



Using the PRS as a route out of homelessness

Community of practice

Meeting notes – 26 January 2021

Let us know what you think

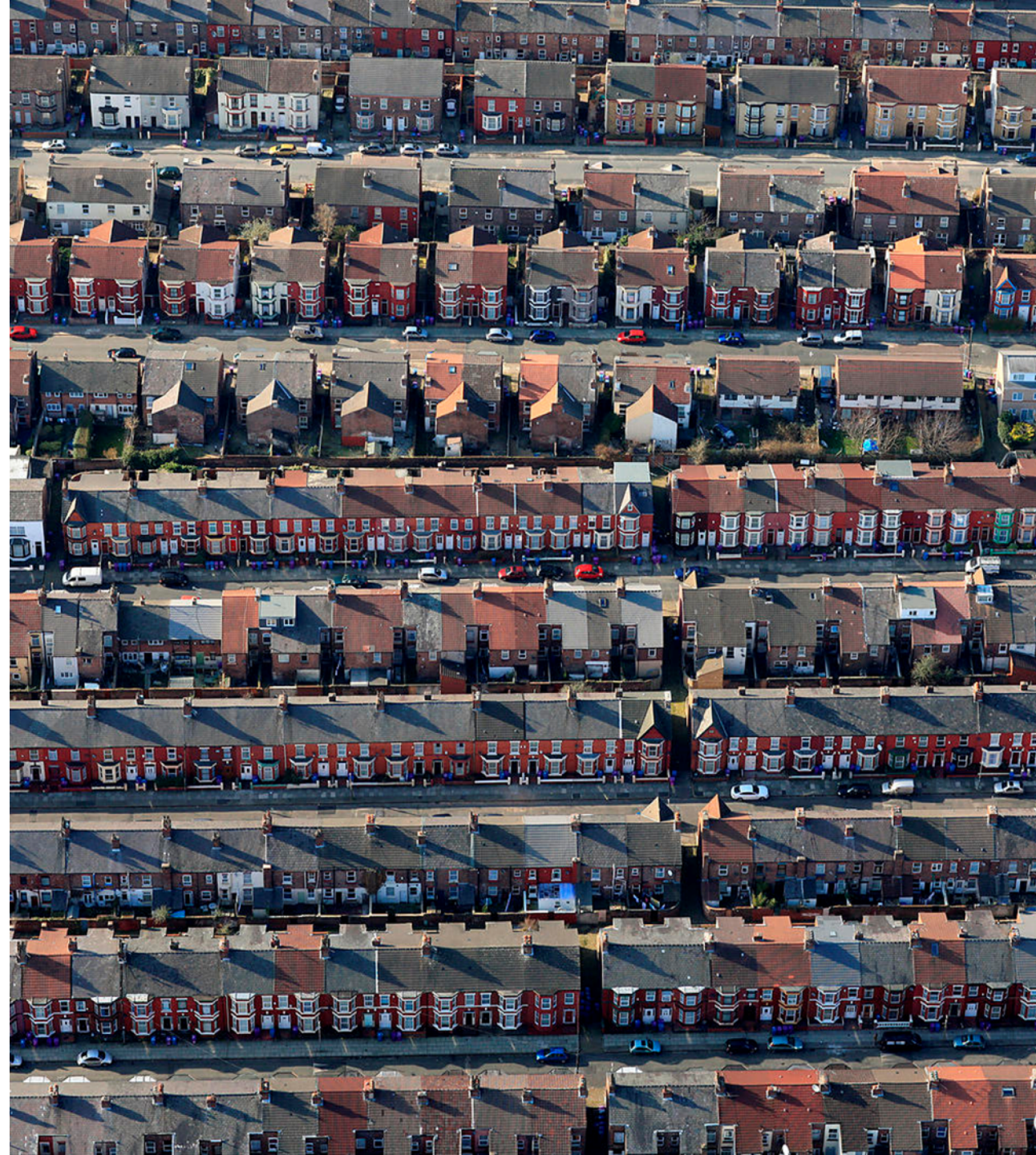
Thank you for attending our first meeting to discuss using the private rented sector (PRS) as a route out of homelessness.

In light of the high levels of interest, we are excited to develop this into an ongoing PRS Community of Practice – and we are really interested to hear your thoughts on how this should be run.

Take our five minute survey

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=Mci-ObCGO0uultbZJX8Bp0C9PosYM1NlgxnXQDCOX8VUMEFMWFE3U1ZCT1lSWjEwUzBXWVg1T0pLTy4u>

If you have any questions or other ideas for future subject areas, please get in touch with us at bestpractice@crisis.org.uk



Practice sharing.

Freedom2Work, Rentstart

SmartMove, CAB Worcester

PATH (Plymouth Access to Housing)

Practice sharing

Helen Watson, Chief Executive, Rentstart

www.rentstart.org/freedom2work

hello@rentstart.org

See attached presentation slides for more information.

Rentstart's Commonweal-funded Freedom2Work programme aims to bridge the gap between being housed and building resilience.

Freedom2Work is a 'bolt on' to Rentstart's existing model. It works to break the cycle of homelessness and unemployment, enabling clients to get to work and giving them financial resilience. It requires:

- Access to quality accommodation in the PRS
- Saving (Rentstart matches funds saved)
- Targeted and bespoke support.

It helps tenants find accommodation, build wellbeing and resilience, maintain a habit of regular saving. Finding or working towards employment helps people sustain their tenancy.

Do you house people with disabilities?

Yes, may require costs to adapt properties. In one case agreement with a bank on peppercorn rent allowed this.

How do you guarantee rent?

Lots of support and client savings provide a buffer.

Do you provide legal advice?

We have a overarching legal agreement with landlord for one to three months.

Practice sharing

David George, SmartMove Service Manager, Citizens Advice Worcester

www.citizensadviceworcester.org.uk/index.php/smart-move/
advice@cabwhabac.org.uk

See attached SmartLets HMO guidelines and risk assessment for more information.

In 2007, CAB Worcester set up SmartLets Social Lettings Agency. It includes one beds, studios up to five bed HMOs and uses Housing Associations and Private landlords.

SmartLets is working with the Worcester municipal charter to renovate older properties and property above shops. 25 self-contained properties are coming on board, on top of 101 properties already. In total, SmartLets houses 130 people per year. As clients work with CAB Worcester, it is easy to signpost to other services outside housing.

Covid-19 issues include: hotel move on, health and safety concerns, vacancies in shared accommodation, delivering tenancy training, visitors.

Do you provide maintenance of properties for landlords?

We offer full management and repair and tailored service contracts.

Do you provide tenancy training?

Yes, face to face tenancy training

What fees do you charge?

Fees are negotiated property by property.

Do you have Legal Advice available?

Yes, we do via CAB Worcester. It's a very important part of our service.

Practice sharing

Dave, Path (Plymouth Access to Housing)

www.pathdevon.org/easylet.html

easylet@pathdevon.org

PATH runs a rent deposit scheme in Plymouth. The scheme purchases or leases properties (mainly HMOs) over two years, managing them as assured shorthold tenancies (ASTs).

The ASTs are based on local housing allowance (LHA), with a small top-up. The top-up is used mainly for bills.

PATH leases from landlords and manages and matches tenants in order to provide a sustainable tenancy. Leased properties depend on the landlord and costs vary depending on lease flexibility.

There is a divergence between high quality accommodation and affordable rent, takes work to find suitable and affordable properties. New tenants have an affordability test.

Do you house people with disabilities?

For purchased properties, yes, as we can adapt the accommodation. Landlords of leased properties find it too much of a cost to revert adaptations.

Group discussions.

Affordability of the PRS

Landlord recruitment

Tenancy support

What would you like to discuss?

Mentimeter



Group discussions

Affordability of the PRS

Affordability often an issue. In a majority of places, there are very few homes on LHA of suitable quality – often the biggest challenge.

Topping up LHA to meet demands of PRS is not sustainable and limits numbers that can get help. Access to DHP helps and is used in instances, but can put extra pressure on local teams.

There are limits to LHA methodology, which regulate a one-size-fits-all approach across the three nations.

Need to be careful to balance suitability with affordability. Finding people moved in areas not close to communities, schools, work etc.

Some have found disparities between the information that housing benefit and universal credit ask for. There is some worry about the end to temporary increase to benefits in March. Finding benefit cap is not well understood by applicants and the public.

Solutions

UC will offer one bedroom rate to over 35s living in shared accommodation, which opens up the market. In some areas, LAs have provided letters to confirm people under 35 have stayed in emergency accommodation for three months and eligible for one bedroom rate.

Can try and negotiate a flat rate from a landlord who holds a number of properties to help to offset the cost of those properties which are more expensive.

One local authority is able to lend for deposits or rent in advance, however some letting agents finding was to discriminate against UC and housing benefit.

In Edinburgh, LHA rate change and collapse of AirBnb means many more properties and opportunity available on the market.

Group discussions

Landlord recruitment

Recruitment happens by word of mouth, via prominent supporters, browsing online listings, social media channels, landlords forums, and 'accidental' recruitment through networks.

Challenges

Other attractive offers for landlords; eg. competing with Capital Lettings in London. Flexible, tailored service models difficult to advertise.

Some struggle to engage letting agencies. Find student landlords won't accept long-term tenants on benefits.

Many landlords risk averse – and wary of upcoming regulation changes and concerns over margins. Suggestion that landlords leaving market and need more support.

Difficulties making transactions happen quickly.

What works

A dedicated landlord support worker, mediation, linking in with local landlord accreditation/association, paying for training. Housing and support expertise a very big draw.

Financial incentives for repairs (such as with Welsh and Scottish government-backed social lettings schemes).

Important to establish trust and good relationship, and to educate landlords and letting agencies – give them confidence.

Bringing in a consultant to work on new lettings agency was very positive.

Direct payments from UC can be a draw and having customer leads at the Job Centre helps facilitate this.

Group discussions

Tenancy support

Many participants reported a successful tenancy support offer.

Good tenancy matching in the first place plays a huge role.

Savings schemes have been very positive – people keep saving even after paying off bond.

Important to have quick responses. Tenancy support provided through schemes can be flexible. Some local authorities do not have floating support services.

Danger that tenancy support can be great at the beginning but often do not end well. In some areas, short term tenancy support is offered, however many people need longer term support. Find that pre-tenancy support and upfront education really effective.

Moving people out of hotels/emergency accommodation can be challenging. Often support in hotels is not mirrored in private rented sector.

Digital inclusion and supporting people remotely is a challenge.

There was recognition that PRS can meet the needs of tenants with more complex needs. Further leasing and rent guarantees alongside intense tailored support are important for this to work – but this might not always be available or affordable.

Peer support schemes can be useful if managed well. For eg, mixing younger and older tenants can be very successful.



Together
we will end
homelessness