Greater Manchester Homelessness Action Network: How we 'Build Back Better'

Exiting a homelessness context: creating an ethical economy

Over the course of two weeks in May, the GMHAN worked through a series of online discussions, email consultation and the [Lockdown Lives](#) online project to gather the thoughts, ideas and experience of over 120 individuals and cross-sector organisations.

From this joint sharing of ambitions and abilities, there was an unprecedented desire to move from the 'management of homelessness' to delivering housing and support which enables everyone to genuinely flourish. This document aims to capture that desire for two key purposes:

1. To galvanise action and further ideas from other partners in the region and beyond to end homelessness for good
2. To hold ourselves, regional and central Government accountable if we do not 'build back better' and the scale of homelessness and rough sleeping returns to previous levels

It should be noted that only a handful of people from the GMHAN have put this document together from that evidence base, and we therefore invite ongoing input and challenge.

Resist just unpicking, and unpack!

The temptation following a crisis is always to go back to the known, and this is what we are trying to resist. It should be recognised that the methods used to effectively house as many people as possible should not be scrapped because they can 'no longer be afforded'.

Throughout COVID relationships have been built between different parts of the system, with open processes, increasingly transparent communication, local partnerships and feedback systems enabling equitable group decisions to be made. We are building a stronger network, with more readiness to work together and co-produce.

Unfortunately, there is currently no resource available to continue this work. To respond as a network to the opportunity this time of transformation calls for, we need all members of the GMHAN more than ever, with particular investment required in the foundations of this network. Please see the accompanying resourcing update for more information about what is needed and how you could support.

What does the network want to see?	
Immediate Needs	• Immediately accessible quality accommodation • Personalised plans for individuals co-produced throughout the accommodation transition • Lead with lived experience, using the strength of our collective voice localise and tie together national campaigns
Learning from the COVID response	• Retain increases in income support and introduce a Universal Basic Income • Housing as a health intervention • Rapid, responsive procurement of services • Prevention through tackling poverty • Partnerships and co-production enhanced • Devolution to enable further innovations
What we can help deliver	• Align funding streams around collective efforts • Facilitate more transparent decision making • Coordination of public and business support • Making co-production happen

Building Back Better: Immediate needs

<u>Accommodation</u>: **Immediately accessible accommodation, complying to "Decent Home Standard.'**

"We want definition, certainty, some kind of future security."

- Quality, permanent accommodation, accessed via a 'Rapid Rehousing' approach, with limited access criteria, long term contracts for homes that are available on the day (or nearly).
- People should have choice and control over their accommodation and connected support.
- Under the current public health situation, the risks of shared accommodation remain too great for the Network to support this approach.

<u>Support</u>: **Personalised plans to be co-produced throughout the transition to new accommodation based on people's strengths & interests**

"I believe good physical health depends on your mental health, which itself is dependent on your circumstances."

- The right support depends on the right relationships. Where possible, relationships should be maintained with existing support staff as people move into 'step down' accommodation. No one should be 'out of sight, out of mind'.
- Food provision and infrastructure created for Covid-19 needs to be maintained and funded appropriately, ensuring everyone has access to the basic things they need.
- Accessible support for recovery from addictions and poor mental health should be set up as soon as possible.
- Families and people in Unsupported Temporary Accommodation need to be given priority when NHS community services resume, to avoid people who are 'hidden homeless' becoming invisible to state services.

<u>Lobbying</u>: **To allow lived experience to lead, using the strength of our collective voice as a network to localise and tie together national campaigns, showing the unity of our sector.**

- End no fault evictions - prevent people being unhoused due to economic factors
- Retract No Recourse to Public Funds legislation
- Build social and affordable housing to meet need
- Introduce a Universal Basic Income
- Have an integrated health offer - #HealthNow
- Invest strategically and sustainably in homelessness prevention, especially by tackling poverty
- Ensure no one currently accommodated will return to the streets - #EveryoneInForGood
- Co-design at all levels - work with people who have been affected by homelessness and frontline organisations when:
  (i) making decisions and
  (ii) designing systemic and procedural changes

Building Back Better: Learning from the Covid response

Retain increases in government income support
- Local Housing Allowance increase
- Increases to Universal Credit
- Creation of a benefits application process based on trust not sanctions

Housing as a health intervention
- Recognise that housing and other human rights e.g. access to food, water and sanitation and culture, are an essential provision as part of a humanitarian public health crisis response and must continue as long as it exists
- Landlords in receipt of housing benefit should be forced to ensure their properties meet the 'Decent Homes Standard'.

Responsive procurement
- Immediate purchasing of accommodation and commissioning of support required to meet existing and future need. The public sector should not be the only source of funding for this.
- Learning from procurement during Covid: avoid lengthy tendering, procure according to need not supply and have contracts in place to start when required
- Invest in co-production: resourcing direct insights and decisions, as opposed to consulting about other people's ideas.

Prevention
- Acknowledgement that prevention needs to be earlier rather than later and woven into all future plans, by ensuring sufficient welfare benefits and person-centred support are in place so people can thrive in their homes and communities. These opportunities should all be co-created *from the start*.

Partnerships
- Acknowledgement that existing local partnerships aided the initial covid-response
- 'Locality-blind' responses implemented during COVID should continue, and we should work to remove 'local connection' within Greater Manchester boroughs.
- Residents of social and supported housing should have the right to work in partnership with their housing provider to form a co-production panel, with transparent reporting to GMCA Programme Board and GMHAN.

Devolution should be extended to enable further innovations in how GM addresses homelessness, notably for welfare support;

- Local freedom to use our contextual knowledge to cooperatively adapt DWP and other national policy and procedure based on local health, housing, and economic requirements.
- Resourcing pathways of communication between local health, housing, and benefits agencies.
- Recognition of job centres as local community resources – providing the solid basis to enable alternative funding, connections to existing community resources and removing the barriers to housing and health inequalities.

Building Back Better: What we can help to deliver

Funding

We should be working collaboratively to tackle the systemic issues causing homelessness and reducing competition within the overstretched community sector.

Using GMHAN's convening power, we plan to bring together a collaborative funding policy forum, routed through the experience of the GMHAN and at the direction of its members.

This forum will be composed of Greater Manchester funders, representative from the communities most affected by the problems and the most responsive grassroots organisations. Commissioning and funding decisions should not be made out of short-term convenience, they should be responsive to the current situation, but the overall long-term strategy needs to be proactive rather than reactive.

Governance and Capacity Building

'Building Back Better' means a change to governance practices too. It means more open and transparent decision making, with an ongoing commitment to devolve power to people with current and recent lived experience and those at heightened risk of homelessness *from the start*.

GMHAN welcomes greater collaboration that the pandemic has necessitated, but we need to see meaningful co-production going forward. Our Agency CIC, the GMCA funded Legislative Theatre programme, ULab and other forms of facilitated processes our members are trained on, are highly respected forums for genuine collaborative policy design, governance and community-led education which we can use to do so.

Coordination of large scale business and public support has been possible during this crisis thanks to the work of network members, for a significant impact. As has the localising of national campaigns. With committed resource, the GMHAN could continue to make these things happen and further build up these activities.

Partners and participants