



Housing services with a human face

Pathways home for people with experience of the criminal justice system

Peterborough and Cambridgeshire

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1. Introduction

In light of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, the recent offender needs assessment¹, and building on recent work by the Peterborough and Cambridgeshire Trailblazer to foster good relationships between organisations supporting offenders and housing teams, Peterborough and Cambridgeshire local housing authorities and the office of the Police and Crime Commissioner identified the need to develop clear pathways to settled homes for people who have experience of the criminal justice system, including people who are either under probation supervision or the integrated offender management 'umbrella'.

GLHS was commissioned to work with stakeholders to identify the action needed to enable a pathway protocol that everyone is committed to enabling. This short piece of work involved:

- Telephone interviews with 18 representations of local organisations (Annex B) to inform the workshop format and content
- A review of information provided by interviewees relevant to understanding the local context
- A one-day workshop attended by participants representing many of the organisations with an interest in this topic

This short report draws on this work to suggest the next steps to develop a protocol, for consideration by the Task and Finish Group, and to make progress towards longer-term ambitions. Annexes are provided in a separate document.

2. Why are pathways important now?

Despite longstanding evidence that homelessness increases the likelihood of re-offending, Peterborough and Cambridgeshire are not alone in experiencing considerable challenges to enabling people who have experienced the criminal justice system to access and sustain a settled home:

- Criminal justice and 'housing' systems are both very challenging to navigate: underpinned by considerable legislation, and often affected – intentionally and unintentionally – by a wide range of policy and programmes outside these systems; a multitude of bodies have an 'interest' in each system, albeit this interest may relate to specific geographies, populations or needs.
- In recent years both systems have experienced reductions in funding, and other changes in the way they receive public funding. They have also undergone transformation in some shape or form to manage the same or more demand with less resource.
- The housing market has become increasingly unaffordable for lower income households; income has not kept up with increases in housing costs; welfare reforms restrict access to a much smaller proportion of the housing market for those who need financial assistance with their housing costs; new housing supply is not meeting demand, which has built up over many years. Homelessness as experienced by all forms of household has been rising since 2010.
- Workforces in both systems are under pressure to deliver in this very difficult environment. On a day-to-day basis, this can negatively affect relationships. It can also result in 'quick fix' decisions in one system, without involvement of the other, which is unlikely in the longer term to deliver effective outcomes for anyone.
- Each system lacks effective means to understand housing needs, to understand what interventions are most effective in meeting these, to inform prioritisation, to measure success or enable accountability.

¹ Strategic Needs Assessment: Managing Offenders, Preventing Offending 2017

3. Framework for a protocol

The following headings are typically used in offender housing protocols elsewhere

1. *Ambition and purpose*

Agreed between stated partners.

2. *Definitions and scope*

Typical pathway stages are:

- a. Before custody
- b. At sentencing
- c. On reception in prison
- d. During custody
- e. On release
- f. Living in the community

The categories of people included in the protocol are described.

The relationship with MAPPA arrangements is described.

3. *Implementing the protocol: who will do what and when?*

This presents the detail of what action is required and who is the lead professional, against each of the agreed pathway headings, for the agreed populations, as described in section 2.

This can be supported by additional material eg, checklists for each stage of the pathway, to be used by the lead professional.

4. *Information sharing*

5. *Dispute resolution process*

6. *Terminology*

4. Agreeing and implementing a protocol drawing on existing resources: next steps

Ambition and purpose

The following were identified as important by Peterborough and Cambridgeshire partners:

- A common desire to act earlier in the system/pathway to ensure the best possible outcome for individuals', their families and communities
- The best possible use of collective resources through collaboration, co-ordination and communication
 - Workforce: their skills, expertise, and opportunities to work with individuals'
 - Housing: single and consistent approach to access, services to enable access (eg, deposit schemes), and best use of available housing
 - Services to support access and sustainment: accessed and delivered to consistent standards across the area
- Shared understanding of
 - The individuals' and their families' circumstances, needs and ambitions
 - The roles and responsibilities of partners, and of individuals
 - The type and level of risk individuals' may present, to themselves and to the community
 - What can be achieved (managing expectations) in the current environment
 - What already works in the area, and beyond
- The means to share intelligence and hold each other to account for their actions

Definitions and scope

Agreement is needed on which populations the protocol should describe action for, and the pathway stages.

For simplicity, the workshop used fewer pathway stages but in practice participants did identify action against the six presented in section six. However, for young people this was a difficult exercise as not all partners in the pathway were in attendance: it may be that additional work is needed to identify action for this population at the earliest possible stage.

Workshop participants were asked to agree populations to focus their discussions on: this was a difficult exercise, highlighted differences in understanding about what defines populations when it comes to accessing housing and reflected that people should be treated as an individual first and foremost. Discussions centred around:

- Young people
- Females
- Low risk but multiple needs
- Low risk of harm and low risk of offending
- Low risk of harm and high risk of offending
- MAPPA offenders

There is an existing protocol describing MAPPA arrangements in Peterborough and Cambridgeshire: this was discussed at the workshop. Approaches to MAPPA elsewhere have been to either include these as a specific section of the overarching protocol, or refer to this as stand-alone, with arrangements taking precedence over those described in the wider protocol (reflecting the nature of MAPPA).

Implementing the protocol

Personal attributes and essential inputs – checklist

Workshop participants identified the following personal attributes and inputs as essential to enabling success in accessing and sustaining a home in the community. This 'checklist' should be referred to in agreeing action for the protocol, and planning: it may identify opportunities to involve other partners in the pathway.

Personal
Basic skills: literacy, numeracy etc,
Communication and social skills
Digital skills and access
Education
Relationships
Safety
Desire, motivation, aspiration, pride – self-efficacy
Skills to manage a home, including money management
Ability to trust others'
Inputs
Knowledge to be able to plan for a future
Personal identification
Positive circle of influence / support network & living environment
Single point of contact and/or support eg, co-ordinator (young person)
Peer support/mentoring
Structure (young people) and stability
Purposeful activity eg, volunteering
Means to communicate
Means to travel
Access to, and support with, financial assistance, including bank account
Stable employment and income
Setting up a home: basic needs met; services in place
Setting up a home: support to settle in a new community
Setting up a home: sustaining a tenancy and independence
Access to health services: universal and specific eg, drug and alcohol
Flexibility in service delivery

Pathways

Annex A presents the outputs from the workshop where participants were asked to describe what should/could be in place at each stage of the pathway, using existing resources. The Task and Finish Group will need to review these and draw out the necessary information/complete gaps against the agreed stages, perhaps by involving people who were not in attendance at the workshop.

5. The ideal protocol, drawing on additional resources and a plan to address gaps: next steps

Most protocols elsewhere form part of an accommodation strategy, and are the mechanism by which collaboration is supported. Such a strategy does not exist in Peterborough and Cambridgeshire, yet it is evident that there several areas of work that would benefit from a clear vision and longer term planning.

Leadership and governance were commonly identified by participants as essential to making progress towards the overall ambition of clear pathways home. It was also evident that governance arrangements across criminal justice, housing, health and 'wealth' systems proliferate. The role of the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner in supporting these systems to work better together was strongly supported by everyone. It's suggested that, at least for the purposes of developing a longer-term plan, there is commitment from local leaders to come together. The governance needed for this plan would follow.

Workforce capacity and capability

A common theme of interviews and the workshop was insufficient capacity and capability across systems and services to support pathways home.

Many examples were provided of services and ways of working across organisations/transition points in the system, that used to be in place, that were felt to be effective, but had ended owing to reductions in funding. Consequently, services and individuals had turned to silo working and in some cases, were taking it on themselves to address gaps they felt existed instead of drawing on partners' expertise eg, to access housing.

Additionally, it was evident that not all workforces were appreciative of new ways of working that have potential to deliver better outcomes eg, taking a trauma informed approach to working with individuals, and employing individuals who have had experience of the criminal justice system in service delivery.

Potential to harness health and 'wealth' workforces was also identified: they are supporting individuals across the pathway and may be able to act in support of pathways home.

In the short term, assuming the same or fewer resources in the system, the following course of action is suggested:

- Leaders across the systems should come together and acknowledge the challenges faced by their collective workforce, review and plan for the best use of the available resource. This should include health and wellbeing, and education, training and employment ('wealth') leaders.
- A workforce audit may be a useful tool to understand what skills and expertise exist, and what's needed, and could inform workforce planning and development (including if more resources become available)
- Enable members of the workforce to come together to share their experiences and expertise through formal and informal means eg, communities of practice, shadowing, mentoring
- Direct the workforce to deliver essential components of the pathway, for example MAPPA arrangements
- Identify opportunities to employ people with experience of the criminal justice and housing/homelessness systems in roles that will enable desired outcomes
- Procure/enable training to address identified gaps in workforce knowledge eg, trauma informed approaches.

The infrastructure to support the workforce could include:

- A single and shared approach to assessing housing needs and planning to meet these, alongside the range of other needs an individual may have eg, health, care and wealth
- Opportunities to work virtually, bearing in mind limited capacity and the local geography
- An information sharing protocol (this may form part of the accommodation protocol)

Access to housing

Whilst the overall supply of homes in Peterborough and Cambridgeshire (and across the UK) continues to be insufficient to meet demand, and increasingly out of reach to lower income households, there is strong competition for available housing. In this context, people who have experience of the criminal justice system find it particularly challenging: they may have previously 'lost' a home; their offence and/or other behaviour present too high a risk (real or perceived) to potential landlords; they may be limited in the locations they can live, either to support their rehabilitation and/or to enable risk management.

There is added complexity in Peterborough and Cambridgeshire: there are six local housing authorities (Peterborough and five district councils), each with their own policies and services to enable access to housing in social and private rented sectors, and to prevent homelessness. Whilst this makes access to housing even more difficult to navigate for professionals in the criminal justice system, it also suggests that there's potential for a better use of housing authority resources – one common approach to working with the criminal justice system instead of six.

Improving access to a limited supply of housing will be difficult, but suggested routes to achieving this are:

- Agreement amongst local housing authority leaders that access is essential to enable them to meet their duties under Crime and Disorder Act 1998 S.17, particularly that in allocating social housing and enabling access to the private rented sector there will be due regard to preventing crime & disorder, including ASB & other adverse behaviour, substance misuse and reoffending
- Consideration to the appropriateness of the 'homelessness route' to accessing housing for this population: is this the most effective approach?
- A single point of access to housing for people with experience of the criminal justice system, across Peterborough and Cambridgeshire (this may be underpinned by common policies/services, but would still have value if these were not in place); this could be supported by a Panel approach (Fenland's was cited as a good example) so providing a platform for multi-disciplinary working, and accountability.
- A single scheme to enable access to the private rented sector
- Working with Registered Providers and other social landlords to identify opportunities to meet needs through existing homes (this could be extended to the County Council and other public sector partners who may have available but unused or under-utilised accommodation eg, NHS partners)
- Finally, recognising the challenge in matching dates of leaving the criminal justice system and a home and funding becoming available, investment in enabling 'step down' accommodation should be tested. This is an approach being taken elsewhere – accommodation is paid for, for a specified period, using local discretionary funds.

Housing supply

At the time of this work discussions were taking place about the need to increase housing supply to recognise the needs of populations who present with particular 'vulnerabilities' and a need for genuinely affordable homes. Without this it is difficult to see how, in the longer term, people with experience of the criminal justice system will be able to move on in their lives, and away from offending behaviour.

In the short term, to inform plans, it would be useful to agree what the unmet accommodation needs are (these could also inform access to existing housing). The following gaps were identified through this work:

- 'Step down' or 'move-on' accommodation
- Hostel provision and supported housing (offender specific and 'generic')
- 24 hour supported accommodation – high needs
- Availability of longer term supported housing for those who need this eg, mental health
- Female only hostel provision
- Immediate access to housing for young people with complex needs/high risk of offending/re-offending
- Housing First

Wealth

A stable income, sufficient to access suitable housing, is essential to achieving the pathway home but the disconnect between approaches to enabling this and access to housing were evident in this work. This isn't unique to Peterborough and Cambridgeshire, and opportunities exist to address this, for example:

- The changing role of Job Centres and work coaches, and of housing option workers (considering the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017)
- Pilot work to enable access to benefits as soon as possible on prison release
- Providing a 'home and job' through local employers, for example councils and other public bodies
- Peer support and mentoring
- A job fair approach

A working group specifically to consider the 'home and wealth' agenda was suggested – there may be other partners who were not in attendance at the workshop who could contribute.