access to charity fund for small essential items to support people back to work, or for maintaining their home). Collectively, such services could learn from one another, Action Homeless could take the initiative in liaising with others to develop a learning network, that looks beyond 'Housing First' and which brings together schemes that are adaptors rather than adopters of this model.

³ <https://www.commonwealhousing.org.uk/static/uploads/2018/07/2017-Peer-Landlord-report-v6-final.pdf>

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