It takes more than a roof to rebuild lives
Save Hostels
Rebuild Lives

The number of people sleeping rough is rising at an alarming rate, yet funding for supported housing for homeless people is at risk. The government is considering changes to the way supported housing is funded, which St Mungo’s believes will cause irreparable damage to these essential services and may even cause some to close.

For many people who have been homeless, the route to recovery is less than straightforward. Poor physical and mental health can be both a cause and consequence of homelessness, and without the right kind of support, it can be difficult to move on. Supported housing projects give people with complex or multiple physical and mental health needs an environment in which to recover and rebuild their lives.

St Mungo’s is calling for the government to consider the potentially damaging effects such changes could have on the lives of so many vulnerable people, and give this complex issue the time and attention it deserves.
Statistics released by the government in early 2017 show that rough sleeping rose by an alarming 134% between 2010 and 2016. In 2016, St Mungo’s supported housing projects – or hostels – gave 4,120 people somewhere safe to stay, over half of whom have slept rough.

Our evidence shows that people sleeping rough increasingly need support for a range of complex physical and mental health problems.\(^1\) The number of people arriving at London’s No Second Night Out\(^2\) service with a support need has risen. We know that more than half of new arrivals at the service need some form of support for mental health problems.

Accommodating single homeless people with support needs in specialist housing saves an estimated £6,703 per person annually by reducing costs to health, social care and criminal justice services.\(^3\)

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“\[I\] was in a critical condition. The guys at Wood Lane saved my life.\]”

John

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\(^1\) St Mungo’s (2016) Stop the Scandal: an investigation into mental health and rough sleeping

\(^2\) No Second Night Out is London’s flagship service for new rough sleepers

Funding for supported housing - in decline

Analysis by the National Audit Office shows that between 2010-11 and 2014-15, funding for housing-related support fell by 45% across single-tier and county councils.

Most funding for supported housing services for single homeless people comes from a combination of housing benefit and local authority budget for support they commission. With local authority cuts and the removal of the protection around support budgets in 2009, funding for these services has been under pressure.

Many local authorities have fought hard to save these essential services. However, analysis by the National Audit Office shows that between 2010-11 and 2014-15, funding for housing-related support fell by 45% across single-tier and county councils.

Research published by the National Housing Federation found a shortfall of 16,692 places in supported housing for working-aged people in 2015-16, estimating that this costs the taxpayer £361 million that year.

With all the cuts to local funding for support, single homeless people with support needs miss out because there is no legal duty for local authorities to provide them with appropriate housing.

The government’s decision to reduce the rent allowance for supported housing by 1% every year from April 2017 puts services under even greater strain and is already placing some at risk of closure.

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5 National Housing Federation (2017) Strengthening the case for supported housing http://www.housing.org.uk/resource-library/browse/strengthening-the-case-for-supported-housing-the-cost-consequences/
Further plans to overhaul the funding system for supported housing present yet another threat. They ignore the cuts that have already taken place through the loss of local funding for support and the reduction in rent allowance.

The existing proposals suggest a cap on housing benefits based on local housing allowance rates, which is tied to rent levels in the private sector. This does not take into account the reality that the costs of providing supported housing are similar across the country. St Mungo’s believes that will provide little incentive to develop supported housing for homeless people in low rent areas.

This would create a situation whereby availability of supported housing could be concentrated in areas where there is already high demand for property, while services may be limited in areas where it would be easier for residents to find affordable housing when they are ready to move on.

The proposal is that any gaps in funding could be met through local funding top ups, which would be entirely discretionary. In the face of ever-greater cuts to local authority budgets, and without any legal obligation to provide supported housing for homeless people, certain areas may not offer the services needed.

The government feels it needs to change the funding for supported housing to fit in with the new benefit system, Universal Credit. But the changeover to the new system won’t be complete until 2022.

We call on government to slow it down and get it right, because these services are too important to lose.
People who live in supported housing and who have complex or multiple needs related to homelessness – like substance use and mental health problems, or chronic physical ill-health – can often find it difficult to sustain an independent tenancy. Without the right support, at the right time, people can get stuck in a cycle of homelessness.

“When I came to this hostel, I knew that it was going to be different. My keyworker’s very on the ball. She knows she needs to be. These guys in here, they need help.”

Lee

Unplanned use of hospital services is common among homeless people and their hospital treatment costs are estimated to be four times higher than the general population. Supported housing can help to reduce the use of emergency healthcare services by supporting tenants to access primary care and preventative support.

73% of St Mungo’s residents suffer with a mental health problem, compared with one in four of the UK population in any given year. People who are homeless often face multiple barriers in accessing mental health services. This is partly because some services are unequipped to treat multiple conditions – like schizophrenia and addiction – at the same time, but also because it is difficult to access secondary care without being registered with a GP or without any help to attend appointments.

“A desire to protect essential supported housing services does not mean that there is no value in other approaches, like Housing First, which St Mungo’s also provides.”

A survey of 1,949 people living in St Mungo’s supported accommodation in August 2016 showed that 44% have a physical health condition that requires ongoing treatment or medication, such as chronic pain, arthritis and lung disease.

“It is essential that the needs of the homeless population are properly assessed, and that any initiative to solve homelessness is driven by a thorough assessment of each individual’s requirements.”

St Mungo’s recognises that different services work for different people and as a result residents sometimes move between projects.

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“If you have meetings, staff will go along with you if you need that support. My keyworker will take me for meetings and that, yeah, and if I wanna go shopping and I can’t face it or don’t want to go on my own, he’ll come with me. He’s my sounding board. They all are.”

Trish

“My keyworker here’s done a lot of work for me, paperwork and stuff, has helped me to go to AA meetings. She’s been very supportive, all of the staff in here have been as well. I’m so grateful, and I do mean it. When I leave this place I will be a bit sad, but that’s the way it goes, innit?”

Jean Marc


Mental Health Foundation (2015) Fundamental Facts about Mental Health 2015

St Mungo’s (2016) Stop the Scandal: an investigation into mental health and rough sleeping
“Making the service fit the need is really important.”

Rob is a former resident at Wood Lane hostel. Rob had been homeless on and off for twenty years when he arrived at St Mungo’s.

Rob had lost his live-in job when he was seventeen, and had to stay on the floor of a drug dealer’s flat, selling Ecstasy to keep a roof over his head. Fearing for his safety, he left, sleeping rough around London. This was the start of a long battle with addiction and mental health problems that saw Rob bounce between services that were ill-equipped to help him, often spending periods sleeping rough.

Rob had been in an abstinence programme when he came to St Mungo’s – his tenancy had ended while he was in treatment, so he was at risk of being discharged with nowhere to stay. He managed to get a little extra funding through his mental health trust, which gave him the time he needed to secure a place at our Wood Lane hostel.

“The keywork was incredible – there was a plan put in action within two days of me moving in that was monitored. It was like ‘this is what you want to achieve, these are your goals’, so I kept being refreshed – ‘look, this is what you want to do’.

When I had nothing, everything I wanted I had to put onto paper, and they’d make sure that I would achieve that. I got my debts cleared, I got rehoused, I got my benefits sorted out, all these little things build those pages, and before you know, they turn into a book.

I would say it was more than a foundation, they showed me how to be a person again.”

Rob stayed at Wood Lane for 15 months, volunteering and attending college. Thanks to a discretionary housing payment from his local council, he was able to move on and into his own flat. He is now a peer research worker with Groundswell, and sits on the London Homeless Health Board which aims to improve homeless people’s access to health services.
Mandy, 43

“I have never been so scared in all my life.”

Mandy has had mental health problems throughout her life, and was diagnosed with borderline personality disorder when she was 27. In 2012, she lived in a one bedroom flat in Islington, London. After re-connecting with her foster family, Mandy decided to give up her flat and move back home to be with her family.

After six months, her relationship with her foster family broke down and Mandy felt she had to leave. She had nowhere to live, so found herself sofa surfing for a few weeks. She approached her local council and was offered temporary accommodation, but was told she could not bring her dog, Skye. Mandy did not want to give up her staffie, so ended up on the streets.

Mandy slept rough for two and a half weeks. She attempted suicide while she was living on the streets.

Eventually, a friend informed Mandy of a local church where she could get some food and a shower. From there, she was put in touch with St Mungo’s and an outreach team approached her while she was sleeping on a bench and moved her into a St Mungo’s hostel.

“I have had some highs and lows in my life, but right now I am on a high. My confidence has grown and I am very proud of myself.”

Mandy now lives in a St Mungo’s project in Islington which is for people with low-medium support needs.

“I am at a turning point in my life, where my life is more positive. I can honestly say I am doing things I never thought I would do. If it wasn’t for St Mungo’s I would most likely be dead, they saved my life.”

mungos.org/savehostels
Making the new system work

We know that the current funding system for supported housing is far from perfect, and support the government’s intention to improve it. However, the changes proposed so far are not going to work. They are based on an arbitrary cap to benefit entitlements and ignore the cuts to support funding and rent allowances that are already putting many supported housing schemes in jeopardy.

The Secretaries of State for Communities and Local Government and for Work and Pensions must consider the damaging effects such funding changes could have on the lives of vulnerable people, and give this complex issue the time and attention it deserves.

We want the new funding system to work for our clients and people in similar situations. Our campaign, Save Hostels Rebuild Lives, is urging the Secretaries of State responsible to:

• Develop a sustainable and secure new funding system that helps vulnerable people get off the streets for good
• Introduce a legal requirement for local authorities to assess need and plan for appropriate supported housing provision in their area
• Ensure that the system is fully transparent and accountable to central government

With the right support at the right time, people can recover and rebuild their lives after being homeless.
To join our Save Hostels Rebuild Lives campaign, please visit www.mungos.org/savehostels

Follow news about the campaign on Twitter @StMungos or find us on Facebook

St Mungo’s
Ending homelessness
Rebuilding lives

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