'I hoped there'd be more options'

Experiences of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2018-2021

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Acknowledgements

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Acronyms

B&B	Bed and Breakfast
DLUHC	Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
H-CLIC	Case-level statutory homelessness data collection tool
HRA	Homelessness Reduction Act
HO	Housing Options
LA	Local authority
LHA	Local Housing Allowance
MHCLG	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
NRPF	No Recourse to Public Funds
PHP	Personalised Housing Plan
PRS	Private Rented Sector
TA	Temporary Accommodation
UC	Universal Credit

Foreword

In April 2018 the Homelessness Reduction Act opened up assistance from local authorities to help more people than ever before. It aimed to provide more personalised support and do more to prevent homelessness from happening in the first place. We are proud of the role we played in making the case for this ground-breaking legislation.

Four years on, our research into experiences of this new system shows the HRA has made a huge difference. Through first-hand accounts of more than 1,400 people we know in many cases it has changed the relationship between people facing homelessness and staff to one that's more person-centred and focused on needs to help people have the outcome that's right for them. When this worked well, people who traditionally would have been turned away finally received the help they needed.

Yet our research shows there are still some people not getting this help. Across the second and third waves of the research 17 per cent of respondents got no help at all. The research also shows that services are only as good as the accommodation options they have. Too many people are being left homeless or in insecure and unsuitable accommodation after they reach out for support (over 4 in 10). This continues the devastation of homelessness but also takes its toll on staff working in increasingly pressurised services. It traps councils in a loop of spending more and more on temporary accommodation instead of investing in sustainable and affordable solutions that can genuinely end someone's homelessness, rather than keeping them in limbo.

The majority of survey participants say they felt treated with respect by housing officers and felt positive after receiving a full assessment. But due to staff shortages, high caseloads and a lack of affordable options, many people found this early positivity quickly faded, with a lack of contact, engagement, and meaningful support as they progressed through the homelessness system. Some services have struggled to adapt to new ways of working, and are still focused on making decisions based on who is eligible for services and collecting evidence rather than providing support based on severity of need.

The staff in the local authorities we interviewed felt the HRA worked well for engaging and understanding the needs of people facing homelessness. However, that system is highly dependent on whether there is enough housing for people who need it, and there is nowhere near enough to meet demand. The impact of this is worse as a result of the continued existence of eligibility criteria including priority need and local connection. Their continued use allows services to stop supporting someone when it is too hard to get housing for them.

Restricting the few genuinely suitable options in this way is the product of a long-neglected area of government responsibility that makes it too difficult to find homes for people who need them. Rising rents and cost of living increases is going to make this worse if we do not tackle the chronic undersupply of social housing and make the private rented sector more affordable and accessible.

During the pandemic, under Everyone In, staff described accommodating hundreds of people in a short space of time, including individuals that they had tried to help for years without success. This context showed us what can be achieved when there is strong leadership from the government, and when different sectors join forces to work together – but it also provides a vision of what a future homelessness system might look like when more housing options are created and eligibility criteria are removed.

The HRA has undoubtedly improved people's experiences with asking for support and their housing outcomes. It is a vital first step in creating a homelessness system focused on solutions to homelessness, instead of looking for reasons why someone cannot be supported. We need a better homelessness system in England, one that can halt the devastating impact homelessness has, not just for some, but everyone who experiences it.

Matthew Downie
Chief Executive, Crisis

Executive summary

Background

In 2018 one of the most significant changes in homelessness legislation in England was introduced. The Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) was designed to put prevention at the heart of tackling homelessness and since its introduction more than 800,000 families and individuals have received help from their local authority to address their homelessness.[1]

Since campaigning for the change, Crisis has tracked the impact of its implementation and this report analyses three years of interviews and surveys with over 1,400 people facing homelessness and over 35 focus groups with staff working across the six local authority case study areas.

The research was conducted over three waves which took place between April-December 2018, April-September 2019 and November 2020-August 2021. The findings throughout the report have been aggregated to give an overview and split out to show differences between the three waves of the research. Unless otherwise specified all quotes are from people we spoke to who were facing homelessness.

Key findings

Accessing help
The HRA has opened up support and assistance for significantly more people facing homelessness. Government data shows over six in ten households (66%) who were owed a prevention or relief duty in the last three years were either single adults or couples without dependent children. This is dramatically different from the experiences reported in Crisis's *Turned Away* research in 2015.[2]

Yet our research shows there are still some people not getting the help they need. Across the second and third waves of the research 17 per cent of respondents got no help at all. Reasons included not being eligible for assistance due to immigration status, application of local connection and in some cases use of priority need and intentionality at the prevention and relief stage. Another key issue was the significant amounts of evidence required to get access to help and was used as a form of gatekeeping:

> "Went for help at [XXX] Council, but they didn't believe that we was homeless, they said you've got no proof. And I said look, no, we haven't got any money at all, we have to sleep in the van, and they just didn't believe us.

> And I got really upset and left my partner in there to talk to the woman because I got too upset and I had to run out. And she just didn't believe us…. She said something about anyone can write a letter, whatever we were saying, she just didn't seem to believe. She just did not believe that we had no friends or anyone to go and stay with that day."

Access to help varied before and during Covid - 26 per cent of respondents reported they got no help at all during wave 2 of the research but this decreased to 10 per cent during the pandemic. There were also striking differences by accommodation situation. Prior to the pandemic, 42 per cent of respondents who approached when they were rough sleeping got no help at all and this dropped to 10 per cent in the final wave of the research. Similarly, 21 per cent of people who approached when they were sofa surfing reported getting no help at all in wave 2 and this decreased to 12 per cent in wave 3.

The research supports wider evidence that when more direction from central government was given to drop eligibility criteria more people were able to access support:

> "Everyone In specifically, from a rough sleeper point of view it's been fantastic because at one point we had circa 200 people accommodated in temporary accommodation of some description, which was amazing because those people would otherwise probably be out on the street or maybe sofa surfing." (Frontline)

Across waves 2 and 3 of the research seven per cent of respondents received advice only and 74 per cent of respondents received some form of support from Housing Options. This included helping people to access to accommodation, referral to other services, mediation and support with budgeting.

The HRA was also designed to promote a supportive and accessible culture in Housing Options services. Across the full study over three quarters (78%) of people felt treated with respect when they made initial contact (78%), and felt staff listened sensitively and with respect during assessments (73%).

> "They've all been helpful, to be honest, because I didn't know what to do, and they did point me to a direction what to do, what to apply and things, all that. I didn't know nothing about that."

However, there were many people who reported poor staff behaviour outside of these specific touchpoints. Many participants also described feeling treated like 'a number,' and not receiving sympathy for their difficult circumstances.

> "If you treat somebody with respect is to make them feel valued, and make them feel like that service is helping or improving that person's wellbeing or situation and I didn't feel like that with the council at all, I felt like they was more, in a way, just trying to say go away, we can't really do nowt for you, go away, kind of situation."

There were notable differences between waves 1 and 3 on people's experiences of the assessment process. In wave 1, 16 per cent of respondents reported staff did not listen sensitively and with respect to their situation and in wave 3 this had increased to 25 per cent. Some of this can be explained by the more challenging environment the pandemic posed with higher caseloads and more remote working in place.

There were also differences by support needs; only 29 per cent of people

1   Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2022) Live tables on statutory homelessness. DLUHC: Online. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness
2   Dobie, S., Sanders, B. & Teixeira, L. (2014) *Turned Away: The treatment of single homeless people by local authority homelessness services in England*. London: Crisis. https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/housing-models-and-access/turned-away-2014/

with complex needs felt their needs were being met by Housing options compared to 47 per cent of people with no support needs. There were notable differences at the assessment stage as well – 69 per cent of people with no support needs left the assessment feeling positive compared to 44 per cent of people with complex needs.

Under the HRA local authorities are required to complete an assessment to understand a person's needs and circumstances. Once an assessment has been completed a Personalised Housing Plan (PHP) must be developed which sets out the steps that they and the local authority will take to help to address their housing needs. Staff felt that whilst assessments and PHPs were useful tools introduced by the HRA they lacked the time to use them meaningfully which was particularly challenging when people had multiple or more complex support needs. Just over half of people (57%) who were aware they had a PHP said it was personalised to their needs and 61 per cent said they understood their PHP. People who were aware of their PHP were more likely to have received advice and support to access the PRS or referrals to other agencies.

Is prevention working?
The design of the HRA was to focus more local authority resources on preventing homelessness happening in the first place. Findings from the research show that when more emphasis was placed on prevention, this improved outcomes for people and is reflected in the statutory statistics as well. Between 2018-21 58 per cent of households whose prevention duty ended secured accommodation, (in our research it was 70 per cent) compared to only 40 per cent of households where the relief duty had ended (in our research it was 43 per cent).[3] However, there

were lots of missed opportunities to keep people in stable accommodation. In wave 3 of the research out of all participants owed a prevention duty only 77 per cent remained housed after approaching Housing Options. This was driven by staff mainly dealing with 'crisis management' due to the huge numbers of people already facing homelessness and owed a relief duty, as well as under-resourcing, and pressures to move people out of temporary accommodation.

H-CLIC statistics over the last three years show prevention activity accounts for around 50 percent of total cases but in some of the research case study areas, the proportion of households owed a prevention duty falls below 20 per cent.[4] There is still more to do to shift further emphasis on genuine prevention centred approaches:

> "So the opinion of the act I think it's, it feels like it's a large step in the right direction but we're not finished yet in terms of the approach that local authorities should be taking around preventing homelessness. In the spirit of what gets measured, gets done, the fact that [Staff member] talked about the 56 days threatened with homelessness whereas we know the right thing to do is to be as upstream as possible, even before people are threatened with homelessness and do work with them. And for us to be able to do that, apart from finding the funding to do it and we know it's the right thing we need to be able to somehow demonstrate the value of that and we need a mechanism of talking to government about that."
> (Manager)

The HRA introduced a Duty to Refer to widen the responsibility of identifying people at risk of homelessness across other public bodies. Positively, as our study went on, this led to more people approaching for help following advice from another organisation (59% in wave 3 compared to 39% in wave 1). However, staff felt that more could be done to give other organisations a stronger role in preventing homelessness.

> "What I think needs to change externally, there needs to be a Duty to Cooperate rather than just a Duty to Refer. It's no good just putting somebody's name on a bit of paper and sending it and washing your hands of it."
> (Manager)

Housing improvement and outcomes
Accommodation outcomes have improved over the course of the study. In the final wave of our research 67 per cent of households experienced a positive housing outcome – defined as either remaining accommodated, or an improvement in living situation up from just 51 per cent in the first wave. The increased provision of accommodation during the pandemic was a critical factor in increasing the positive housing outcomes for people approaching local authorities for assistance.

However, among those whose contact with Housing Options had ended when we conducted the research, nearly half (46%) remained homeless after going to the local authority for support. And for many respondents (including those whose situation had improved) their housing outcome/situation was not a satisfactory one. When asked how they felt about their living situation after using Housing Options, half (50%) did not think it was secure for at least 6 months, more than half (58%) did not think it was suitable for their needs, and less than a third (30%) felt it was both secure and suitable. The reasons

for this included homelessness not being resolved, accommodation being temporary, but also issues with more permanent forms of accommodation, such as affordability, poor quality living conditions, accommodation being inappropriate for support needs, and a lack of follow-up from Housing Options or other services after moving in.

> "[I'm] in a temporary accommodation. It's too long to where I work… By bus, it took me about 2 hours 15 minutes, 15 to 20 minutes. Then by train, it's more quicker but it's expensive…. I have to wake up early, like 3.30am, 4.00am, to make my journey because I have to resume 7.00am."

> "The private sector, it's not very helpful as well. The rent is gone high. It's so unfair. Why is the rent gone so high? It's like it's not giving people opportunities to rent anymore… you have to earn three times the rent and I don't earn that much, so I'm stuck."

People living in rented properties, either within the private, social sector, or in supported housing, were more likely to report their situation being both secure and suitable. Families were more likely to see a positive change in their living situation (64% compared to 47% for single people) but were less likely to feel the accommodation was adequate.

Housing outcomes were worse when respondents reported they did not receive the right help to assist them. Of those experiencing a negative housing outcome, only 19 per cent felt support from Housing Options helped to resolve their homelessness, whereas 51 per cent of those who had a positive housing outcome felt the support had resolved their situation. This still leaves significant numbers of respondents who felt their situation was not resolved.

3   Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2022) Live tables on statutory homelessness. DLUHC: Online. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness
4   Ibid.

Having a positive housing outcome affected other experiences as well. People who reported improvements in their housing situation were more likely to report positive experiences of the HRA and on most other metrics we measured in the research – they were more likely to have left their initial meeting feeling optimistic, to report being treated with respect and to report being able to access the services in their personalised housing plan.

Recommendations

1. Despite the widening of legal duties under the HRA there are still significant numbers of people that are not getting the help they need to address and end their homelessness. Steps should be taken to build on the intent of the HRA, but the legal protections must go further to provide help to everyone who needs it. This should be based on the following principles:
   - Everyone facing homelessness should be able to access help wherever and whenever they need it
   - Local authorities and other public bodies should have robust duties to prevent homelessness
   - There should be clear regulatory oversight of how they discharge their duties under the legislation

2. The research has highlighted the critical shortage of housing which is stopping the HRA working as effectively as it could do. The Westminster Government should set an annual target of delivering an additional 90,000 social homes each year for the next 15 years and invest in substantial increases in the delivery of social rented housing.

3. Practice varied considerably by area and Housing Officer which affected the quality of support and whether people had their needs addressed. Improving standards of practice should be achieved through introducing a statutory code of practice which provides a clear and enforceable set of standards for local authorities with long term funding to achieve this. The code of practice must be accompanied by training and support for staff to embed and deliver person centred services and commissioning services that are housing-led with tailored support to meet the needs of people facing homelessness.

Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Origins of the HRA

In April 2018 the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) was implemented across all local authorities in England. Crisis along with many partners campaigned to embed lasting change that would place prevention at the heart of the homelessness system and widen access to people facing homelessness.

The origins of the HRA came from an independent panel convened by Crisis in 2015 to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the existing statutory framework.[5] It drew from the Housing (Wales) Act (2014) which introduced similar prevention and relief duties on local authorities. Originally a Private Members' Bill sponsored by Bob Blackman MP, it was also supported by central government and the Communities and Local Government Select Committee, having received pre legislative scrutiny, and received royal ascent in April 2017.

Crisis' *Turned Away* report and campaigning activity brought to attention the two-tier homelessness system that was created by The Housing (Homeless Persons) Act (1977). The study uncovered widespread problems with the advice and information provided, with many turned away without any help or the opportunity to speak to a housing adviser. The introduction of the HRA was designed to redress this imbalance of support offered to single people or couples experiencing homelessness who were not classified as being in priority need.

The HRA introduced two new universal duties: a 'prevention duty' and a 'relief duty'. Under the prevention duty local authorities must take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness for anyone at risk within 56 days. Under the relief duty local authorities must take reasonable steps to help secure accommodation for those who are currently homeless and eligible. Both duties apply to people regardless of priority need – which identifies those eligible for housing either because they have dependent children or because they meet set vulnerability tests – and intentionality, which can exclude households on the basis that the council considers they are at fault for their homelessness. The prevention duty is also local connection blind meaning people are eligible regardless of their long-term connection to an area.

The HRA introduced the Duty to Refer, a new duty on specified public authorities to refer people to a housing authority if they are homeless or likely to become

5   Crisis (2016) *The Homelessness Legislation: An independent review of the legal duties owed to homeless people.* London: Crisis. https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/housing-models-and-access/the-homelessness-legislation-an-independent-review-of-the-legal-duties-owed-to-homeless-people-2015/

homeless within 56 days. The public authority must have the consent of the individual before making a referral. The public authorities with a duty to refer include prisons, probation services, Jobcentres, social service authorities, hospitals and emergency departments.[6] This duty came into force on 1 October 2018.

Another key element of the HRA is the use of Personalised Housing Plans which provide a framework for local authorities and applicants to work together to identify appropriate actions to address their homelessness.

The HRA was initially going to include other Duties: a Duty to Co-operate (instead of the Duty to Refer) which would see a range of public bodies more deeply embedded in the homelessness system; and a Somewhere Safe to Stay Duty, which would have required councils to provide a safe place to stay, such as emergency accommodation, so that no one would have to sleep rough after seeking help from their council. This was removed because of the perceived challenges to provide accommodation to meet it.

While the statutory framework established via the HRA has remained largely the same since 2018, in July 2021 provisions of the Domestic Abuse Act came into force, meaning that any household who is homeless as a result of domestic abuse is automatically in 'priority need' under the HRA, and thus owed temporary accommodation by their local authority, and settled housing where the prevention and relief duties fail, regardless of whether the household includes dependent children or passes the vulnerability test.

1.2 Wider homelessness policy context

When the HRA was first implemented no-one could have predicted the significant impact of pandemic responses to homelessness on the wider system. The final wave of the research was conducted against a backdrop of emergency policy measures to protect people from the impact of Covid-19 and additional funding to tackle rough sleeping and people living in unsuitable shared accommodation. Some of these measures are described below and have had an impact on the research findings; this is expanded on in chapters 2, 3 and 4.

One of the most significant measures in preventing homelessness during the pandemic in England was the eviction ban that took place between March 2020 and May 2021. This prevented widespread evictions which can be seen in the significant drop in households having a prevention duty accepted between Q1 and Q2 in 2020 in figure 1.1.[7] The latest release of DLUHC's H-CLIC statistics showed overall homelessness presentations were still below pre pandemic levels, but there has been a significant pick up in households owed a prevention or relief duty (24% increase) due to a valid Section 21 notice in the latest data available (Q2 to Q3 2022).[8] Data on landlord repossessions also shows a significant increase in all stages of possession claims the first quarter after the ban was lifted, especially in London (July to September 2021).[9]

Figure 1.1: Homelessness acceptances by local authorities, Q1 2020 to Q2 2021
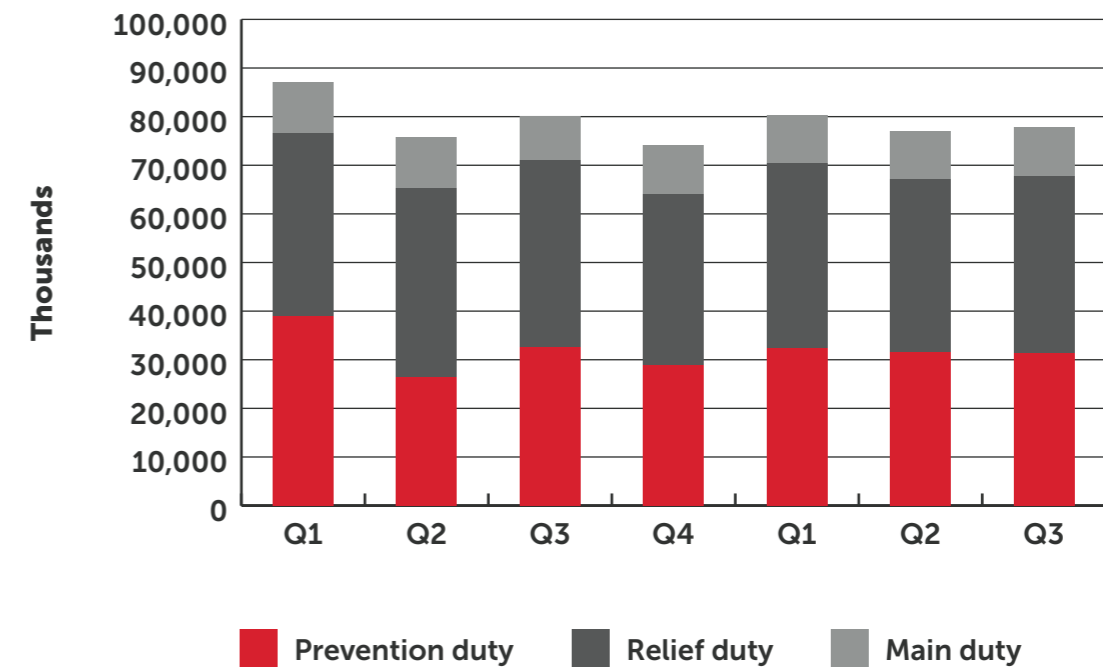
Source: DLUHC Live Homelessness statistics

Other measures that prevented homelessness happening at a large scale included the temporary uplift in Local Housing Allowance, the furlough scheme and temporary uplift in Universal Credit. All of these have now ended and there is increasing worry homelessness will begin to significantly rise again.

At the more emergency end of homelessness provision, one of the most impactful changes by the Westminster Government in response to the pandemic was the introduction of the Everyone In initiative, spearheaded by Dame Louise Casey and backed by £3.2 million of government funding. At the onset of the first lockdown in March 2020, Dame Louise led the bold and life-saving decision to unequivocally instruct local authorities

to accommodate all people sleeping rough, or living in accommodation where they couldn't self-isolate, into emergency accommodation, where they would have their own room with washing facilities.

By January 2021, a reported 37,000 people had been supported out of rough sleeping and other precarious living situations into safe emergency accommodation. In many areas this saw a significant drop in numbers of people sleeping rough. In all local authority areas this research was conducted in there was a large decrease in rough sleeping and significant increase in use of emergency accommodation. Wave 3 of the research examined the impacts of Everyone In and explored the extent to which households approaching their local authority via the HRA were

6   The full list of public authorities is listed in the Homelessness (Review Procedure etc.) Regulations (2018): https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2018/223/made
7   DLUHC (2022) Live tables on statutory homelessness. DLUHC: Online. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness
8   Ibid.
9   Watts, B., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Young, G., Fitzpatrick, S.,.and McMordie, L. (2022) *The Homelessness Monitor: England 2021*. London: Crisis. https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/homelessness-monitor/england/the-homelessness-monitor-england-2022/

being accommodated under the emergency response. More is explored in the housing outcomes section in chapter 3.

1.3 Existing evidence on the HRA

The government commissioned its own evaluation to assess the HRA two years after it was first implemented and published its own review based on this and an open consultation fed into by 160 respondents. The evaluation by ICF[10] found that the prevention duty was viewed as the element of the Act that has been most effective in achieving positive outcomes for more service users. There was more a mixed picture on the relief duty, where the ability of local authorities to relieve homelessness was reported to be inconsistent depending on structural challenges such as the local supply of affordable housing. This is echoed in Shelter's study, *Caught in the Act*[11], and was reflected in Crisis' interim report[12] on the HRA published in 2020.

The 2022 England Homelessness Monitor makes the wider point that the HRA alone cannot effectively prevent homelessness given its focus on what has been described as 'crisis prevention' (when people are at imminent risk of homelessness) as opposed to 'universal' or 'targeted' prevention that seeks to reduce

homelessness risk across entire populations or groups at especially high risk, via for example housing supply, access and regulatory reform and/or poverty reduction efforts.[1314]

The government's review of the HRA shows that since the introduction of the Act, service has improved for people who would previously have received limited support to prevent or relieve their homelessness. The Homelessness Monitor England[15] notes the pandemic context has also quite radically accelerated the achievement of a central aim of the HRA, this being to enhance the support available to single homeless households via Housing Options teams, including but not limited to those experiencing rough sleeping. But whilst some LAs have moved away from a series of legal tests at the prevention stage there are still reports of particular groups including people with complex needs lacking entitlements to TA and settled housing.

There has also been an overwhelming positive response that partnership working (internally within LAs and with external bodies) had improved in the first two years. Yet as highlighted in the Homelessness Monitor, some local authorities would welcome *a more muscular 'duty to cooperate''* in place of the Duty to Refer. While the duty is seen to have improved practice and partnership working, it is also seen to

Table 1.1: Research sample

	Structured survey	In-depth interviews	Follow up surveys	Local authority staff interviews and focus groups
Wave 1	545	51	N/A	20
Wave 2	437	38	132	N/A
Wave 3	452	104	97	17
Total	1,434	193	229	37

perpetuate the view that LA Housing Options fundamentally 'carry the can' in responding to homelessness.[16] And the ICF evaluation found that joint working and the duty to refer worked best where pre-existing connections between local authorities and public bodies were already in place. Particularly effective methods for improving joint working include colocation and secondments.

Conclusions from the government review focus on reviewing the new burdens funding due to reports that the funding was both short term and insufficient. There was also a focus on administrative barriers including better guidance on PHPs and promoting better practice of the duty to refer in health and voluntary co-operation of social landlords. All recommendations looked at strengthening existing practice rather than substantial changes to the legislative framework.[17]

1.4 Report aims

Whilst the ICF evaluation did some interviews with people approaching their local authority for assistance as homeless (184) there has not been extensive evidence gathered from this perspective. This final report

from Crisis on the implementation of the HRA fills this evidence gap. Four years on, the report takes a step back from the legislation seeking to answer whether the HRA is working and where it can be improved. The research places the legislation in the wider context examining the impact of the pandemic on a prevention framework and the extent to which the structural barriers stop the HRA from achieving its goals.

Chapter 2 looks at the experiences of people approaching Housing Options, the causes of homelessness, and the process of receiving support under the HRA. Chapter 3 focuses on the housing outcomes achieved in the short and long term, the role of different forms of support in achieving these, and the suitability of the accommodation on offer. Chapter 4 looks more closely at how the HRA is working for different groups of people and their outcomes – families, single people and other household support needs, people with multiple support needs, people leaving institutions, victims of domestic abuse and people rough sleeping. The final chapter draws conclusions from the evidence addressing the question of what needs to change.

10   MHCLG, *Evaluation of the Implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act: Final Report*. DLUHC: Online. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/919748/Evaluation_of_the_Implementation_of_the_Homelessness_Reduction_Act_Final_Report.pdf
11   Rich, H. and Garvie, D. (2020) *Caught in the Act: A review of the new homelessness legislation*. London: Shelter. https://england.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_and_research/policy_library/report_caught_in_the_act
12   Boobis, S., Sutton-Hamilton, C. and Albanese, F. (2020) *'A foot in the door:' Experiences of the Homelessness Reduction Act*. London: Crisis. https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/services-and-interventions/a-foot-in-the-door-experiences-of-the-homelessness-reduction-act-2020/
13   Watts, B., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Young, G., Fitzpatrick, S. and McMordie, L. (2022) *The Homelessness Monitor: England 2022*. London: Crisis. https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/homelessness-monitor/england/the-homelessness-monitor-england-2022/
14   Fitzpatrick, S., Mackie, P. & Wood, J. (2019) *Homelessness prevention in the UK: Policy briefing*. Online: UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence. https://housingevidence.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Homelessness-Prevention-in-the-UK-Policy-Brief-July-2019-final.pdf
15   Watts, B., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Young, G., Fitzpatrick, S. and McMordie, L. (2022) *The Homelessness Monitor: England 2022*. London: Crisis. https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/homelessness-monitor/england/the-homelessness-monitor-england-2022/.

16   Ibid.
17   MHCLG, *Evaluation of the Implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act: Final Report*. DLUHC: Online. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/919748/Evaluation_of_the_Implementation_of_the_Homelessness_Reduction_Act_Final_Report.pdf

1.5 Methodology

The research is based on three waves of an in-depth three-year research study, funded by the Oak Foundation, examining the impact of implementing the HRA across six local authority areas in England. Fieldwork was conducted between April and December 2018, and April and September 2019 and November 2020 and August 2021. A total of 1,477 participants took part in the research through 1,434 surveys, 229 follow up surveys and 161 in-depth/follow up interviews (including a series of longitudinal interviews exploring experiences over time). 37 staff interviews and focus groups took place across two years of the research with frontline housing officers, team leaders and managers (including senior managers and heads of service). Table 1.1 above breaks this down in more detail.

The findings throughout the report have both been aggregated to give an overview and been split out to show differences between the three waves of the research. Participants have been recruited through direct referrals from the local authorities taking part in the research and homelessness organisations supporting people in these localities, and in wave 3 on the street interviews were conducted – including with a cohort of 24 people not using Housing Options support (whether out of choice or due to restrictions on accessing support) whilst facing homelessness, to include their perspective. The surveys have been conducted through a mixture of face to face, telephone and online formats. The six local authorities have been anonymised throughout the report and have been selected to represent a range of housing markets, geographies across England and footfall through Housing Options services. They include two London boroughs, two Northern cities and two cities with neighbouring semi-rural areas.

Verbatim quotes in this report are taken from in-depth interviews with people facing homelessness, except for those attributed to Housing Options staff, which are sourced from interviews and focus groups with local authorities. Most of the quotes in the report are taken from the final wave of research, to avoid duplication with our previous, interim report, and to provide the most up-to-date data.

Chapter 2
Experiences of Housing Options

This chapter explores people's experiences of using their local council's Housing Options service for support with homelessness, covering all stages from their initial approach and contact to ongoing communications and receipt of support. It shows that:

- The HRA has opened up support and assistance for significantly more people facing homelessness. Over 6 in 10 households (66%) who were owed a prevention or relief duty in the last three years were either single adults or couples without dependent children. This is dramatically different from the experiences reported in Crisis's Turned Away research in 2015.

- However there are still some people who are not getting the help they need. Overall, one in six (17%) of people across the second and third waves of the survey said they received no support, advice or assessment at all from Housing Options. This indicates that a larger proportion of people facing homelessness are turned away than anticipated, despite the improved access under the HRA.

- Reasons included not being eligible for assistance due to immigration status, lack of local connection and incorrect early use of priority need at the prevention and relief stage. Another key issue was large amounts of evidence being required to get access to help, used as a form of gatekeeping.

- People who approached Housing Options in our study were facing homelessness for a range of reasons, and we heard about situations where homelessness could have been prevented. During the pandemic 31 per cent felt the Covid-19 crisis put them at risk of being homeless.

- Positively, as our study went on, the HRA's Duty to Refer led to more people approaching for help following advice from another organisation (59% in wave 3). However, staff felt that more could be done to give other organisations a stronger role in preventing homelessness.

- People who used Housing Options tended to describe themselves as having no expectations, or low expectations of what the service could deliver. Similarly, staff felt it was challenging to help people for a number of reasons, including a lack of funding, a lack of staff, and a lack of housing.

- In this context, many people found it difficult to make contact with Housing Options, with over 4 in 10 feeling it was hard to reach their housing officer and over half saying their housing officer was not available to speak when they needed them. Participants found it even harder to reach staff during the pandemic.

- Whilst most participants felt treated with respect when they made initial contact (78%), and felt staff listened sensitively and with respect during assessments (73%) there were reports of poor staff behaviour outside of these specific touchpoints. Many described feeling treated like 'a number,' and not receiving sympathy for difficult circumstances.

- Staff felt that whilst assessments and PHPs were useful tools introduced by the HRA, they lacked the time to use them meaningfully. This made it particularly challenging when trying to help people with severe and/or multiple support needs, where more holistic support was needed.

- Whilst the HRA was intended to change Housing Options culture to become more supportive and reduce gatekeeping practices, services were often more focused on deciding whether people were eligible for support over actually providing support.

- This had a negative impact on both experiences of using the service, but also on whether people felt it would be worth approaching for help: awareness that some service users are prioritised over others could act as a deterrent from accessing support.

2.1 Eligibility for support

Whilst more people are eligible for homelessness support under the HRA, there are a number of measures that affect who is allowed to receive different forms of help. Whilst these are each introduced at specific stages in a person's homelessness application and subsequent 'journey' with Housing Options, in practice there is some evidence of them having an impact on whether someone receives any support at all from the local authority.

Government data generally shows that most people who make a homelessness application are deemed eligible for support: 94 per cent of all assessed between 2018-2021.[18] However, this does not capture

how many people do not receive this assessment. In our survey, we therefore asked a number of questions to establish how many people are excluded from the most basis forms of support. Overall, one in six (17%) of people across the second and third waves of the survey said they received no support, advice or assessment at all from Housing Options. This indicates that a larger proportion of people facing homelessness are turned away than anticipated, despite the improved access under the HRA. Table 5.1 in chapter 5 details how this varied across different groups and housing situations.

Access to support improved dramatically in the pandemic. Whilst 1 in 4 (25%) received no support, advice or assessment in wave 2, when under a stronger obligation to accommodate people in wave 3, this reduced to 1 in 10 people (10% - see figure 2.1)

The rest of this section details people's experiences of these eligibility criteria.

Restrictions based on immigration and citizenship status
A large group excluded from most forms of support are non-UK nationals who due to their immigration status have No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) or other restrictions on their eligibility for support from statutory services. There were some significant changes to this once the Covid-19 crisis began: under the initial instruction that launched Everyone In, those with NRPF who were sleeping rough or at risk became eligible for help from local authorities whilst a public health emergency was ongoing. However, it has been noted that as the pandemic progressed, it was unclear whether local authorities were allowed to continue supporting this group, leading to varied responses across England. By summer 2021, some local

Figure 2.1 Proportion of people who received support in Waves 2 and 3

Advice only

Assessed but no support received

No advice, assessment or support

Support received
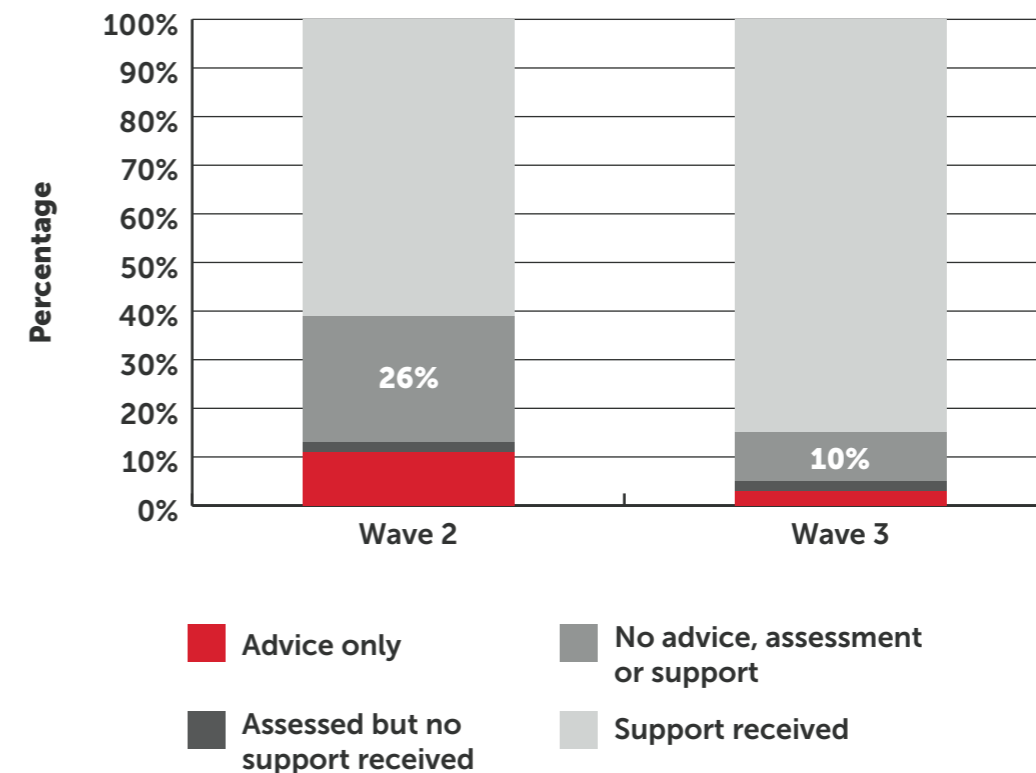
N=439, 448.

authorities were still helping people with NRPF and others were not.[19]

At all times, people with NRPF should also be eligible for advice and information from Housing Options, even if no other support can be given. However, we met some people whose awareness that they could not receive support meant that they did not approach Housing Options at all.

"Well because of my immigration status I'm not allowed to, I'm not allowed to like to do anything like that, like claim benefit or universal credits or anything, you're not allowed to, because I'm on an immigration process at the moment."

"[The council] said that I don't fit, I don't have, I've got no recourse to public funds in my, on my visa so, we won't be able to help you basically... Nobody cares about people like me in this country. So what, nobody cares, so you have to do what you have to do. And luckily I've been able to find job and find, and rent, and rent somewhere."

This may have meant that they missed out on some of the support provided as a result in Everyone In – for example, during this time there were people who had their issues with eligibility for support resolved by Housing Options.[20]

18   Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2022) Live tables on statutory homelessness. DLUHC: Online. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness

19   See page 41-45, Watts, B., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Young, G., Fitzpatrick, S. and McMordie, L. (2022) *The Homelessness Monitor: England 2022*. London: Crisis. https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/homelessness-monitor/england/the-homelessness-monitor-england-2022/
20   Ibid.

Though they had been helped by a charity into interim accommodation whilst looking for work, one participant with NRPF described feeling isolated after not being eligible for support from statutory services.

> "They say can't help me because I was working less than half a year in England… they doesn't try direct me on the other services. But they say like, 'do you can stay with your friends?' … I feel sad because, I feel sad and I think now, like everything meet alone, and I'm like a new person in England and don't know a lot of the place and everything and there's nowhere to go. And I feel lost, and I, yes, really I got lost and I feel panic because I'm alone and nobody can help… if I get a deport and everything, yes, I think in my country I will not stay too much long time alive."

Local connection
Another group who face restrictions on what support a local authority can provide are people seen to lack a 'local connection' to the area. Twelve per cent of people in our survey sample could only receive limited support because they had not worked or lived in the area for long enough. Some affected by this viewed it as unfair given they felt they had strong ties to the area in question, or because of the impracticality of moving to an area where they might qualify as having a local connection. Awareness of the criteria even acted as a deterrent, discouraging people from accessing support.

> "I'd not been in [XXX] for 12 months, there was a lady, I remember a lady getting pretty, quite funny with me a little bit, because I said I need somewhere to stay. I've not go no, I didn't have the funds to set myself up. And she just said, because you've not been in [XXX] for 12 months we can't do nothing for you, really narky, you know? So, I said, well there must be some sort of rule

on this, any outsiders from [XXX] who haven't been living in, within [XXX] for the last 12 months, ain't really going to get any help. And that's the message she conveyed to me, you've not been here within the last 12 months, so bye."

> "They said, have you got any local connections? Well, at the moment I haven't because it always goes down to the last three years. I said, well, I went to school there, I've lived in a property there, a council property there before. But is it in the last three years? Well, no. But that's where I was brought up from being a child. And then they just say, she was very nice, it wasn't her fault, she said, well, I'm sorry, but we can't consider you for the property, we can't put you on the shortlist. Because I couldn't prove an actual local connection at this point in time. [...] I've got plenty of friends still there, people I went to school with, bearing in mind I'm 63 they're dying off but there is still people there I'm still in touch with. They couldn't, I haven't got, you see I don't have any family, so. And I wasn't, I don't work in the area. If I'd have said I worked somewhere but then you, I suppose if they, I don't tell lies, do you understand what I mean?"

People who did not have a local connection may in fact be eligible for some help – for example, they would still be eligible for any help given under the 'prevention' duty. But their experiences suggest that local connection can be used as a tool of exclusion to prioritise other people for the limited housing that is available. Perversely, this could lead to some people remaining in a homeless situation for longer in order for enough time to pass for them to qualify as having a local connection – even while sleeping rough, in the case of one person we spoke to – only for that support to then be very limited.

> "I first came back to [area] because I'm not originally from [here] but my son lives here, and when I came back here they did me the five minute assessment, found that I at the time didn't have a local connection and I had to wait for my local connection to get my banding and all that, right. And then when I finally got it they really didn't really offer me no support or anything…

Priority need and intentionality
There are also restrictions on eligibility that apply to later stages of contact with Housing Options. At the 'Main duty' stage, people whose homelessness has not been relieved are not given further support if they are deemed intentionally homeless or not to be in priority need. As assessment of these criteria is not conducted until such a late stage in a person's contact with Housing Options, and at a point when some people have already been moved into a new form of accommodation, it is difficult to say exactly how many people in the survey received an assessment of whether they were eligible for Main Duty support. We do know however, that 38 per cent of people in our research were told they *were* in priority need and 11 per cent were assessed as being intentionally homeless.

What is striking about both of these eligibility criteria is how they acted as a deterrent to people pursuing relevant forms of support. In the case of intentionality, people described being put under pressure to view or accept properties that they did not feel were suitable for them, and that that not doing so could mean they were seen as not trying to prevent their own homelessness.

> "I wasn't very happy in the way that people communicated to me, especially with that first viewing that I had to take it because that would be their commitment to me over and the flat was absolutely

ridiculously inadequate. I could not get up the stairs on the visit let alone live there. But I felt compelled to take it because they, as I said, this will be your only offer."

> "I was told that, not directly but in so many words, that if I didn't accept this flat I would lose my priority. So I was already going to accept it regardless of what was going to be here. And that worried me because of the area that it was in… I went to go and have a look at it and there were three guys doing a drug deal on the corner of the flat. And now I was thinking, well, this is what they're going to offer me."

There were also cases where intentionality was in effect delaying someone's ability to receive help until they were experiencing a more severe form of homelessness. Rather than attempting to support someone to find accommodation before they became homeless, the threat of intentionality in effect was a way to buy time to support someone later.

> "Our landlord's selling up, we've had a Section 21… And if I leave without being thrown out by the landlord, I'm intentionally making myself homeless. So, I would not be offered any help in that case either."

In the case of priority need, there were some single people without children or support needs (and who would therefore be unlikely to be seen as priority need) who broadly felt there was little point in asking Housing Options for support, as they did not believe they would be prioritised for any support and/or would have little chance of being able to access appropriate social housing. This suggests priority need and intentionality were incorrectly used at an earlier stage than is meant to be the case; for priority need this was also indicated to us by staff themselves (see section 2.7).

"I would have to go on a list because I'm healthy and I don't have any dependents, you know, criteria. I don't fit the criteria… so it's not, the council is not an option to me anymore."

"I'm a young, single, male, as far as I can tell you have to be priority, you have to be pregnant, asylum seeker, or you have to fall into a special category. And I don't tick all the boxes, I've got no kids, I'm not married, I don't have any serious health problems so I think I'd be really at the bottom of the list, not really priority for them. So that's another reason why we never really considered going to the council just because I think I'd be at the very back of the queue, even, that's if I'm even on the queue, yeah, so, no, I've not actually considered that."

However, there were others who described not being prioritised for help and struggling to understand why this was the case, as they believed there shouldn't be any issues with eligibility criteria, and subsequently having to 'fight' to receive relevant support.

"They say I'm not eligible for any help. Which I think is absolutely disgusting… I'm a disabled person, I have a live in carer who helps me, she's my daughter, we have two children living with us. And they're saying we don't qualify. What do I have to do to qualify? … I'm thinking, I'm disabled, I've got COPD, I've got mental health issues, what do I need to have before they'll put me in anything."

"It took them seven months throughout my pregnancy to even find me a temporary accommodation, which is the hostel that I'm in currently, it took them seven/eight months to find me that… my support workers and stuff like that they were all saying,

they just didn't understand why I'm not a priority."

"They said I'm not entitled to this and I'm not entitled to that and I said, well it's wrong because you're having me up as an ordinary person, I'm not an ordinary person, I'm disabled."

Some people also reflected on the experience of developing a health condition that made them eligible for support they had not received before. Whilst they were grateful for the support received, they also felt that they should have been helped earlier in their life.

"Now don't forget I am a single male, yeah? Yes… you're at the bottom of a very, very long list which keeps getting bigger. And you never, ever, ever get on being a single male within a certain age group… the housing officer that I managed, finally managed to speak to basically said, well, you're 59 now, if you wait a year more services open up to you. I said, well, I could die within that year, so. But because I had underlying health issues I think they moved it a little bit quicker for me."

"I think as soon as they realise that there's anything like that going off they do tend to pull their finger out a bit, I guess. So, yeah, they were really helpful in just trying to get me somewhere that I could be safe and be under a roof and whatnot while I was going through my [health] situation."

Whilst the prevention and relief duties are meant to be priority blind, this suggests that in practice priority need criteria are being applied at this point.

Other reasons
There were people who believed they were ineligible for some forms of support due to an issue relating

to their previous residence in social housing, or due to an outstanding debt to the council. This meant they felt they had run out of options for how to resolve their homeless situation.

"Because I've got CCJs and that there's not much anyone can do… they say because you've CCJs and that… not a chance, no help, we can't help you… I went all through the housing agency, there's not much they can do for you, so they won't give me much unless I pay off a bill."

"I let a couple of people stay there, run jobs from the flat, like any job, I told the council I was subletting so as soon as I said that, that was it, they just [evicted me]… they're trying to charge me £1,000 to clear the flat out as well…"

There were also participants who had been told they were ineligible without being given a clear reason for this. Whilst it's possible the people in question were subject to some restriction – for example, not being considered in priority need – their lack of clarity on the subject suggested they had received poor information about this.

"They said they couldn't help me… with finding anything at the moment… I'm still homeless… Sofa surfing, where I can… They seemed to have just taken down my details and just not bothered to be honest… Just the current pandemic, there's other people that are more vulnerable… Well that's the reason they gave me. I don't know if it is that or if they just couldn't be bothered. I have no idea."

This shows that experiences of poor communication or assessment (see

sections 2.3 and 2.4) can lead to issues for many people's ability to access support, not just those who are subject to specific rules around eligibility.

2.2 Why people approached Housing Options for assistance

Housing Options work with people facing homelessness for a variety of reasons, and previous research shows that there usually isn't a single 'trigger' that causes homelessness in someone's life.[21] There is often an inter-relationship between structural drivers and individual factors leading to someone being pushed into homelessness. Structural causes are underpinned by housing market trends, welfare benefit arrangements and policy choices. There is also now consensus about the role that poverty plays in shaping homelessness.[22] Whilst structural causes such as lack of affordable housing create the conditions that make homelessness possible, specific individual risk factors like poor mental health increase someone's likelihood of experiencing homelessness.[23] It is therefore important for local authorities and the wider homelessness system to address this range of causes, and to provide varied kinds of support to those who need it.

When people described how they came to be homelessness it was notable that in many cases people lacked a support network of friends or family to help them. Nevertheless, they were in contact with other public services who if they had the right knowledge about housing or homelessness, may have been able to help prevent someone from becoming homeless. This highlights the importance of involving

21 See page 3, Watts, B., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Young, G., Fitzpatrick, S. and McMordie, L. (2022) *The Homelessness Monitor: England 2022*. London: Crisis. https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/homelessness-monitor/england/the-homelessness-monitor-england-2022/
22 Bramley, G. and Fitzpatrick, S. (2018) 'Homelessness in the UK; who is most at risk?', Housing Studies, 33:1, 96-116. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02673037.2017.1344957
23 ibid.

Figure 2.2: Primary cause of homelessness according to prevention/relief duty

N=1431

Figure 2.3 Primary cause of homelessness according to living situation

N=1153
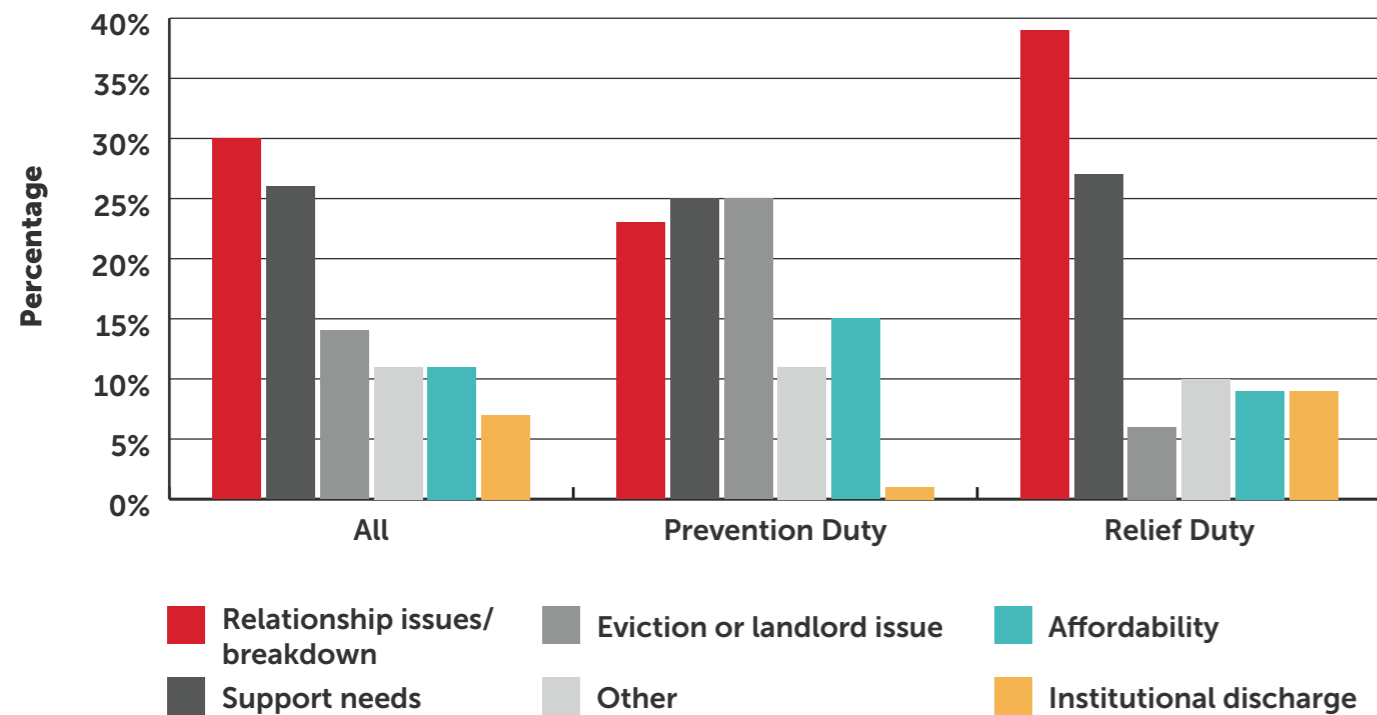
other organisations in preventing homelessness (see section 2.6). A victim of domestic violence, for example, described how she was sofa surfing but only seeking support informally through friends and volunteers.

"I'm sofa surfing at the minute… I've been there about a month… I'm not very good with talking to people, I find it a bit hard and that… I've been getting help with, like support through a friend, there's like a food bank that I used to go, that I go to on a Saturday, she's been trying to help me find a place and stuff… I think they're trying to [go to the council], they're going to do it for me I think, because I'm not very good with talking to people, I find it a bit hard and that because I didn't want people to know my business, because at the time I was hiding because of my ex, domestic violence. …. So, it was a bit difficult to go to people because

of trusting issues and stuff… The [police] put me in a hostel for a while, but it was with men, and at the time, I couldn't trust a man at the time… we've been looking at like private rented and getting, finding a way of getting the funding, the two months' rent or something or whatever it is. I've been trying to get funding through all people and that to get me somewhere to stay… [with the] council, I'm worried that they're going to bring up stuff from my past, that's what I'm worried. Because I'm very, I'm a private girl."

In our research, whilst some causes of homelessness were more common than others, there is clearly a wide range of factors forcing people to approach their local authority for support. Survey respondents were asked to identify the main and other issues that led them to approach Housing Options, and the issues they raised can be separated into
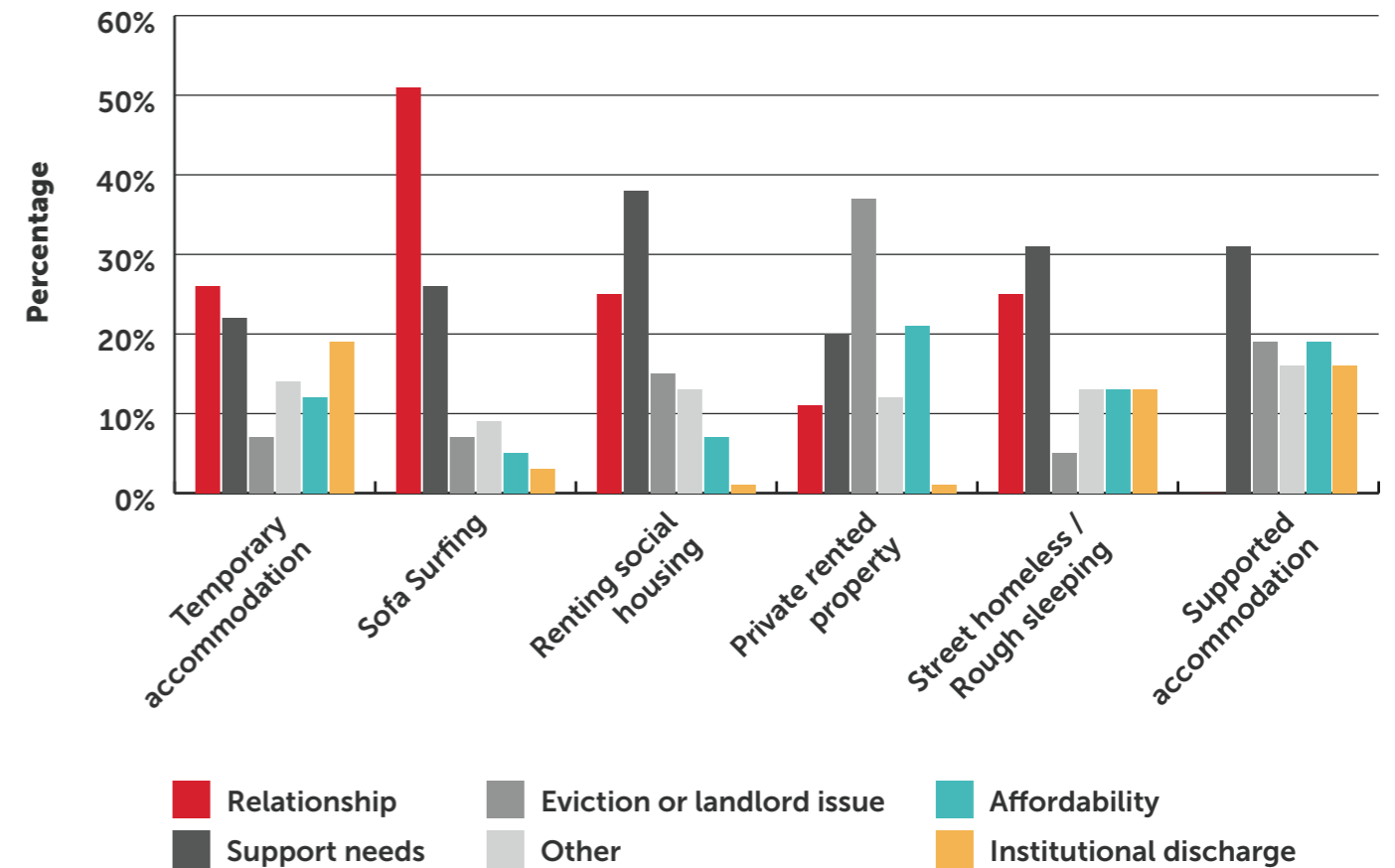
five core areas, shown in figure 2.1 – relationship issues, some form of support need,[24] eviction or landlord issue, housing affordability and discharge from an institution.[25]

Relationship issues were particularly common among people who approached the council when they were sofa surfing (51% of all sofa surfers, as shown in figure 2.3). This echoes previous research[26] on this subject and often reflects a living situation where the experience of sofa surfing can have

a particularly detrimental effect on the relationship with the host. There are other living situations where one or two causes of homelessness were more common: 38 per cent of all households we spoke to who had been living in social housing reported their homelessness was caused by an issue relating to support needs and 37 per cent of all households in the research who were living in the private rented sector said their homelessness was caused by an issue relating an eviction or other landlord issue.

24   These needs included bereavement, domestic abuse, mental Health issues, physical health issues, substance misuse, debt, and loss of employment. For a full set of definitions of each category, please see Appendix 1 of *A foot in the door.*
25   A further 11% of people sit outside these categories; their main causes of homelessness vary from a pregnancy making a current living situation unsustainable to leaving home as a result of a fire.
26   Sanders, B., Boobis, S., and Albanese, F. (2019) *'It was like a nightmare' The reality of sofa surfing in Britain today.* London: Crisis. https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/types-of-homelessness/it-was-like-a-nightmare-the-reality-of-sofa-surfing-in-britain-today/

Figure 2.4: Pandemic experiences putting people at risk of homelessness
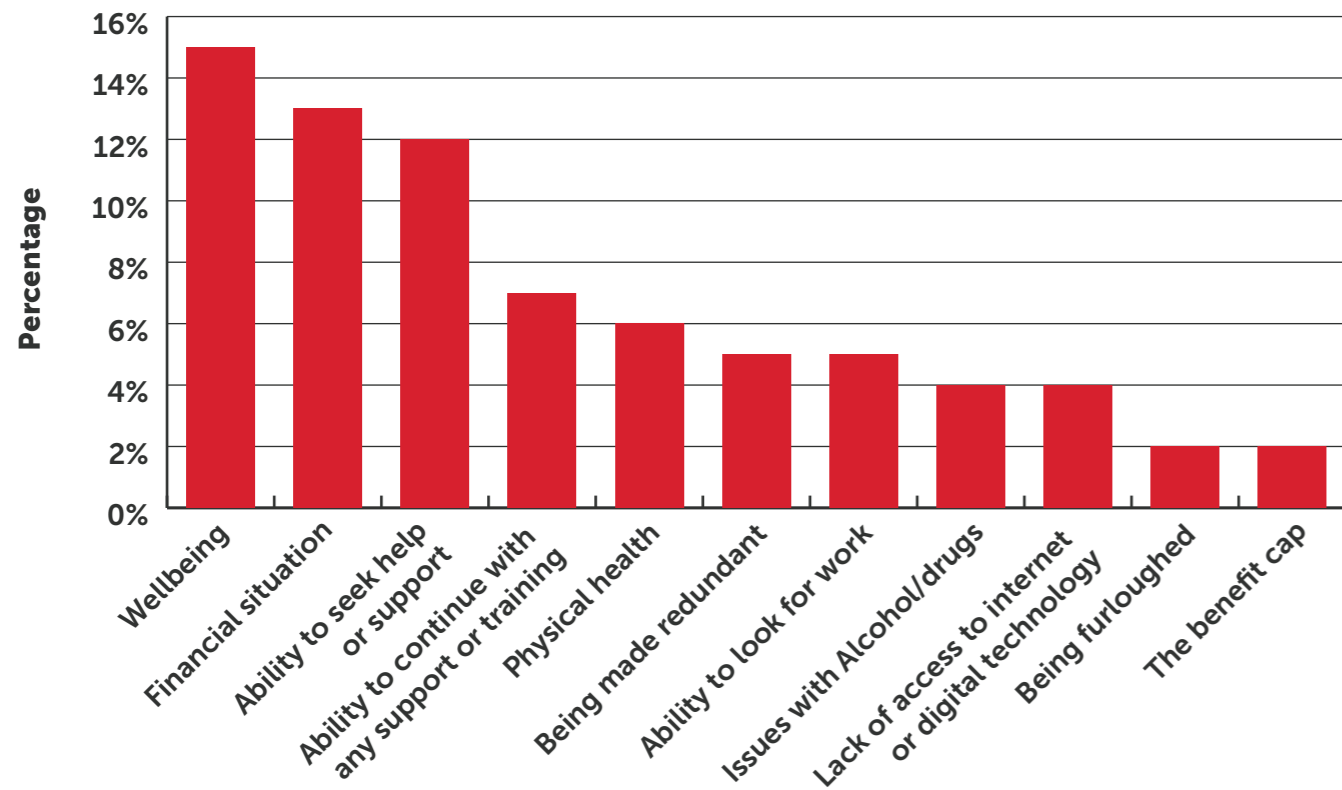
N=448. Showing % of people who thought these factors put them at risk of homelessness.

Figure 2.5: Experience of government interventions during the pandemic

N=444

It is also worth noting that the profile of people who approached the council for help at the prevention duty stage was more evenly divided across different categories, as can be seen in figure 2.2. Here, tenancy issues and affordability are much more dominant compared to those owed a relief duty, due to the presence, for example, of people who needed help after receiving an eviction notice and still being in accommodation, whereas the relief stage is more likely to have people rough sleeping or sofa surfing.

The pandemic also played a large role in why those we spoke to in our research during 2020-21 (wave 3) approached Housing Options. Thirty one per cent in this wave of the survey said issues related to the pandemic put them at risk of homelessness; the main experiences they identified as creating this risk are shown in figure 2.4. This reinforces other available evidence[27] showing that major pandemic-related drivers of homelessness include changes to financial and personal circumstances – for example, redundancy and not being able to find new work, mental health and wellbeing, including social isolation and not being able to continue sofa surfing.

Indeed, impacts on wellbeing were more dominant in our sample than financial impacts (cited by 15% of people). Related to this, the pandemic put some people at risk of homelessness when they became unable to seek support (cited by 12%) or continue with support or training (7%). Interview participants described this loss of support in relation to being unable to see family/friends or access relevant services, either due to closures of in-person services, or due to issues with digital access.

"When I put the phone down, I've already spoken to my son today, I won't talk to anybody until tomorrow. So the isolation and the just being alone is just, it's not something I'm used to, and I've had to get used to it. I've had 14 months of it now."

"Definitely mental health. I had come from quite a big family and obviously not being able to see people when you wanted to because I wasn't living at home, I was sofa surfing on friends' sofas and things like that because my mum's house was overcrowded... Everything is over a phone call and then at times internet would go down so that would then affect things... So yes, definitely mental health was affected."

"I hated being pregnant in the pandemic. It was hell, the hospital, the appointments were so far apart, honestly they would give me an appointment for like 14 weeks, and then they tell you are missing appointments like two weeks before they were even

27 See for example *The Kerslake Commission on Homelessness and Rough Sleeping (2021) A New Way of Working: Ending Rough Sleeping Together: Final Report*. Online: The Kerslake Commission. https://www.commissiononroughsleeping.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/KRSC-Final-Report-2021.pdf

due, so if you're due for a scan at 16 weeks, you don't get that scan until you're 20 weeks."

"The only thing was I couldn't go to the library. I just find the library really, it's just one of my well known places because you get a bit, well you get a bit of peace and it's quite calm."

The survey findings also reinforce other evidence showing how helpful government interventions targeting people's finances and evictions were. 61 per cent of people in wave 3 experienced one or more of these measures, with around half experiencing an uplift in the amount of welfare benefits they received, as shown in figure 2.5. Others cited the increase in housing benefits, the pause on Section 21 evictions and the furlough scheme as other key sources of support.

Without these, people's situations may have been much worse, though some felt the support didn't go far enough.

"Luckily, I received a furlough, full furlough from beginning of April till, it should be end of August because it was no work for teaching assistants. They sent me for the furlough which was, at first it was actually fine because it was around £100 a week but better than nothing."

"You spend more money, if you're stopping in. I mean, it were winter time, everything, you've got to stop in, you put heating on full pelt, you've got your telly every, all on the time, you've got your lighting, well in winter, it's summer time now. You can get out, if you want to go out, you can go out you don't have your heating on but it does bite into your little bit of money, so... Your bills go up and up and up, and the, your Universal Credit money never goes up. It goes up by a quid, if that."

2.3 Contacting Housing Options

For homelessness support to work effectively it is important for services to communicate with people clearly, consistently and respectfully. Overall, whilst the survey results showed positive experiences were more common than negative, substantial numbers of people felt that they were not respected, were unclear on what support was available to them and why, or felt they were unable to get in contact with their housing officer easily. In addition, outside of the survey people described other issues with contact.

Making contact
Some respondents were frustrated in the first instance by having to wait a long time before receiving an initial appointment with Housing Options. The proportion of people receiving a same-day appointment decreased from 38 per cent in the first wave of research to 19 per cent in the final wave. The average wait time for an appointment among people not receiving a same-day appointment was four and a half days. In addition, among those waiting the longest for an appointment, the length of time they had to wait increased from 21 days to 30 days between the first and final waves of research. Whilst some of these changes might have been due to pandemic-specific challenges in the last wave of research, the overall trend suggests this may have simply exacerbated a pre-existing problem with Housing Options capacity.

But one of the biggest issues people experienced was with lack of contact. Many described having issues being able to reach Housing Options staff, with 42 per cent in the final wave of research saying it was not easy getting through to the right person on the phone at initial contact (see figure 2.6). Research participants tended to say these issues were worse after their initial contact, with 43 per cent saying

Figure 2.6: Experiences of contact with Housing Options
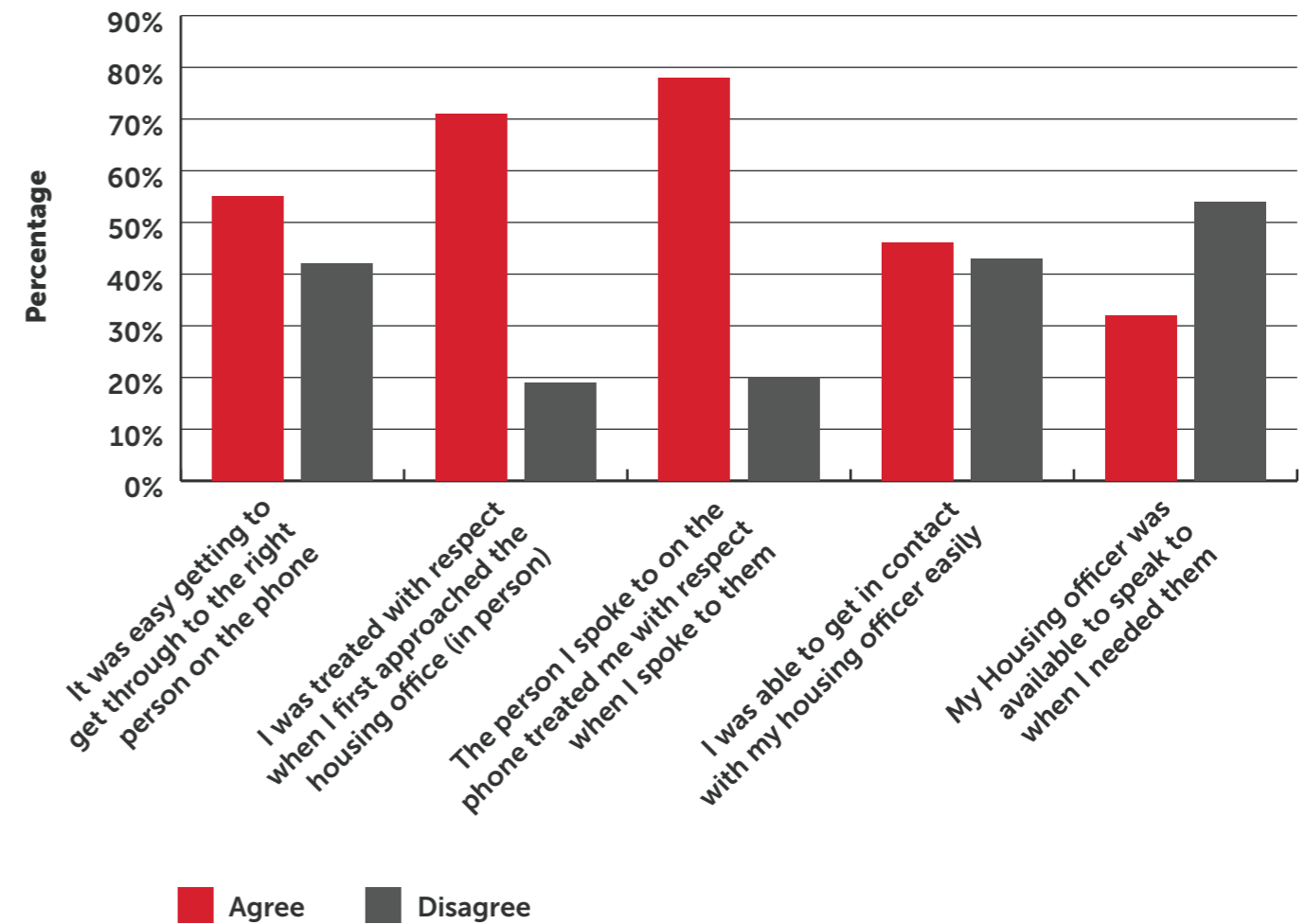
N=77-261

they could not get in contact with their housing officer easily afterwards, and 54 per cent saying their housing officer was not available to speak when they needed them.

"Only downfall or bad thing I would say is having to wait on the phones for a while before getting hold of someone."

"I first got in touch with them last year in October. I got an interview with a housing officer in the November, After that, I didn't hear from him again till February after leaving him 30 messages and 18 emails. Saying, please can you

tell me what is happening? And then he got hold of me, and I was still none the wiser, because he doesn't seem to have a clue what's going on. And I've heard nothing from him since."

Some described a general lack of communication over long periods of time. People described feeling ignored and receiving few updates on the status of their homelessness application.

"It was really hard for me to get through to her... I sent her my expenses and my income as well, and she saw that. Then a few weeks

later she came back to me as if she didn't know what was happening anymore, and I felt so confused because I already told her the information that she was asking again for. So it went in circles all over and over again, so for three months… she never replied to my emails."

"Yeah, you can never get hold of them. You can never get hold of them, it's always on answering machine and they never ring you back."

"I can't say interactions with them because I haven't had any. So the only thing I've had, no, nothing really. Nothing's got better, nothing's got worse. You're just in a pile of people waiting and hopefully you get lucky."

As noted in our previous report, staff felt that the way in which their teams were structured meant some service users might require two points of contact – and that people could 'fall through the cracks' if both of these points of contact had their capacity stretched. There were therefore people who described not having or not knowing if they had a single point of contact as their housing officer. This meant people felt they had to repeat themselves to different members of staff, explaining their situation time after time. Similarly, some people discovered that a housing officer they were working with had left or was on leave, and it was unclear whether anyone else had been allocated to their case.

"It [j]ust seemed like every time I were on the phone I was speaking to somebody else."

"The lady I had been liaising with in terms of this emergency accommodation, she was on annual leave. So, which I didn't know about until I got there. So, it took a while for them to, I don't know, sort out who was dealing with what and who was taking over her cases or something."

"I have been looking for her and I've been calling her. I leave messages and everything. But apparently she was off sick, and nobody phoned me about it. So I feel, one day I just rang again and she said, oh she's been off sick for the, for that (inaudible) so I'm like, nobody let me know about that, and she said, well that's [this area], it's not my fault that she's been in hospital. I'm like, all right then, that was the last time and since then she hasn't contacted me either, just says wait to hear from them"

"Every time you go in, if you go in, you see a new person and then they'd have to always see your stuff again, you're not allocated to one person, it's all different. And they're sitting there going through all the paperwork and you've got to explain everything over and over again… it's frustrating when you go in there every time and you have to explain yourself again, explain how you got to the situation you are in."

This highlights how important it is for people to have a single, key worker recommendation around the importance of having a single worker with the capacity to build a supportive relationship with their client.

Respect, sympathy and supportiveness
However, some issues people experienced seem linked not just to resourcing but also to poor staff behaviour and/or an unsupportive culture. Whilst not in the majority, once in contact with Housing Options, 20 per cent of people did not feel treated with respect when they made initial contact with Housing Options via phone (with 19 per cent feeling this way when making contact in person – see figure 2.6).

Those who had positive experiences said staff had been supportive from

the start, and then followed through by guiding them carefully through the process of receiving support.

"They've all been helpful, to be honest, because I didn't know what to do, and they did point me to a direction what to do, what to apply and things, all that. I didn't know nothing about that."

"The lady that dealt with me, she really helped me a lot, so it went smoothly… overall they were quite helpful… I was given a lot of help, I was given, I was put into temporary accommodation, I was put in a hotel so I went through the right channels. Then eventually I was given a property so, I was given the right help I believe."

A refugee described receiving frequent contact and guidance on what to do as they moved from NASS accommodation to TA and eventually social housing.

"I'm happy with the results… I was in contact each two weeks with someone from, volunteering from the council, who helped me with almost everything… They help me in the bidding for, to find accommodation. And also this [staff member] helped me to… apply for something called [Discretionary Housing Payment]… Very helpful."

Some noted there were differences between staff they worked with during their application.

"Overall, I'd say it was positive… The gentleman I did deal with was quite supportive, quite helpful as well, yes. So yeah, I dealt with a limited amount of people, some of which were, some of which were nicer than others."

Other people related some specific experiences of poor staff behaviour. In some cases the experience was with

another part of the council, or linked to a specific point in the process of the homelessness application that the service user was trying to navigate.

"I've spoken to multiple different housing officers and I got passed from pillar to post at the beginning of it. It wasn't like you had one direct person. And one lady I did deal with… She was quite rude at some points, being quite personal… my mum had to prove she was my mother. Even though I'd sent my birth certificate, obviously that states my mum's name, and my mum's email address I'd given the lady to contact her on was the name on the birth certificate. So it was a no brainer and she was just quite rude."

"I approached the council and they said that they would phone up and speak to me and try and help me find somewhere to live. The first person that I spoke to were really quite rude, really didn't want to help at all, just I was wasting the time being there, and then at some point I must have mentioned that, the word homeless, and she says, oh, you're in the wrong queue, you need to be in that one over there."

"The housing officer that I had encountered at the beginning of the process did not want to house me and she did say that to me, that she didn't see why I needed to be housed and she didn't want to house me… I was devastated and I just remember being in floods of tears and she had no remorse at all. She was very much, why are you crying, what's your issue? She was, I found her very cold hearted towards my application and I felt very hurt by that, and then I went back and that's when I saw a different housing officer who had a totally different approach… she was very

much more understanding of my situation, my circumstances."

"I actually went with, yeah it was, my probation officer set up the meeting in [area name], this is what happened. They, because you know I'm assigned a police officer because of like, I was a PPO, a prolific offender right, so he came with me to the high housing in [area name], showed his badge to the woman, and that's when she laughed at me. And said yeah, you're having, you ain't getting a place mate. I was like that, I looked at him yeah, and I thought is this for real? [...] And then basically I just, I just felt like shit. I just felt worthless."

"I don't really agree with security guards like that, because they're bullies. Yes. They're bullies... The minute you go into somewhere and you see security and they're rough and they're bullyish and they push you, they actually physically touch you. So, oh no, no, no, no, no, no and you think, what? Like you don't, they don't know what trauma you've been through already."

One participant described not qualifying for emergency accommodation, and a housing officer implicitly threatening her to contact social services about the custody of her child.

"She came back to me saying that, oh, if you don't find yourself private accommodation I will not hesitate to get, what is it called? Social Services involved. And I got shocked because why would you get Social Services involved? I haven't done anything wrong. I just became homeless. And I just didn't understand. Besides me becoming homeless, now I have to put up with anxiety of having to deal with Social Services, and I didn't understand why she would do that instead of helping me with

emergency accommodation, as she stated from the beginning."

One participant described how he felt less supportive housing officers tended to be harder to reach and more focused on process.

"The good ones get back to you, pretty quick, and then others... I had one that got to me pretty quick, he got back to me within a week and said, everything's being processed, oh that's good, I thought hold up, that's a step in the right direction, then I heard nothing. I heard nothing for about two months, you think to yourself, you think hang up, I've wasted an hour. What did I waste an hour for sitting in your office... I got the letter and I thought, oh I know what that is, read it and I thought, yeah it's same, the same old letters, read it, like a frog in a library, read it, read it."

Another person who had been to Housing Options felt that their success in receiving support was down to luck.

"I feel like I lucked out, yeah? It was all luck. It was just all luck, yeah, because I still do know some people are still homeless even though they've gone through the same process as me. So I feel like I got lucky which shouldn't really happen, yeah, should it? ...luck because I got a person that was willing to do their job. Or got the job done within a reasonable time."

Language and navigating the system
Large proportions of people also described issues in being understood by Housing Options staff. Around a third (32%) did not find it easy to explain their situation over the phone when making initial contact, and there were people who experienced language barriers when communicating over the phone (19%) and in person (27% - see figure 2.6) Examples of this included both issues among people

Figure 2.7: Experiences of communicating with Housing Options staff
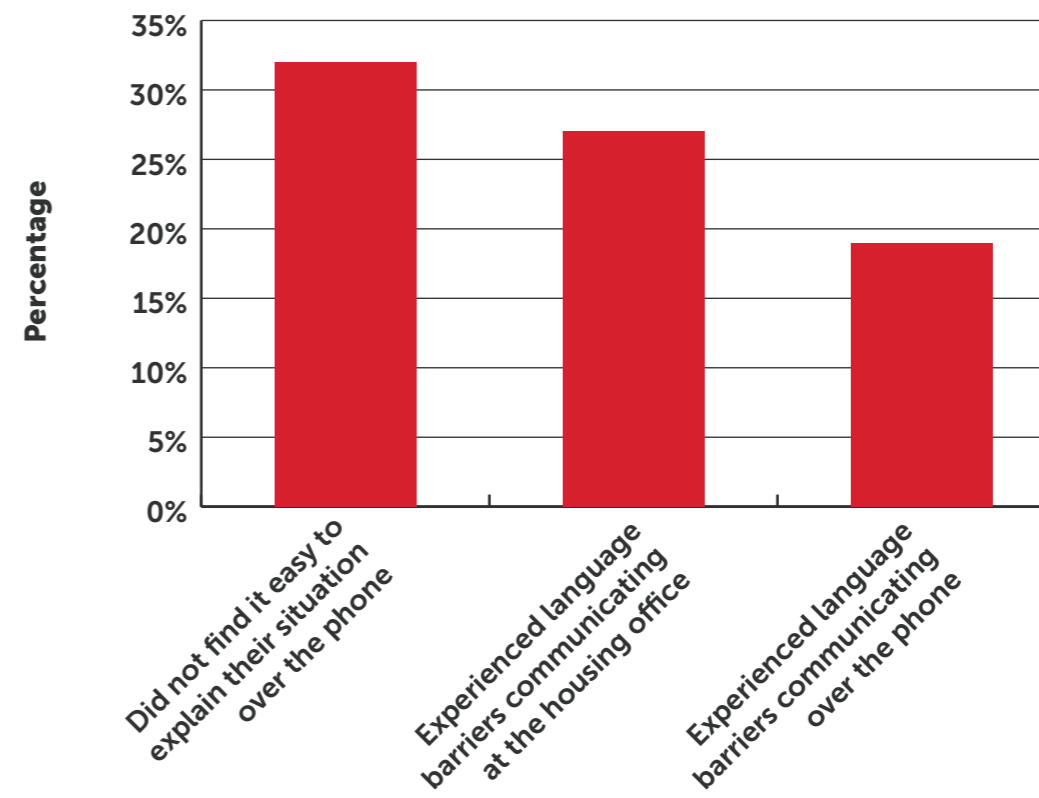
N=77-261

for whom English was not their first language, English speakers who found it hard to understand specific terminology, and some described having learning difficulties. Across all these groups the common experience was not feeling understood.

"They're OK in that they're kind of respectful, understandable but only they, it's the words they use. I don't understand a lot of what they say. So a lot of it is just jibber jabber to me... I've got to go away and ask someone else what exactly does this mean? Where does that put me now?"

"Literally they were like, oh take this big, take this huge form, fill it out for me, give it back to us. And it's just like, OK, this is too much. In terms of that, no, I didn't really

get any, somewhat any help when it come to them knowing that I suffer from learning difficulties."

Feeling staff were unsupportive (or even hostile), and language barriers – both of these seem closely linked to the complexity of accessing support from Housing Options. The role of Personalised Housing Plans as an additional 'process' a Housing Options user must go through may have added to this feeling of complexity (see section 2.5). People described it being hard to understand the process involved in applying for homelessness support, the reasons why they weren't eligible for different forms of support, or that they struggled to understand or complete the forms required. One participant described how they felt staff needed to explain the processes involved in a homelessness application

more clearly, and that ideally these processes needed to be more efficient.

> **"If you were struggling with homelessness the first thing they could do is book you in for a meeting and then give you a step by step process of the first result, the middle result, and the end result, and how long it's going to take. Instead of taking someone in there, telling them a little bit about the housing situation, and fobbing someone off with only half a story, only half an answer, only half a way forward without knowing what's actually going on that's when people dwindle, and they leave it, and time, the next appointment's next month, come back. That's too long, man, they need one official meeting, bosh, bosh, bosh, and go here, go there, do that, it's going to take this long, we'll see what we can do for you. It's simple, isn't it?"**

The complexity of correctly following processes was noted by staff as a barrier to people getting the help they need.

> **"From a procurement perspective, some of my clients have lost out specifically on properties because they've been referred to me, when I've actually gone to refer them to avoid, they've lost out because we don't have the documents we need."**
> (Frontline)

A key issue expressed by those approaching Housing Options was the need to provide documentation to prove their eligibility for support. Whilst in some cases this was linked to meeting specific criteria for support (see section 2.1), the scale of evidence requests suggests some staff may be using requests for evidence as a means of gatekeeping or withholding of support. Staff members talking about the need for service users to prove their support needs or homelessness

situation provide some indication of how they viewed delivering help as conditional, and were not providing a more person-centred approach to support.

> **"There needs to be some kind of audit trail. There needs to be some kind of evidence of the nature, the severity, the type of the issue that they're presenting with. And you can't always just tell on the phone what that is and because we're not seeing people face to face, you can't see what that is. How severe is that mobility problem that you have? It's impossible to tell on the phone, so unless you have something to back up what they say, it is really tricky. And it's not to say that what they're saying isn't true, but later on when you're making a decision, what are you basing it on? Well they told me that their pain was really severe, they told me that they're on this medication, OK, where's the evidence? So it can slow things down, it can reduce their options, so yeah, all of them."**
> (Frontline)

As our research progressed, the proportion of people being asked to provide evidence increased from around one quarter (27%) in the first wave of research to nearly 9 in 10 people (87%) in the last wave. Whilst overall 70 per cent in our last wave of research said they found it easy to get documents to the housing office, the increased requests for such documents suggests there has been a stronger burden upon service users to 'prove' their eligibility for help, as time has gone on. A few participants described either practical challenges with accessing or sending documentation, or a broader problem with being able to 'prove' they were homeless.

> **"Went for help at [XXX] Council, but they didn't believe that we was homeless, they said you've**

got no proof. And I said look, no, we haven't got any money at all, we have to sleep in the van, and they just didn't believe us. And I got really upset and left my partner in there to talk to the woman because I got too upset and I had to run out. And she just didn't believe us... She said something about anyone can say they're homeless, and I said we got a letter, I think we could get, I think we said we could get a letter off the guy who said we have to move out of his bungalow. She said something about anyone can write a letter, whatever we were saying, she just didn't seem to believe. She just did not believe that we had no friends or anyone to go and stay with that day."

> **"They are asking for the letter from the Home Office, so I couldn't provide it, because everything is in the storage. I tried to explain the situation or things to them, but they said the storage is in [XXX], and there's no way I can get there... They want the original copy. They said they don't want this as an email, because I have it as an email, but it was, they said they don't want it, only the original one... there's no way I can go to the storage. I was told that the storage is in outside London, and there's no way we can have access to it until we get a place."**

> **"They wanted a load of information, especially medical information, which I managed to provide... The thing was they wouldn't accept my doctor's, a doctor's letter, they had to see the raw data so that their doctors could make an assessment. So that seemed strange in itself and when I queried that they said, oh no, it's our doctors that do it. And then, so one doctor could, my doctor couldn't say I'm ill and I thought to myself, well, they've got all this data, they don't have**

any interactions with me, they were just looking at the raw data, they can make their minds up on anything, couldn't they?"

The impact of poor contact
When using a complex, under-resourced service, people were more likely to succeed in progressing their homelessness application if they were very proactive in their communication with Housing Options. This suggests the system was in effect biased towards people with greater cultural capital – people with more relevant skills and familiarity with the 'culture' of the system they were navigating – as well as more emotional resilience to 'fight' for their support.

> **"If I hadn't of kept ringing and doing everything that I was doing on my end, I would have just been forgotten about... they're not ones to chase after, they're not ones to ring you up on a regular basis saying, look, how is everything going, what have you found? This is what we've found. It doesn't work that way."**

> **"I had to go running about contacting everybody else to contact them, instead of them contacting them and getting the information from them, it felt like I was doing all the chasing about."**

> **"You kind of feel that you're having to fight and you're having to call in every resource to try and just get the very basics, which is a home, just four walls and a roof just to keep your children safe and from any harm. So that's, it's tough. It's tough."**

A couple of people even escalated the issue to a local MP in order to make progress – something that should not be necessary and which favours those who feel capable enough to take such an action. Similarly, some felt they would not have made progress had it not been for a charity or support

worker making contact with Housing Options on their behalf.

> "It took social services, [XXX] health charity, the MP, just to get this place and it took two years."

> "I did forget to say that as well as going to Citizens Advice, I also went to my MP as well… It did help. She did write a letter on my behalf and explain that we really did need to move and they needed to help us. It was, I don't know if it was a combination of her letter or just Citizens Advice but we did get that temporary accommodation in [XXX] and we were very grateful for it."

Some even had a support worker dealing entirely with Housing Options during their case, illustrating the importance of services that deliver intensive support to someone facing homelessness, instead of placing the burden on the service user to progress the receipt of support.

> "[The social worker] was doing it over the phone with the council and then she did send me letters and she did send emails and whatever she had to do around to whoever it had to go. So it was, it was all done how it should have been done. She didn't miss anything, to be honest… she was amazing…. I think because she was in the job and she knew, she knew what she was doing and whatever, and she knew, I suppose where the pits were, if you could call it pitfalls. She could put it all right…"

> "Well, he [charity worker] understood the whole system and could explain it. When you, even you calling today, you're talking about some housing option scheme which is meaningless to me, I don't know which part of the council that is. So he was able to explain, this person has a legal

responsibility to do this, these people a responsibility to do this. This is the information that you need to supply, you don't have to supply this information, etc, etc. He did, he knew how to make it work, let's say."

Those who were less proactive with Housing Options or who didn't have support from other organisations could nevertheless be in vulnerable circumstances, without being considered a priority until they were facing a life-threatening health issue or were due to have a baby.

> "I don't know if it's because of nine months or forgetting, they didn't really speak to me during the pregnancy. They didn't really help me, they just put in one place and left me until it was time to have the baby. So, it's like once I had that baby that's when I got in contact with them again and then I think they just moved me to the nearest, wherever. They just forgot my situation, they forgot, they didn't go through their notes, they didn't go through remembering what, the areas I'm supposed to be in and then they just placed me where they wanted to place me and I hadn't really no choice."

Where experiences of contact were more positive, there seemed to be less emphasis on 'process' from the housing officer, and more proactive contact from Housing Options.

> "They let me just do my, literally do my own thing and just kept in touch with me and supported me and made sure that I was applying for the right properties and things. So they've been in the background if I've needed them…"

> "With this particular council, yeah, it was very positive… I just felt it's not about… it wasn't about the rules and regulations, it was about speaking to me."

> "The gentleman that I dealt with regards to organising the, discussing the housing payment and moving into this place. He was very, he, even though it took a while, he would either email or call to give an update, or if there were no update, he might, if there were no updates, he may send an email at the end of the day saying, I'm still working on this or waiting to hear back from such and such. So, it was just mainly being informed about what was going on."

Overall, the poor experiences people had in not being able to contact Housing Options – and in some cases finding interactions with staff unpleasant and difficult – had a negative impact on people's ongoing situations. For some, lack of contact meant not being able to make progress with receiving support or accommodation.

> "I finally got my priority in March this year… I've not spoke to the officer now, it take her about eight weeks. I've had no contact to say look this is how it is, you've got priority. I didn't even know that I'd been awarded to bid… I didn't even know."

> "They're supposed to find a property for me, but I don't know if they can do it anymore. So they ask me or think I can do it quicker, so that I can get what I need, move nearer… So now, I'm looking for a private property but some people are asking for guarantor, which I cannot provide. So it is difficult, but I'm still trying. I don't know. I don't know what to do again. So everything is so bad, nobody to help. You don't have anybody to call and speak to. You just have to keep emailing them before they will respond and all that."

For others, the lack of contact added to the strain on their wellbeing already affected by their housing or homelessness issue.

> "To be honest it's like you ran into a wall and there's no hope, that's how I felt when I left, like there's no hope. They make it seem as if there's hope but from my experience it made me felt like there's no hope."

The participant who described being laughed at by a staff member claimed this contributed to him rejecting the idea that the state would be able to help him, and led him further into criminal behaviour.

> "I thought you know what? Fuck this society, and then I just started going on, and just carried on like going mad robbing and doing crazy things. Just didn't care, didn't, don't feel part of society… I've lost my confidence in going to ask for help from the government and councils and stuff.

2.4 Assessments

The HRA led to the introduction of an in-depth assessment, used mainly to understand a person's housing needs. Worryingly, only 69 per cent of survey participants said they received an assessment, even though this should be available to all currently homeless or facing it in the next 56 days, provided they meet immigration conditions for support. This suggests that some people were not aware that they were being assessed, and that others did not receive an assessment – also indicating that measures such as priority need may have been incorrectly used to withhold support that people were entitled to.

Staff in one LA highlighted how the pandemic in particular meant they did not have the capacity to give assessments to everyone.

"Because of the staff shortages etc, so they are not doing, the only cases they'll do the full assessment for at the minute are the ones that are going into temporary accommodation. So the, most cases come through now... There's a big difference in the quality of work... two years ago was a lot higher than the quality they are doing now. So they've been impacted because of the volume of calls which has then had quite a negative knock on effect with case work officers, because they're not getting the quality assessments done or they're getting no assessments done. Personally, like I probably said two years ago, I don't think the whole way we work is a very good experience for the customer. And in my ideal a case officer would be given time to do these full assessments from beginning to end. But be given quality time to do it... how short staffed we are as a service, so nothing is getting done as it should be really."
(Frontline)

As noted in the interim report, participants generally appreciated having the opportunity to speak to someone at length about their situation, particularly when their housing officer was knowledgeable about what options the person had in their circumstances, and when they showed empathy towards them.

"He was just very good at what he was doing. He listened and understood, and he took the right actions, and it was all very good."

"When they finished, they asked me do I have any questions or anything like that. So, yeah, it was long enough to explain what I needed to, yeah, they didn't rush you or anything like that. They just sit and explained everything. So, yeah, it was enough time. It's probably longer than half

an hour but I can't remember but I explained everything that I needed to in the time that was given and I wasn't rushed or anything."

However, there were some clear examples of participants receiving a poor, overly basic assessment. A common theme was people telling us that their situation was not understood – for example, their financial circumstances, support needs, or caring responsibilities. They felt there was then a mismatch between what they were telling the housing officer and what support was available to them depending on their level of vulnerability. In these cases it was felt staff were less sympathetic, and this could add to the overall emotional and mental strain people were experiencing at this time.

"I feel like she should have tried a bit more, but then again, she said it is not our, all she was saying is just to fill the application and she didn't listen to my side of the story... I feel like maybe if they considered my son's condition and things, maybe think, I feel like they haven't considered that."

"When I was originally first made homeless it was from a mortgage property but I moved into that when I was eight months pregnant so I wasn't on the mortgage. So when me and my partner split he kept the house and then they were just like, well you bought a house before, you must have money. Well no, all my money's in the house and then they just weren't willing to help. I had to fight for at least a year just so that they would accept me on to the list."

These experiences also indicate that a sense of judgement and prejudice could affect whether people were assessed effectively. Related to this, people with previous experience

Figure 2.8: Experiences of assessment
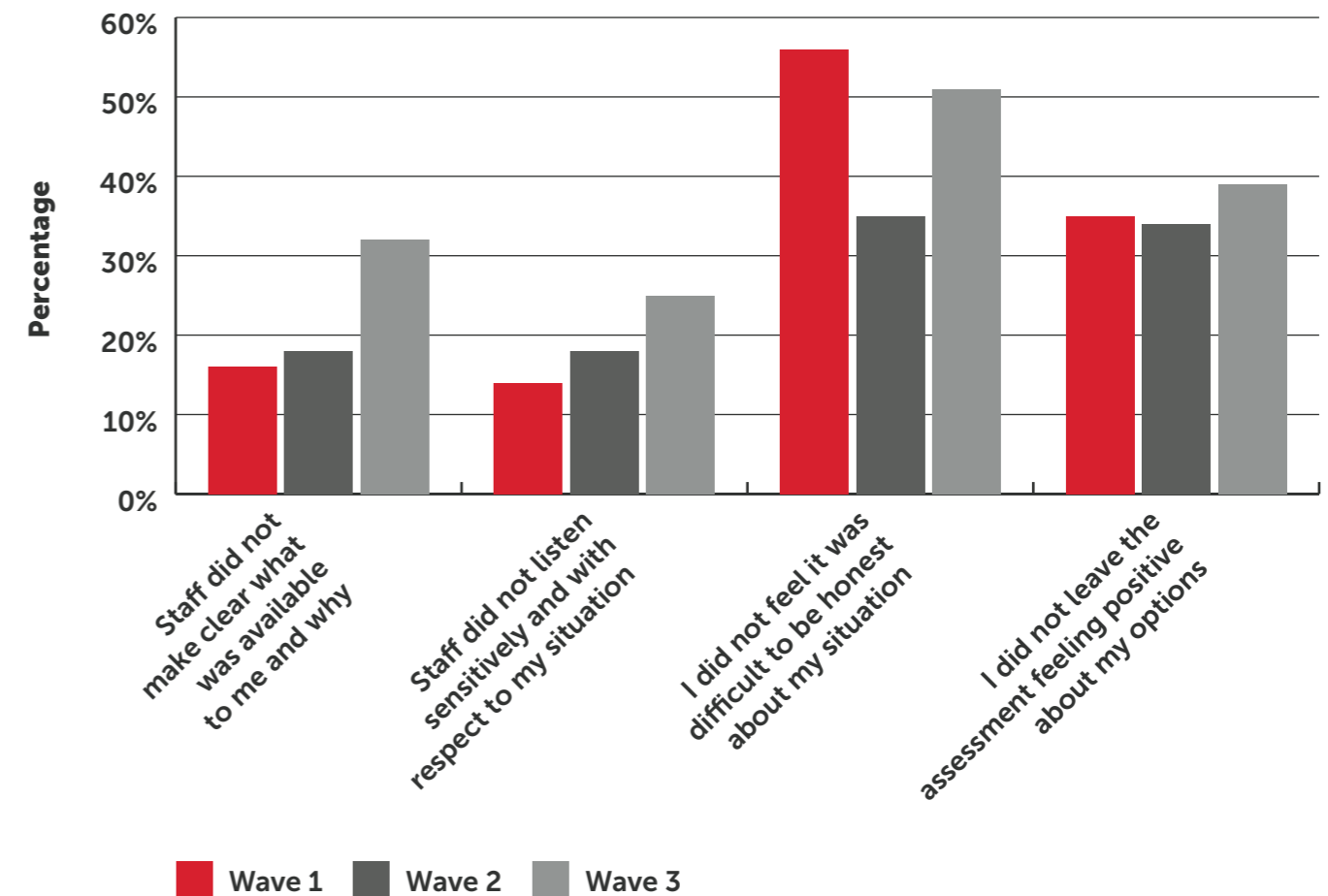
N=77-261

of homelessness were less likely to feel staff listened to their situation sensitively and with respect, nor made clear what was available to them and why.

There is also evidence that the pandemic had a negative impact on the quality of assessments being delivered. In the final wave of research, there was a higher proportion of people who did not feel that staff listened sensitively and with respect to their situation; and who did not feel that staff made clear what support was available to them and why, as shown in figure 2.8.

Related to this, some staff felt that assessments could be more challenging in a remote working context, particularly when assessing people with multiple support needs.

"I think for the more complex cases is where it hasn't been so good. I feel like there's been some cases where I'm pretty confident I would have been able to get a lot more out of had I been able to observe them. That sounds a bit weird, I don't know how else to put it, but so for example actually seeing them and building that rapport and noticing something that they might not be telling me

for example, all of those sorts of things have been lost and I think that creates a big risk in terms of safeguarding and actually doing a really good, thorough quality assessment in terms of housing need. So, yeah, I think for the more complex ones face to face is better."
(Frontline)

In addition to issues with resourcing, some staff noted differences in quality of assessment vary depending on housing officer, with some less likely to act supportively towards service users, partly because they were more accustomed to the homelessness system prior to the HRA – meaning they were less 'bought in' to the new system's emphasis on providing personalised support to a wider range of people.

"There are some, what he would call old school housing advisors who are not necessarily used to, or haven't previously had to manage a higher caseload. Where they're having to do more things. And some of those things are seen as admin rather than supportive, even though they are actually supportive, it's that getting the change."
(Team Leader)

In some cases, the impact of a poor assessment was not always felt until a later date. As noted in the next chapter, some people were recommended housing options that they felt were unsuitable for their support needs – suggesting that there was either a poor assessment or a poor interpretation of this when identifying accommodation for them.

"I couldn't actually bid on anything so, yeah, I did get in touch with them about it and then they just said, oh you're not eligible for anything on there. And I said to them, why did you put me on there in the first place? I said, why did you give me all that false hope

knowing that I wasn't going to be able to use it?"

Whilst local authorities have a responsibility to deliver these assessments, they are also an opportunity to work with other services to support with delivering these, who might have more specialised areas of expertise, for example in helping people with complex or severe health and support needs. Assessments in this research were largely conducted in-house by the local authority: only 5 per cent of people said they were referred on to another service at the initial contact stage.

Interviews with a few of these participants suggest their housing need was established entirely by another organisation they were working with, and that contact with Housing Options. They in fact tended to find the experience of seeking support was smoother as a result, particularly because they appreciated the level of understanding their case worker showed towards their support needs. This demonstrates the benefit of closer working between local authorities and other organisations.

"[The social worker] was amazing, she really was amazing. She came to see me, we done like an assessment thing with my worker from [mental health charity] and yeah, well I think she done the bulk of the work, to be honest, to get it, to get the ball rolling… unless I had the social worker put the input in what she did, then no, I would be, like I said, if I would have had to try and get onto a Band 1 on my own, I wouldn't have never, it wouldn't have happened."

Clearly, some participants needed the kind of help that is delivered by people in more support-oriented roles compared to what is provided by a housing officer. The HRA intended to push housing officers into more of a supportive role but the assessment

process is more focused on fact-finding than on providing holistic support.

2.5 Personalised Housing Plans

Personalised Housing Plans (PHP) are a tool used under the HRA that are intended to deliver more holistic support for people facing homelessness. They are intended to be developed collaboratively with a service user and list out actions for both the local authority and the applicant to follow.

Some staff felt that when given adequate time and when there are sufficient accommodation options, PHPs could be valuable for helping someone feel involved in decisions about what accommodation is suitable for them. However, others raised significant concerns about how meaningful it could be to provide a PHP when there was a huge shortage of housing, meaning that in practice PHPs were only being used to signpost people to whatever housing options were available to the service user, and were more of a tick box exercise.

"The whole idea of, tell us that your problem is, tell us what your aspirations are, and here's what we think we can do, and here's your, the role that you can play. That as a basic conversation is really powerful and is absolutely the way forward."
(Manager)

"The PHP makes it really, this is not going to happen soon. And I think in that sense it's good, so they have that clear… There's 3,000 families waiting for… council flats. It's very clear in the PHP and this is not what's going to happen."
(Frontline)

This and the perceived administrative burden of completing a PHP meant some staff felt they had limited value.

"I think the PHPs they, I mean I can, there is a need and there always was a need even with, pre HRA to carry out an assessment of the applicant or their needs because that's how you decide any duty, suitable accommodation etc, but the fact of putting it in a PHP and given the right to request the review, it's just another piece of paperwork that's an absolute waste of time… I think the reality is HRA has just created more paperwork rather than changed any, the overall problem with homelessness."
(Frontline)

"A lot of them don't even look at it, and we're spending hours, it's quite normal to spend a full half day putting this PHP together and then that's just wasted."
(Frontline)

It was also seen as harder to deliver PHPs meaningfully in the pandemic, both when interaction with service users was often remote, and when caseloads were particularly high, and staff were time-poor.

"To be honest, yeah, I will 100% echo the personal housing plans, we're very, very hit and miss. I'll be honest, probably a little bit hit and miss at the present time really. I think they're getting, I think most of the time they're getting done at initial assessment, or just after initial assessment. Whether they're actually being updated on a regular basis like they're meant to be? It solely is a time element. It's a lack of bums on seats when it comes round to the number of housing advisors we've got at the present time. It's fair to say that sickness levels have been fairly high, there have been a few officers with stress related issues regarding work, during the period of time."
(Team Leader)

Figure 2.9: Experiences of Personalised Housing Plans
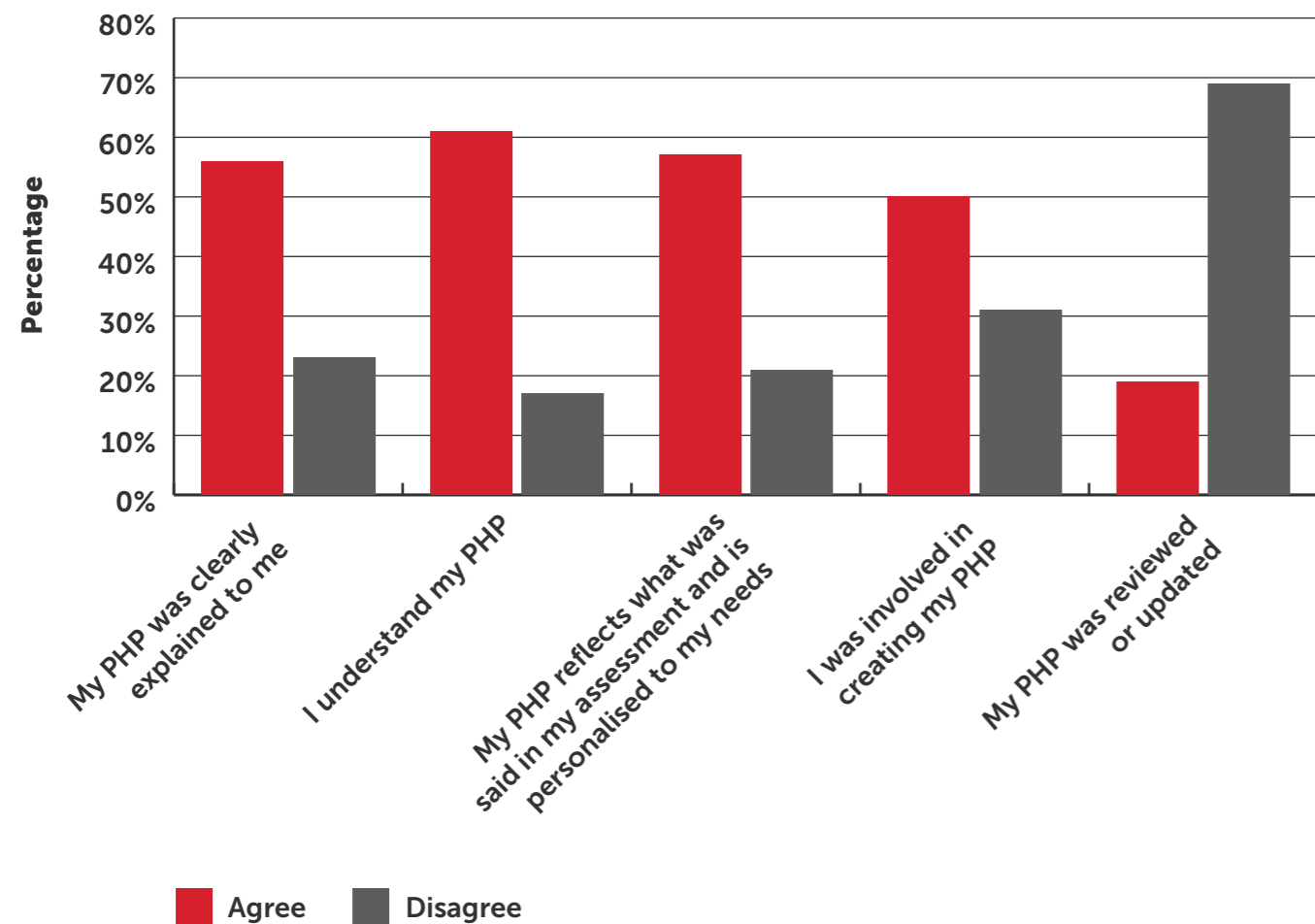
N = 581

In our survey we found many people were unaware that a PHP had been created for them, with only 50 per cent of participants in the last wave of our study being able to identify they had a PHP. Whilst this increased from 37 per cent since wave 1, awareness remains far too low, indicating a lack of clarity in communication from local authorities as to the process they are engaging their customers in, or PHPs not being completed.

Among those who were aware of their PHP, the level of understanding and explanation of their PHPs remained low, with only 56 per cent of those who were aware of their PHP reporting that it had been clearly explained to

them and only 61 per cent reporting that they understood it (see figure 2.9). Without understanding and explanation, individuals may find it difficult to follow the steps in their plan or to know when the local authority is failing to fulfil their parts of the plan.

One of the key intentions behind PHPs is that they should be delivered as a live, interactive document, flexibly adjusting to the needs of an individual. However, our findings suggest that, even among those who were aware of their PHP, PHPs are often not being delivered in this way. Over all, only 57 per cent of individuals who were aware of having a PHP reported that their PHP was personalised to their needs,

with 50 per cent saying they had been involved in creating the PHP and a mere 19 per cent reporting that their PHP had been reviewed or updated during the process.

Both the lack of personalisation and lack of revisions throughout the process are sources of deep concern, indicating a lack of local authority engagement in the needs of individuals. As plans fail to be updated or reviewed throughout the process, they may quickly become outdated or fail to respond to current need, particularly in cases where individuals are in volatile housing situations, or whose situation changes over the course of their time engaging.

Despite relatively low understanding of personalised housing plans, 76 per cent of people who were aware of having a PHP in the most recent wave of our study reported having agreed to it. Whilst this is a relatively high figure, this is 12 percentage points lower than in the first wave of our research when 88 per cent of those who were aware of their PHP agreed to the plan.

This may well be driven by broader concerns identified with PHPs, with only 47 per cent of those with a PHP saying that they were able to access the services that were outlined in it. Moreover, only 37 per cent of individuals reported that the local authority followed the steps in the PHP (broadly consistent across waves). It is concerning that local authorities are putting together plans that they are unable to follow. By contrast, 65 per cent of individuals reported they were able to follow the steps in the PHP in wave 3 (up from 54% in wave 1).

However, as discussed in the next chapter, there was a correlation between use of PHPs and positive housing outcomes – suggesting that on balance they can have a positive impact. Some staff felt that whilst PHPs were a useful tool for some clients, its formality and length undermined the

idea of delivering more holistic support to others with greater levels of support need.

"I think it's important that clients leave with information about next steps and what's going to happen in their housing options but I'm not sure the Personalised Housing Plan is the best way to deal with all clients. It doesn't deal with the nuances around mental ill health, substance misuse, those at risk of other issues around, a young person fleeing domestic violence is not going to be trying to find private rented accommodation. It's one of those other things that take priority."
(Team Leader)

"A lot of customers are in a chaotic, emergency situation here and then we send them a ten page personal housing plan saying do this, do that, do other. It's a very old fashioned dated way of working in my opinion, I think who's going to actually take the time to look at that document we sent them in the post... it's pointless isn't it if 30% of them are going to throw it, set fire to it or throw it in bin."
(Team Leader)

Overall the findings suggests that implementation of PHPs has been very mixed – but also that more broadly, PHPs alone cannot deliver the level of personalised support they are intended to provide. Staff felt that to improve PHPs, they needed to involve other agencies' support, and involve less administration to focus more on the idea of delivering support.

"I think we need to be honest that personal housing plans, in theory, are really good... But I think it probably is overly administrative in terms of tasks, I get them, I get why they're there but I just think in practice, in terms of, you want to have a meaningful

conversation with somebody but we ask so many questions, we gather so much information, I just think it maybe gets, I think the idea gets lost a little bit in translation and application."
(Manager)

"We've talked before about moving the duty to refer to being a duty to cooperate as well, a GP refers something to us, we then write to the GP saying tell us a bit about this person's health and three months later we've still got nothing back again. So there's sorts of, being able to pull other people into that task because in reality if it's something that you and that applicant can solve the advice you're giving them is incredibly basic, if it's something that's more complex there's lots of other agencies that are going to be involved in solving that problem yet they're not part of that personal housing plan and if you're going to make them part of that personal housing plan that's going to take a lot more work."
(Manager)

2.6 Duty to Refer

The Duty to Refer was introduced under the HRA to make it easier to refer someone facing homelessness to a local authority for relevant support, with a goal of involving more public bodies in homelessness support. However, only some public bodies have a Duty to Refer, and they do not necessarily have other responsibilities in homelessness prevention. In the interim report, we noted that whilst a much wider range of services were engaged with households at risk of homelessness it wasn't clear if they were acting on their new responsibilities in the spirit they were intended.

Our findings suggest that the duty is having a positive impact, with 59 per cent of people in the final wave survey being advised to approach Housing Options from another service, up from 39 per cent when we carried out the first wave.[28] Both staff and people using Housing Options described the positive impact that this involvement of other services had, on both ensuring people were guided to relevant support, and on speeding up the receipt of support.

"When I was trying to get the appointments, I was being told there weren't appointments for three months down the line and what not. And literally, as I went to the [other organisation] and spoke to them, I managed to get an appointment the same week, like two or three days later."

"I think it's a really useful, it's a really powerful bit of legislation... I think it's really good, it's really powerful... I think in terms of getting that commitment to early intervention and homelessness prevention, effective early intervention from other partners, all roads lead back to duty to refer."
(Manager)

However, it was highlighted by staff that the duty can be difficult to administer and that the level of information provided by the referring services can be poor.

"Every time I try and contact my housing officer or somebody like that, she always seems to never be at the office.... a lot of the people I've spoken to have all been referred to by support workers and doctors and loads of other people."

"I still struggle with duty to refer. I can see why it's there and it has merit but the practicalities

28   This reflects government data that also shows an increasing number of referrals under the Duty to Refer between 2018-2021 – see DLUHC live statutory tables on homelessness: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness

Figure 2.10: Experience of contact with other services, Wave 3
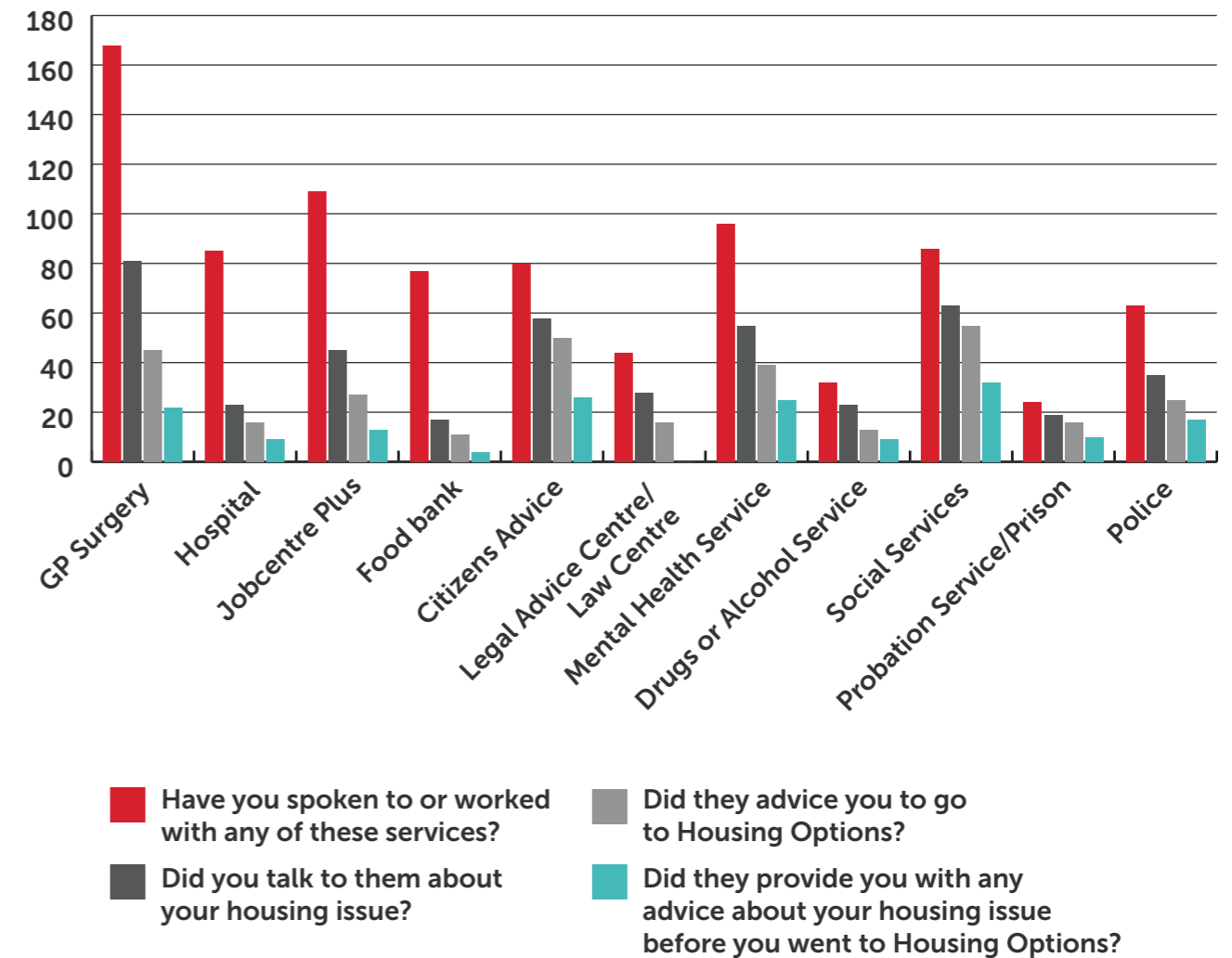
N= 24-443

of administering it and how it is administered nationally is, that needs finessing."
(Housing Options Manager)

Further, opportunities to refer people to Housing Options from another service are being missed, as shown in figure 2.10 which summarises what contact people had with other services in the final wave of research, and whether advice to approach Housing Options was discussed as part of their contact with other services. For example, while 24 per cent of people were in touch with Jobcentre Plus, only 6 per cent remembered receiving

advice to approach Housing Options. In addition, there is a wider set of organisations not subject to the Duty who people were in contact with. For example, 38 per cent were in touch with a GP, but only 10 per cent were advised by the GP to approach the council. This is despite 18 per cent of people speaking to their GP about their homelessness situation. This suggests that if there were a legal obligation upon GPs to refer patients facing homelessness to Housing Options, people in our sample could have their situation assessed at an earlier stage.

Some staff felt that more could be done to share responsibility for homelessness prevention with other agencies, and wanted there to be a stronger emphasis on joint working, such as via a Duty to Cooperate, which would expand the involvement of other services in the homelessness system.

> **"There's some talk before around Duty to Refer, making it more around a Duty to Cooperate and do more around preventing homelessness, I think there's still some merit in that."**
> (Manager)

> **"We are using duty to refer really well actually in [our area] but sometimes because of the volume of work we can't get to them quick enough… I think that basically sometimes, particularly somewhere like the hospital or, they fill a form in, send it to us and then they wash their hands of it and they don't see it as a joint effort around, 'what are we going to do?' It's like a team around the person almost, about the person that we're referring to you… they try and ring you up and say, 'oh well, we've got somebody that we want to discharge in an hour, can you sort them out?' So there's always that, they don't seem to pick things up early enough. We've tried to train hospital staff with, but we don't think it's gone far enough. We're doing some work around training receptionists and doctors' receptionists at the moment… so yeah, there's that. But I don't think there is enough emphasis on a joint effort, that actually it's everybody's problem not just the council's problem… What I think needs to change externally, there needs to be a Duty to Cooperate rather than just a Duty to Refer. It's no good just**

> **putting somebody's name on a bit of paper and sending it and washing your hands of it."**
> (Manager)

This echoes evidence from others working in the public and voluntary sectors that a Duty to Co-operate would create a more effective obligation upon other bodies to be involved in preventing homelessness, as it would apply to other stages beyond referral.[29] It may also have the benefit of ensuring support is delivered more quickly; some participants noted that there were delays in receiving support due to slow contact between agencies.

2.7 Staff and decision-making culture

From interviews with staff it was clear that that 'eligibility criteria' (see section 2.1) could play a role in decision-making around who to support and what level of support to provide. Whilst the HRA was intended to tackle gatekeeping culture, interviews with staff suggested many continued to have a mindset focused mainly on considering whether someone deserved support, rather than trying to identify what support they needed, and then how to deliver this.

The introduction of the HRA intended to create a more support-based culture that expanded who was eligible for help. The prevention and relief duties required staff to take reasonable steps to house clients before making an intentionality or priority decision on whether they were entitled to the full support available from Housing Options. However, staff highlighted that despite the intention to move the role of housing officer to be more supportive, they still saw the role as being predominantly about 'making decisions.'

> **"People are confused by our role sometimes. We're not support workers. We're making decisions. The nature of my role, I work very closely with the likes of Crisis and the outreach team and I come from a support background so you employ that, but I do try and make clear my role is still about making a statutory decision whilst at the same time working with people to understand their needs and try and accommodate for that, but ultimately that's what we're doing."**
> (Frontline)

The additional duties of the HRA intended to bring in more help for cases that previously would be discharged with little to no support. Staff felt that this had made an impact for people who would previously be excluded for support on the grounds that they were intentionally homeless. They said that intentionality decisions were now only being made later on after some support was provided during the intentionality-blind prevention and relief stages. Staff were clear that for the most part this key part of the HRA had changed the amount of support given to those who historically would not have received any help at all.

> **"I would say the biggest challenge probably from staff culture is the second chance, giving people a second chance if they've made a previous, a bad choice in the last couple of years, I think the HRA has brought that on around the intentionality aspect"**
> (Team Leader)

> **"I think it's better for people who are intentionally homeless, because they'll have the 56 days to work with him, before making that intentionally homeless decision. And then accommodate them for two weeks, if they're in TA or whatever, they've still got the same rights that any, that they'll have to be dealt with**

> **housing, find a private rent, help him pay off rent arrears, all that kind of stuff."**
> (Team Leader)

> **"The only, one of the good parts about it is we really are tending not to do, not to make intent decisions now on cases. We're very, very reluctant to make intentionality cases, and we've got, as [colleague] said previously, we've got a lot of joint working with Social Services, with children's services. And we've got a dedicated officer… who works for families and focus, that's the link between housing and Social Services at the present time for us. And can sit down with clients, can meet, discuss, can chat, can help with repayment plans and other things on whatever and stuff.**
> (Team Leader)

Under the HRA, priority need decisions are only meant to be made at the end of the 56 days of priority and intentionality blind support offered at the relief stage. Staff felt that this change had been less successful in terms of changing practices. Although this did vary depending on the LA involved and between different staff, some indicated that there were people who they did not support during the relief stage because they were a lower priority, even though there was a legal duty to help them.

> **"Unfortunately, with a lot of the non priority need cases, I think it just is, just verbally feeding some information, not doing a lot for 56 days, because we haven't had the time at the end of the day. And then a non priority need decision given at the end, and it's thank you very much, go away, it's just a process that we follow.**
> (Team Leader)

> **"I don't think there's a huge amount of work that's put in towards clients, that we know**

29 See page 58-59, Watts, B., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Young, G., Fitzpatrick, S. and McMordie, L. (2022) *The Homelessness Monitor: England 2022*. London: Crisis. https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/homelessness-monitor/england/the-homelessness-monitor-england-2022/

we're going probably going to have a main duty towards, or a duty towards moving forwards. And our focus very much is on those clients, where we go at the present time. […] But yeah, at the moment, the aim is to try and see what we can do to try and assist, rather than particularly go down a route where I don't think it benefits anybody to be fair."
(Team Leader)

"We issue many non-priorities because we have many single homeless. It takes a long time to address every piece of legislation in a letter which doesn't really help the client at all. It's a paper exercise. It's in the legislation. We need to do it. It takes me four hours average to do a non-priority letter. That doesn't help the client really, but you just have to do it. So those four hours, I'm not going to be speaking to anybody. I need to concentrate doing that letter, that decision. So it's not really in that sense helpful because it takes your time to really actually do something for the client."
(Frontline)

Making decisions requires administration as it is a statutory part of the HRA. We discussed in the previous report about staff feeling a large administrative burden had been brought in by the HRA. Below we see how decision-making processes and statutory decision letters take up much of this burden, and take officers' time away from delivering the help someone might need during the 56 day window, before the point at which they might receive a non-priority decision, which would then prevent them from receiving more support.

"What HRA has done it, from what I've been led to believe is just yeah, created so much more paperwork and the day, the 56 days as opposed to where it used to be 30 or 32 days is meant to

give more time, but it, things go way past 56 days regularly because we're struggling to get confirmation and there's so much expectation around what we need to do before we can make a decision."
(Frontline)

"We have a big problem with housing supply. So basically, we just spend more time doing non priority decisions now which is a shame because it takes a long time and I guess it's time taken away from the Options Officers to actually try to help the person. I think that's why I feel, I don't know about my colleagues, but it's just too much legislation that you have to go through which takes 70% of our time and is, it becomes redundant in the sense that it's probably not what the client needs. That's my opinion, yeah."
(Frontline)

"The decision letters do take ages to write and I think you could be using that time more constructively by helping somebody to house somebody rather than writing a long priority letter."
(Frontline)

"I'm taking the notes whilst I'm interviewing, then, this is my personal one which I'm sending that email, then I need to do the PHP and the letter, and then I need to make a decision after going through all this collecting, all this information and do the decision letter. So sometimes it feels like it's more of the paperwork than actually interacting with clients and trying to help them out. I said this is sometimes like a sausage factory really"
(Frontline)

"I think maybe a few things of HRA are good that now we give this

service to everybody, but it's not the service I would like to give. I don't have time to give to them because of the admin I have to do. So it's good but we will need, instead of ten Options Officers we probably would need 20."
(Frontline)

"It's just a decision because of the legislation. I just think it's a waste of time sometimes. There needs to be more support."
(Frontline)

Another result of staff needing to make priority decisions is that they will spend time asking for evidence during the period that a case should be receiving eligibility blind support. This moves the focus from finding solutions for that case onto providing information and evidence. It can also lead to interactions being mainly about chasing evidence – even though evidence can in fact be gathered whilst assessments and other forms of support are provided. This really highlights the point above that staff feel like decision makers and not support workers due to the legislative need for decisions and the evidence to back them up.

"My main issue is pretty much the long delays in getting the documents that we need is causing for me anyway the delays in making decisions on cases."
(Frontline)

"Yeah, and actually in terms of practice what I've been finding, where we spoke about decision making and whatever, in the absence of reliable information, sometimes you can find yourself requesting more and more information to try and get something from the client, which puts them under pressure. You can go down this rabbit hole where you just really struggle, clutching at straws basically to

try and get a picture of the client and trying to formulate a plan and trying to work through the process. So, it just has a, it's just not good."
(Frontline)

Evidence that was highlighted as being particularly difficult to collect were medical documents from GPs, proof of income and ID. It was also suggested that it can be hard to confirm someone's homelessness.

"But I think one big for me is confirming the homelessness, quite often people are staying with friends and here and there and they don't have anyone, actually they don't want the people who are staying with them, they don't want to confirm the homelessness and it's very difficult then to accept them as homeless people, because we don't have that confirmation."
(Frontline)

"With ID as well, some of the people say they don't have the money, I mean they might've been released from prison and all they have is a license or anything like that and they say they don't have the money to apply for a copy of birth certificate, so it's a lot of chasing up but I think it was easier for people before to maybe take a photocopy and bring it to the council, now it's the whole arrangements for them to have somebody there who takes it from them or where they're going to do it."
(Frontline)

"I found recently is getting medical evidence, and that could be again with GPs being overworked. I had a couple of replies from GPs that it takes them up to 28 days to send the report about the clients."
(Frontline)

Housing officers at one LA felt that the intentions of the HRA were being superseded by requests from managers to close cases and gather evidence. This was also highlighted in other services but to a lesser extent. The focus on justifying someone's support needs rather than providing for those needs goes against the intentions of the Act that chiefly aimed to remove historic gatekeeping from the system. This puts the staff at odds with their clients and leads them to feel pressure from both sides, making a difficult job harder.

"According to management expectations, if they don't provide those documents within seven days their case will be closed and that will be the end of it for them. And that's being pushed more and more, so that defeats the whole object of actually opening the service to people that generally would have just had, hello, this is what, here's a bunch of papers, bunch of information that you can go ahead and pursue yourself, this was pre HRA, it really does defeat the issue. We're now, HRA is actually trying to give the applicant more support."
(Frontline)

"From my understanding, it was brought in to ensure that non priority clients or any client that approached had a streamlined service and they could actually measure the process for the applicant and there was a defined pathway through their application. So now, due to management, they just introduce tasks and deadlines and all kinds of different things, on a weekly basis that just really put you under a lot of pressure to meet these stats in all kinds of ways and then if you don't, then you get the resulting pressure. Let's put it in, to use a pleasant word, as a result of not being able to meet those organisational targets that really

don't line up with the person on the street who's homeless. The two things are completely disparate, there's no, they don't know what's, the customer who applies to us doesn't know the remit we're under and so on their end, so you're having pressures from both sides really."
(Frontline)

The focus on non-priority decision making, evidence gathering and the statutory administration of these processes means that practices that were common under the previous system cannot be superseded by the more positive spirit of the HRA. As described in the next chapter, when the cost of TA increases and affordable options decrease, more pressure is put on housing officers to close cases and reduce the financial burden on the LA. This is mostly caused by a lack of suitable options at either the prevention, relief or main duty stages. A system that has enough accommodation options does not need to put emphasis on making decisions that limit access to accommodation.

A Housing Options service with better access to affordable accommodation and who implemented the HRA with a full-service design responded to the ongoing need to make decisions and organised staff to do this in a fast way. This meant the creation of more manager and team leader positions who would help staff to make decisions and stop time from being taken up by evidence gathering. Managers at this service felt that it had helped to ensure that cases were being closed once a suitable outcome had been achieved.

"We made a decision early on to invest in lots of managers, lots of team leaders, our thinking being that, we went through a few journeys in terms of working out what's best. And obviously, you need housing advisors to do the

assessment, to do the personal housing plans, and do the prevention work but we felt really we needed a strong, especially in terms of the volumes that we deal with, we needed decision makers, people who would say, yeah, let's go with that, etc, etc."
(Manager)

"I think it's just further, one of the things we're very aware of is that running a homelessness service is a lot about psychology and it's a lot about understanding about what people want when they come in through the doors and, for us, we close the case when there's no more value we can add and we don't really get a lot of people coming back to us. A litmus test for me is if we're closing all these cases unreasonable prospect do they come back again and it's very small numbers and when we do get those cases back again we do actually take quite a bit of time out and think what went wrong first time?"
(Manager)

There are many factors that influence an organisation culture and approach but a key one is having suitable options available. Without those the HRA moves quickly from an effective approach to supporting those in housing need to a system which is looking for reasons that support can be denied. With appropriate options available the gatekeeping that the HRA was focused on removing has the potential to return as long as the legislation has in built eligibility markers such as priority need built into it.

2.8 Expectations of Housing Options

In our interim report on the HRA, we noted that many people described themselves as having 'no expectations' about what support they would receive from the council. This was also noted in the government's two year review of the HRA.[30] Awareness of what support might be available increased over the period of our study, but remained very low. In wave 3 only 33 per cent said they knew what support or help would be on offer before they approached for help, compared to 20 per cent when in wave 1. This in part might be due to low use of Housing Options websites – seen by only 41 per cent in wave 3. Engagement with the website seemed to have a fairly positive impact on people – with 68 per cent of those who had looked at it before approaching Housing Options saying the information encouraged them to approach for help, and 60 per cent saying they found the information helpful.

"I was 35 at the time that I was made homeless, up until that point I always put a roof over my own head, always been in full time employment, never really used any council services so I didn't go into it with any expectations. If anything, quite the opposite, I went into it, going OK, I'm very unaware of what is on offer."

What has become clearer now that we have completed the research is that there is a cohort of people in fact had *low* expectations about what support they might be given. In some cases, previous experiences with the local authority (whether this was with Housing Options or another part of the council) had put off some respondents who had repeat experiences of homelessness from approaching them for help again – suggesting that the

30   MHCLG, *Evaluation of the Implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act: Final Report.* DLUHC: Online. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/919748/Evaluation_of_the_Implementation_of_the_Homelessness_Reduction_Act_Final_Report.pdf

system could even act as a deterrent for people to attempt to access support.

"I've been experiencing homeless for a while, like for a year, for a few years, because every time I've gone down there, they've just basically, the last time I went down there they laughed at me. You know what I mean? And I just walked out mate, and I never asked no one for nothing ever again."

"I'd rather use… one of the agencies to help me get accommodation rather than deal with the council because they just, they seem to have a problem with people that may be ex drug users or still using drugs, it's that. I can't think of the words they've just got that prejudice against, not everybody uses drugs or had used drugs is the same, they're not all going to rob the salt, the sugar out your cup and come back for the teabags. And it's just, that's discrimination, as soon as I tell them and say, oh, you know when you get asked, what do you do for a living? Oh, I sell the Big Issue, I swear people step back from me … it affects your mental attitude to whether to go get support or not from them, if you feel like you're getting judged just because you sell the Big Issue, I don't really like to talk to people like that, because you've always got that feeling they've got that automatic biased against you before you even started and that's, well, it's not nice. And I've had that a couple of times at various times and [XXX] Council's got a bad enough reputation so I'd rather just not deal with them, in that aspects."

"I weren't going to the council to start with just because I didn't have any faith in them to be honest. And people kept telling

me, my friends and my family, to go to the council and that they'd help me and so I approached the council. I were really apprehensive and suffering with panic attacks when I went there."

But low expectations were shared by people who had not approached the local authority for help before. This view could be linked to factors such as awareness of lack of housing, concerns about being able to get in contact, or concerns about being eligible for support. It also seemed related to a broader set of perceptions people had about statutory services in general (e.g. Jobcentre Plus).

"There's so much negative things about [XXX] Council, or any time when I'm talking to anybody about this housing, council housing, when I just mention [them] everybody will be like, oh, the worst, oh the worst, oh the worst, I believe they should do something with [XXX] Council because it is, it's really, really bad, it's really bad."

"I haven't heard anything really bad about the Council here so much but I've not heard of them getting anybody anywhere to live though. They seem to get put in these shared houses and most people end up back in prison so they never seem to get anywhere."

"I do know of other people that have been homeless dealing with councils, especially my friend for example she only had one contact from her housing officer and that was to give, I think the only contact was giving her a name of a charity and the second contact was, well, we've done our 56 days duty of care, tough luck."

Our research into LA homelessness services prior to the HRA identified many issues with staff culture that led to people receiving poor

treatment about being turned away.[31] As described in this chapter, there was some evidence of this culture remaining. A staff member felt that newer colleagues brought in after the HRA was introduced were more supportive whilst other colleagues focused more on testing whether people were facing homelessness than.

"I think it's fair to say that I've got a couple of, what I call old school housing advisors or homeless officers, of prior to the HRA being introduced. And it was, I found, I did find it a little bit hard, and I still have to remind them a little bit that it's just not good enough to be saying, well the chances are, you'll be intentionally homeless at main duty, blah, blah, blah. Or you're not priority need or this or that. And it's actually, come on, everything's changed, you know the process, we're here to try and see what we can do to assist them front end, rather than getting towards that stage at the present time. Probably the bulk of our housing advisors are new since the HRA. So actually, it's been, better words, drilled into them right from the very start, with the training etc, etc. And they obviously embrace the culture towards it."
(Team Leader)

But many staff felt in principle that the ethos behind the HRA was a positive thing.

"I've found that the focus on actually working more on prevention and early intervention, the understanding of what a relief duty is, I'm comfortable with its ethos and what was developed from Wales coming across and that side of things, that embryonic legislation that was across the border."
(Manager)

"I'm glad to see that we're helping people that we don't have any statutory duty to place into [accommodation], like people non-priority need, I really welcome that."
(Manager)

There were exceptions to this, with some stuff feeling that the increased level of demand created by the HRA was problematic, and others that the legislation did not open support up to enough people who should receive it.

"We're under pressure from senior management to say, well no, we should try to prevent homelessness as much as we can. Then when you look at the legislation and when the threshold for homelessness is so low, it can cause, I just think whatever instruction we get from senior management above, doesn't necessarily correlate with what we are trying to do as officers."
(Frontline)

"Of course for the no recourse clients, they're completely outside of the legislation and we're still looking at where we go going forwards once the, once things change. Because obviously the government don't want local authorities to be accommodating people with No Recourse to Public Funds. We try to get them status etc, we signpost into advice, but it's not very easy."
(Team Leader)

There were also differences in opinion depending on whether or a Housing Options service had been redesigned following the introduction of the HRA. As noted in our previous report, some services successfully identified the key areas where extra staffing was required – such as having middle manager decision-makers, and

31   Dobie, S., Sanders, B. & Teixeira, L. (2014) *Turned Away: The treatment of single homeless people by local authority homelessness services in England.* London: Crisis. https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/housing-models-and-access/turned-away-2014/

specialised staff to deal with cases with particular needs, such as leaving prison, rough sleeping and domestic abuse. By contrast, services that passed cases between assessment and case work teams had the unintended consequence of some cases falling through the cracks based on the capacity of the two officers involved.

"We've got staff working with prison leavers and probation so we've got specialist housing advisors working so we've got early heads up with all of those and looking for things within our commissioned pathways for those, for a lot of those clients."
(Manager)

"There's been a rehousing panel been set up to look at the more complicated cases because obviously you're not doing any favours if you just, just put, let's say an entrenched rough sleeper into a council tenancy who's never going to pay the rent and they're going to fail in the tenancy. So for the more complex cases, not just rough sleeper cases, across the service, we've now got a weekly panel meeting, which is currently chaired by the rehousing services manager service manager and that looks at all of the complex homeless people that we've got."
(Team Leader)

Regardless of their views of the HRA and their service's design, staff across the board felt there were broader constraints that prevented them from offering as much support as they would like to. In line with the government's review of the HRA, many felt there was a lack of funding for their service.

"If the government put out a legislation of that nature, they needed to back it and fund it and that just didn't go down, just didn't happen and that's for me where

it stands on that. And that's why I'm not a big fan of it. I think in principle it may, all right, OK it's, it was a great idea, but you've got to back it, you've got to fund it."**
(Team Leader)

This was combined with a feeling that the nature of funding was often too time-limited for them to be able to plan for the long-term, and that there was a lack of direction-setting from central government.

"One of our biggest resources is ourselves and we can't use our own skills and knowledge if the caseloads that officers have are so large, that essentially they're firefighting and not being able to tap in to their own resources and use the ones that are available. Fundamentally I think that's one of the biggest issues that we faced. I understand that's a funding issue because we can't have the staff if we don't have the money to pay them but nonetheless it's still a problem that we face on the frontline. We've got limited resources we do have, we can't use, like I said, because the biggest one is ourselves and we can't do everything we need to do purely because we're trying to spread ourselves too thinly. There's only so many people that one caseworker can support effectively and as a result of not being able to spread ourselves thinly, to be effective people aren't, we're not getting the results that management want such as successful preventions and reliefs."
(Frontline)

"I think the tricky thing here for us in homelessness services is that some of the general grant allocation that was given to local authorities was meant for homelessness but it wasn't, it was for local authorities to decide how much was spent on

homelessness services. So I think it's just another, whilst flexibility is good it's another, it's an example of just giving the problem to local government to decide which of these crucial services need to be funding with a grant allocation that isn't, generally isn't enough. We are really hopeful, all the talk has been about a three year settlement next time and that really has to happen, I think if doesn't I think, not quite sure whether we can, I guess it's partly a case of people losing face. Another round of year funding will just be absolutely ridiculous, we're struggling in [area] to recruit to fixed termed posts at the moment because the jobs market is relatively buoyant.... Yeah, so it could all go wrong next year and it is a bit annoying because the messages you get from government are this level of funding can't continue and you think, why, we haven't sorted the problem out yet, what are you on about?"**
(Manager)

Consequently, though was some variation in this view depending on service, staff often felt they were under-resourced, with some even feeling their teams were stretched beyond capacity, and that caseloads were unmanageably high.

"I think it's mainly we need more staff and better systems, that's what it is… more people to deal with the work, because there's a lot of work, there's not enough staff. So people are having to do extra work without an increase in pay."
(Frontline)

"We've been shrinking the workforce for a good few years now, so you've got less staff doing more work. So that's definitely going to be a challenge for us."
(Manager)

"I think it's, the team have been amazing but I think we've, they've been really stressed and challenged around clients just turning up, homeless today, been evicted, we need to respond, we need to do an assessment, offer accommodation, and also it feels very much last minute and a lot of homeless on the day, we've seen a huge challenge around that, and we haven't had an increase in our staffing complement but we've seen an increase in the numbers presenting."
(Team Leader)

But the greatest restriction identified by staff was the lack of available Housing Options (described in more detail in the next chapter).

"A lot of customers, when we approve cases, they go onto the housing register… so they're bidding, they're bidding, they're bidding, but they've really not got a chance of being made an offer in the time because of the numbers on our housing register."
(Team Leader)

"We still have that same problem. It all comes back to housing which is still there, so until we get more housing… then it's always going to be the same… People are spending longer in B&Bs… And we know at the end of it, it's not going to be a positive outcome because there's nothing there for them."
(Frontline)

It was therefore clear that staff themselves had low expectations about what support they could deliver. This mindset and external constraints therefore had a negative impact on staff's ability to deliver support.

2.9 The impact of the pandemic on contact

As our final wave of fieldwork took place during the pandemic, the nature of contact with Housing Options changed drastically. As a result of the pandemic the majority (58%) of people in our final wave of research had initial contact over the phone, and 70 per cent of ongoing contact was phone based. Whilst staff described it as being a struggle having to transform their service very quickly into a new format, and working with service users whilst juggling childcare commitments, there were no indications during our research that their services would go back to 'normal', suggesting that hybrid working was likely to continue in the future.

"The working from home depended on the individual situation. So, for example, I have children so that made it a lot more difficult to contact clients at certain times of the day when they'd be, historically it would be easier to contact the client during the day but at the very beginning at the start of the pandemic flexible working was put into place so you weren't working at the end of the day to make up your hours."
(Team Leader)

"So from a selfish point of view I've actually found working from home really, really handy. It's a lot more environmentally friendly, it's easier in terms of work life balance… it saved me a lot of money in petrol. So, yeah, I definitely, I'm now back in the office part time and working from home part time. I really, really am enjoying the balance."
(Frontline)

"One other thing we've also, we did straight away was the council had a directive to ensure everyone was working from home so we had to move our assessments very rapidly within a couple of weeks, move everyone onto online, remote applications. So we basically just moved our duty service from face to face to telephone appointments."
(Manager)

Overall, the pandemic made people felt that it was harder to reach Housing Options, and that it made contact feel more limited.

"Obviously it's all done through phones now and everybody trying to contact one person it gets a bit, you know, waiting lists on the phones and stuff like that."

"Before the pandemic you was able to even just, if you wanted to go into the council office, now, even now as we're coming slightly out of it, it's still taking like an hour just to get through to somebody."

"It was just getting hold of the council, sometimes they would take a while. I'd be on the phone for about half an hour or so trying to get hold of someone, so yeah but towards the end it gradually, I could get a hold of someone towards the end… there was a difference towards the end of the pandemic of, compared to the beginning. The beginning I thought it was so hard to speak to a support officer."

"Their offices haven't been, or you've not been encouraged to go into their offices in [XXX]. So there is no really anything else you can do except accept it. You just don't have any, there's no emails, no nothing, no why you was refused, why you've been bypassed or whatever. So contact is very limited. So it's all over the phone now and, yes, it's not as easy to get in contact with people. It's extremely frustrating to be quite honest."

Lack of contact in the pandemic context could also mean people were left without support in emergency situations.

"She told me it's snowing all day and if, she told me that we, there are no cabs because it's Covid-19, they're in lockdown, and then it is a domestic abuse situation, we'll need to send you a cab. If they had followed through everything that she told me over the phone, next time I spoke to somebody and she said, what cab? What this, what that, nothing from, we're not going to send anything to you. If they had actually followed through everything that the lady told me then I wouldn't have had any issues and I wouldn't be standing out in the snow for three, four hours."

Some people wondered when using Housing Options whether staff might have both understood their situation better and been more personally sympathetic if they had met in person, and one person wondered whether remote working meant that their situation was treated less urgently.

"I wasn't able to go directly to the council because it, I think it was closed or something like that. So I had to deal by phone with them. Yeah. And yeah, people wouldn't get the same kind of image speaking over the phone with them or by emails as they will get if you are face to face… I feel like if I went to the council on the day that I was homeless with my child and they would see that actually this person is actually helpless and they would see me, how I was so helpless, they would get that feeling. They would feel, they would see me. They would actually see how I feel and how I was looking so stressed and sad and anxious, and they would see I was so helpless and vulnerable. But through a text or by phone, they don't actually see."

"They were always working from home. You got brushed off every time you, I got on the phone really. I'll pass it to so and so, pass it, and that's all it ever was. So I just thought that, well, they'd dumped me in the gutter."

Related to this, staff felt that some people were in practice harder to communicate with, assess, or provide interpersonal support to via remote contact – and that this could be more challenging for them to do in their home working environment. In particular they felt it was harder to engage with those who were less capable with IT, whose personal situations were less stable, and with particularly 'vulnerable' individuals who could be spoken to more sensitively in person.

"So if you've got a language barrier and you have been sent a text, so or a member of staff doesn't have necessarily loads of time because of the high caseloads […] people will be sent a text message telling them how to get in touch with us and then if you've got a long wait on phones and you don't speak English and you don't really understand what's going on, you're quite likely to give up. So I think that's been an access problem"
(Frontline)

"There are elderly people, vulnerable people, chaotic people that for all the will in the world, like I said, you can't force them to play that ball. So we have to have some resources in place that are open to people that can't send us things, can't use digital things."
(Frontline)

"I think for me one of the things that was impacted from going over, by the phone was, like the priority need assessment and some of the more vulnerable customers because I think some

of that really helped just doing that face to face getting an understanding of the types of needs and vulnerabilities." (Team Leader)

Local authority staff also noted that getting documentation from clients – such as ID, income, addresses – was more difficult online, and expressed concerns about people with low digital access being less able to do this during the pandemic. In turn, people who needed to receive paper documentation from Housing Options but didn't have access to printers also found it a challenge to get the documents they needed.

"That was obviously a bit of a challenge for staff and for customers because we're doing, having to do a lot of remote work when it comes to document gathering or assessment and so forth." (Frontline)

"The downside to what we've been experiencing with working from home, from a client's perspective, is things like everyone said, obtaining documents. The lack of face to face interaction has really impacted things like lack of documents. Like [staff member] said, people have either got no phone or a brick phone. I think there's too much, I appreciate the positives that the digital age can bring but at the same time I think it needs to be appreciated that not, you can't force everybody to swing that way. There are elderly people, vulnerable people, chaotic people that for all the will in the world, like I said, you can't force them to play that ball. So we have to have some resources in place that are open to people that can't send us things, can't use digital things." (Frontline)

In turn, people who needed to receive paper documentation from Housing

Options but didn't have access to printers also found it a challenge to get the documents they needed.

However, some using Housing Options preferred to have contact from their own personal space. Nearly two thirds (62%) in the final wave of research felt they could call at a time that suited them. Other benefits included not having to pay for travel to the council office, and a sense that this type of contact was more efficient than going to the council office in person.

"You can't get past, it's very difficult and every single occasion I go you've got to deal with security guards and why do I need to deal with security guards? Security guards are sat there trying to keep you out. The job seeking side of things they don't often always help you and then if you try to get into housing you've got to queue up to get through reception. If you get through the reception and they finally pass you on to a housing officer to assess you it's a very difficult long process."

In addition, whilst in previous waves people sometimes described conducting conversations in open office spaces, by phone, people felt more able to have their conversations with a housing officer in private – though this was not the case for all, e.g. due to the presence of others when making the phone call. In the final wave of research, 72 per cent felt they could have ongoing communication in a private and confidential way, and 74 per cent felt they could have their assessment conducted in a private and confidential place. One participant described how she preferred this for her mental wellbeing.

"It's the face to face I struggle with, I suffer from anxiety and depression. So having conversations with random people I don't know and speaking to them about debt and rent

and hard situations. In the circumstances I find it easier to talk about it over the phone than face to face."

This was echoed by a staff member in relation to some clients feeling less intimidated when using remote contact – suggesting the importance of offering either remote or face to face contact depending on someone's preferences.

"So for example some working with entrenched rough sleepers and young people they find it easier to be not that face to face and actually some of the feedback's been quite good. For example, it can be quite intimidating people being like, oh, I'm speaking to someone from the local authority when actually if they're sat there with their support worker doing it over the phone or whatever it could be, I don't know, the feedback's been quite good." (Frontline)

Nevertheless, the negative impact of the pandemic overall on contact has worrying implications for services moving to largely remote contact. Whilst some aspects of remote contact were beneficial to staff and service users, it also made it more acceptable for there to be an absence of contact, with the additional challenge that people were less able to come to a housing office in person in the event that they were receiving no response to their attempts to get in touch.

"Before you can walk into [XXX] Council, you can walk, you can go in and you know, it's always open and speak to somebody, but all these emails go, you don't know, you can't even get her to read your email, nothing, nothing, you know, it's, it's just, it's very frustrating."

In addition, there was evidence from the staff interviews and focus groups

that the intensity of work during the pandemic may have led to some deterioration in how supportive staff were towards their clients. For example, one staff member sounded as though they didn't want to deal with their clients any longer.

"Everyone was complaining about their temporary accommodation, everyone feels like they're entitled to social housing, and everyone was moaning. I find it a lot harder because you couldn't move people on, people are complaining that they can't stay in this room because this person is, they're sharing with that person, they're sharing with that person and everything was a moan, and things that I shouldn't be dealing with I find that I'm dealing with different teams work in order to get situations resolved, and I shouldn't have to be doing that." (Frontline)

2.10 Overall views on experiences with Housing Options

The experience of poor communication – which for some was combined with an experience of limited or restricted access to support – led many participants to feel as though they had received poor treatment from Housing Options. It was common for participants to describe the service is lacking sympathy or empathy for their situation.

"They have disrespectful people working for them, and it's like, there's not empathy. So, they just work off, by the books. Well, this type of job, you need to have some empathy in order to understand where the people are coming from. Because the way you speak to someone and the way in which you say, OK, cool, we can't help you, it can force, it can make someone commit suicide maybe."

"If you treat somebody with respect is to make them feel valued, and make them feel like that service is helping or improving that person's wellbeing or situation and I didn't feel like that with the council at all, I felt like they was more, in a way, just trying to say go away, we can't really do nowt for you, go away, kind of situation."

"Yeah, communication is very important, you can, somebody cannot be sending you three, four, five emails with no answer, they can't tell me that they don't see those emails... I don't understand, what is the point, yeah?... And it is disrespectful, because I don't know what is happening, I'm just in the dark."

A common theme amongst these participants was a feeling that they were being treated as part of a process – more like a 'number' than a person. This suggests people lacked a sense of personalised contact and support, influenced in some cases by the perception that housing officers were looking for reasons *not* to help someone.

"It's just the experience overall is shocking... It's just they don't care, they just want to try and push you off their back, or they're oh, do private renting, then you're like what am I going to eat? I don't understand, it doesn't make sense. You feel like a bloody number. It's like you're not a human being."

"She was just trying to do her job, but they, she just like, it would be nice if she was more sympathetic. But then again I don't think that's part of her job, she was just doing what she was told to do... the lady, she said it's not her fault, it's the system but it's not, I can't blame, it's just part of nature as well, so I don't know. It's just the whole system I think. They're not that sympathetic towards me."

"Put it this way, finding people accommodation is an administrative job for the people in [XXX] Council. It's basically the ideal packing them, wrapping them and stacking them on shelves, people who stick them on a shelf, OK? I don't know if you understand what that actually means? It means its people are just numbers, or they're things to be put in a pigeonhole or stacked on rack, they're not human beings."

"I find them quite abrasive, quite, how should I put this, like pencil pushers, they was more bothered about what criteria I met for getting a house... rather than actually me as a person."

"It's just like, I was all, it doesn't seem like they care, it was just like I was a number or something and I was just finding it very difficult, I thought the woman was a little bit condescending so it was like, well, that really did put me off."

Others described feeling judged and not feeling understood by Housing Options. Regardless of what biases or prejudices housing officers may have had, this suggests at the very least that people's circumstances were poorly assessed.

"And it was just, I don't know, you were treated as if someone, as someone who was just trying to, I don't know, who was only interested in council accommodation... [they were] not really paying any attention to my individual circumstances and yeah."

"It was negative, very negative. I felt like I was being judged... I mean it was almost like I voluntarily became homeless, the way that they were treating me, it wasn't the case. You know, I became homeless because I wanted to take full care of my

daughter whose mother had abandoned her and I just felt like we just got brushed under the carpet. So they didn't really take that into consideration.

Those who had more positive experiences characterised these as being more personalised. They often involved a strong relationship with a specific housing officer who they found communicative.

"He was very, he, even though it took a while, he would either email or call to give an update, or if there were no update, he might, if there were no updates, he may send an email at the end of the day saying, I'm still working on this or waiting to hear back from such and such. So, it was just mainly being informed about what was going on. So, the one, definitely to know that I wasn't forgotten... it's just nice to know that it's not just that they are, you're just one of many cases that's just, maybe they were waiting for something or a particular response. Yeah, so he kept in contact, at the end of the process he was very informative

"She's been really my best support throughout all this because my landlord are not very sympathetic to me. And she's really been right on my side. And she's taken, she's fought my corner really well and she's actually come up with a kind of a compromise so that they've dropped their idea of notice to quit and they're not going to go forward with that. And they've actually offered me an alternative place, which I can move into when I get out of this hospital. So she's actually achieved what she set out to achieve. She's helped me avoid ending up homeless again."

"PARTICIPANT: I was gutted when my housing officer moved on, to be perfectly honest. She was fab,

yeah, couldn't compliment her enough, she was really good.

"INTERVIEWER: What helped most?

"PARTICIPANT: Direct support and accountability and also it was, while I'm not making it sound like it was, it was pretty clear where we were aiming, where we were sort of, we were pointing, what the aim, the end game was to get me out of the hostel system and into a council flat of my own."

Some with positive experiences also characterised their housing officer as allowing them to feel involved in decisions about their situation and being given autonomy over what support would be helpful to them.

"They let me just do my, literally do my own thing and just kept in touch with me and supported me and made sure that I was applying for the right properties and things. So they've been in the background if I've needed them. Well, obviously, but yeah, they've done as I wanted them to do rather than sort of force me to make a decision that I didn't want to do."

People understood that some of the issues they experienced related to their council being under-resourced.

"I think at times they were supportive but I, to be honest I think their hands are tied. I think it's limited as to what they can actually do. And like they say, I know one lady told me, they're working under 400%. So I think it's, yes, I think the problem is it's limited personally what they can actually do and they've just got so many people they have got to deal with, there's little time that they can actually spend with each person and that's a major issue."

"You could always do more, if the housing office had more, a bigger team or more funding or more, it was a frustratingly slow process. I think from entering the, interacting with the housing office to being shown this flat was between six and nine months, so it was frustratingly slow, in an ideal world it would be quicker. But I don't necessarily think that's a failing of the housing office or their team."

"They just do things on their own time. But I can't complain. There's nothing really to complain. It's just they have millions, thousands of other people that they're helping... maybe they need to, what's that word, recruit more people if they need help because it's like there's just lack of staff why they're just not seeing some people after years and years. They're literally coming to people after three years. Three years. So that's not fair at all. People are already dealing with some serious life issues and trying to get away from people and then they're just leaving them for last."

However, for experiences of Housing Options to improve, it is not only resourcing that needs to improve. Services need to develop methods that focus less on decision-making and evidence gathering, and more on working with individuals to resolve their situation if it is sufficiently clear they are owed a prevention or relief duty – something that could ease the administrative burden described by staff. This in turn might help staff deliver help in the spirit of the HRA – shifting away from a culture of thinking that some deserve support more than others, towards one that is more balanced.

One participant described how to improve the experience of using Housing Options, they felt staff needed to be less judgemental, and consider each person making a homelessness application was worthy of support.

"I think that they can just realise that people may start off having a decent life and things go wrong. Just because we could manage it once doesn't mean you can do it again. And the only reason most people go for them for help is because we've tried every other option and we can't do it ourselves, which is why we're asking for help. And then you still have to fight to get the help. I think just being a bit more understanding of everyone, that everyone's circumstances are different and going from it that way. But they always, it's, to me it seems like they want as many people as they can to help themselves before they're even interested in helping."

Chapter 3
Support and Housing Outcomes

This chapter looks at what people's outcomes were under the HRA, in terms of both whether the support they received was useful, the extent to which they saw an improvement in their living situation, and how sustainable people felt their living situation was once the support they had received from Housing Options had ended. It shows that:

- Among those whose contact with Housing Options had ended, nearly half (46%) remained homeless after going to the local authority for support. Over half (56%) of survey participants experienced a positive housing outcome under the HRA – meaning that they either remained in accommodation or their living situation improved after going to Housing Options.

- When asked how they felt about their living situation after using Housing Options, half did not think it was secure for at least 6 months, more than half (58%) did not think it was suitable for their needs, and less than a third (30%) felt it was both secure and suitable. The reasons for this included homelessness not being resolved, accommodation being temporary, but also issues with more permanent forms of accommodation, such as affordability, poor quality living conditions, accommodation being inappropriate for support needs, and a lack of follow-up from Housing Options or other services after moving in.

- Whilst the majority did not feel Housing Options had helped that much – with 62 per cent saying Housing Options had not resolved their living situation – there is a correlation between the receipt of support from Housing Options and positive housing outcomes. This is evidence that without some form of help people are more likely to continue facing homelessness.

- More people were helped into accommodation during the pandemic (when 67% experienced a positive housing outcome), which staff linked back to the high pressure they were under to ensure people were accommodated during the crisis. The quality of support provided at this time declined: in wave 3, less people were provided with financial support, referrals to other services, and more people said the information and advice they received was not relevant to them.

- However, staff felt the pandemic demonstrated it was possible to provide a greater level of support than was previously seen as feasible, particularly to people sleeping rough. They indicated making less use of eligibility criteria to determine whether or not to support someone, raising questions about the value of having these in the first place.

- Interviews with staff identified a lack of housing options as the greatest barrier to having more people in secure and suitable accommodation.

- Overall, only 42 per cent of participants felt that Housing Options had met their expectations. Whilst many were grateful for the support they received, some described 'giving up' on Housing Options and choosing to pursue risky living situations.

3.1 Housing situations before and after approaching Housing Options

Survey respondents were asked what their living situation was before and after approaching Housing Options for support. After excluding people whose contact with Housing Options was still ongoing when we spoke to them, we can see that nearly half (46%) of people were still homeless after using Housing Options.[32] This included nearly 1 in 5 of people (18%) who were sofa surfing at this time. This alone highlights how many are still facing homelessness despite the improvements seen under the HRA. The rest of this chapter goes into more detail about how much people's housing situations changed during the research, and why. Table 3.1 provides a breakdown of what people's living situations were both before and after approaching Housing Options in wave 1 and wave 3. The data has been categorised into six overarching categories – including a very broad category called 'accommodated' to describe people who are living under a roof, even though they may still be experiencing or at risk of homelessness (particularly if they are facing eviction), whilst excluding those who are sofa surfing, rough sleeping, in temporary accommodation provided by the local authority, or in a government institution like a prison or hospital.

The most common living situation for households participating in the research prior to approaching Housing Options were renting in the PRS, sofa surfing and rough sleeping. In the last wave of the research there was a higher proportion of people sofa surfing (up to 29% of survey respondents from 26%) or living with family/friends in the long term (up to 11% from 8%), and a fall in the number of people who had been privately renting (down from 27% to 23%) and rough sleeping (down from 17% to 12%). This reflects what is already known about changes in the profile of people approaching their local authority for support during the pandemic – for example, that financial protections meant less people living in the PRS required support with homelessness.[33]

Table 3.1 suggests some specific successes in the final wave of research compared to the first, which may also have been influenced by the pandemic (see section 3.5). In the third wave of the research, more people were accommodated after approaching Housing Options compared wave 1. There was a greater increase in the number of households in council or housing association accommodation (a 9 percentage point increase, relative to a 4 percentage point increase in wave 1) and supported housing (a 10 percentage point increase, relative to a 3 percentage point increase in wave 1), as well as a decline in the number of households who were sofa surfing in the final wave (7 percentage point decrease, compared to a 4 percentage point *increase* in the first wave).

Whilst this suggests some improvement as time went on to get a better picture of changes in housing outcomes, the next section examines 'flows' between housing situations, and tracks the transition of individuals from one housing situation to another.

Table 3.1: Living situations before and after approaching Housing Options, Waves 1 and 3

	Wave 1		Wave 3	
	Prior to approach	After approach	Prior to approach	After approach
Accommodated	**47%**	**43%**	**44%**	**58%**
Renting a private rented property	27%	22%	23%	26%
Renting a council or housing association property	6%	10%	7%	16%
Supported housing or supported accommodation	2%	5%	1%	11%
Living with family / friends - long term	8%	2%	11%	4%
Living in a property you own	2%	2%	1%	1%
Lodging (not with family or friends)	1%	1%	0%	0%
Tied accommodation	0%	0%	1%	0%
Housing co-op	0%	0%	0%	0%
Sofa surfing	**26%**	**30%**	**29%**	**22%**
Living with family and friends – short term	26%	30%	29%	22%
Rough sleeping and 'quasi' rough sleeping	**17%**	**8%**	**14%**	**5%**
Rough sleeping	17%	7%	12%	4%
Car	0%	1%	1%	1%
Temporary accommodation	**4%**	**16%**	**8%**	**15%**
Living in a temporary accommodation	3%	15%	6%	11%
Living in a refuge	1%	1%	1%	1%
COVID-19 Emergency Accommodation	0%	0%	0%	3%
Government institutions	**2%**	**0%**	**5%**	**1%**
Home Office accommodation	1%	0%	3%	0%
Prison	0%	0%	1%	0%
Hospital	1%	0%	1%	0%
Drug or Alcohol Rehab Unit	0%	0%	0%	0%
Other	**4%**	**1%**	**1%**	**0%**
Caravan	0%	0%	0%	0%
Other	1%	1%	1%	0%
Squatting	0%	1%	0%	0%
House boat	0%	0%	0%	0%
Unknown	3%	2%	0%	0%

N=545 for wave 1 and N=448 for wave 3

32 The total sample size for this group, including those who remained homeless, and were no longer homeless, is 681.

33 See *The Homelessness Monitor: England 2022*, as well as Fitzpatrick, S., Mackie P., Pawson, H., Watts, B. and Wood, J (2021) *The COVID-19 crisis response to homelessness in Great Britain. UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence (CaCHE)*. CaCHE: Online. https://housingevidence.ac.uk/publications/the-covid-19-crisis-response-to-homelessness-in-great-britain/; and Fitzpatrick, S, Watts, B., & Simms, R. (2020) *Homelessness Monitor England 2020: COVID-19 Crisis Response Briefing*. London: Crisis.

3.2 Housing outcomes

When Crisis published its interim report we concluded that whilst the HRA was opening up access and increasing the number of people eligible for support, it was less evident at the time that it is having an effect on overall housing outcomes.

Now after three waves of research, we have found that 56 per cent of people experienced a positive housing outcome, which we define as remaining accommodated, or an improvement in their housing situation.

Table 3.2 provides a detailed breakdown of the proportion of individuals moving between each housing situation, and provides a comparison of these flows across the first and final wave of the study. It is positive to see an increase in housing improvements across the three years of the research – with 67 per cent of households having either remained accommodated or experienced an improvement in their housing situation in the final wave – up from just 51 per cent in the first wave.

This was mainly driven by:

• An increase in the number of households remaining accommodated;

• An increase in the number of households moving from sofa surfing to being housed or unsuitable temporary accommodation to being accommodated;

• A fall in the number of households remaining sofa surfing; and

• A fall in the number moving from being housed to the likely worse situations of sofa surfing or being in unsuitable temporary accommodation.

The increase in the number of households who were in a housed situation is seen both within the private rental sector and the social sector – with 29 per cent of participants in our final wave of the study having been housed in the private rental sector after being in contact with Housing Options (up from 25 per cent in the first wave) and 16 per cent being housed in the social sector (up from 10 per cent in the first wave).

However, with 33 per cent of households in the most recent wave of our study having experienced a worsening or no change in their housing situation (a negative housing outcome), this suggests that more can be done to support people into an improved living situation.[34]

Among those experiencing a negative housing outcome, the most common experiences in both waves were people who remained sofa surfing, and people who went from being accommodated to sofa surfing.

Figures 3.1 and 3.2 visualise the same information from the table to illustrate the 'flow' in living situation, wave 1 and wave 3, respectively.

It is worth noting that some participants experienced multiple accommodation types between approaching Housing Options and taking part in our survey, and some went on to other types after this – particularly people placed in emergency and temporary accommodation. In these cases people's experiences were therefore characterised by instability as they had to move often.

34 In this vein it is worth noting that 7% of people who experienced a positive housing outcome were still living in a temporary or emergency form of accommodation – we have included some people in this situation in both the negative and positive outcome categories to reflect the fact that some at least experienced an improvement in accommodation situation.

Table 3.2: Changes in living situation, Waves 1 and 3

	Wave 1	Wave 3
Positive Housing Outcome: Improvement in housing situation or remained accommodated	**51%**	**67%**
Remained accommodated	32%	35%
Sofa surfing to accommodated	6%	11%
Rough sleeping to accommodated	5%	4%
Unsuitable TA to accommodated	0%	4%
Institutional discharge to accommodated	1%	3%
Sofa surfing to unsuitable TA	3%	3%
Rough sleeping to unsuitable TA	4%	2%
Rough sleeping to covid accommodation	0%	1%
Sofa surfing to covid accommodation	0%	1%
Negative Housing Outcome: Worsening or no change in housing situation	**49%**	**33%**
Remained sofa surfing	18%	13%
Housed to sofa surfing	9%	7%
Housed to unsuitable TA	6%	3%
Remained in unsuitable TA	3%	2%
Remained rough sleeping	4%	2%
Rough sleeping to sofa surfing	4%	1%
Sofa surfing to rough sleeping	0%	1%
Unsuitable TA to sofa surfing	0%	1%
Housed to rough sleeping	2%	0%
Housed to squatting	1%	0%
Remained in car, caravan or houseboat	1%	0%
Rough sleeping to squatting	1%	0%
Grand Total	**100%**	**100%**

N=545 for wave 1 and N=448 for wave 3

"Well, they help me to get this accommodation, and the accommodation I was before, and the other one I was before, because I was just sofa surfing from friend to friend because I just went through a divorce and I had to find a place. But they helped me with that, and obviously, well, I'm just, I didn't expect to wait this long to find a place. I'm in temporary accommodation. I can't even change my address because every week could be the last one, so I don't want to change the address."

Figures 3.1: Flow between living situations in Wave 1

Housed: 46.2%
Housed: 41.3%
Temporary accommodation: 3.2%
Temporary accommodation: 15.1%
Sofa surfing: 25.7%
Sofa surfing: 29.2%
Rough sleeping: 16.7%
Rough sleeping: 6.5%
Other: 5.3%
Other: 5.0%
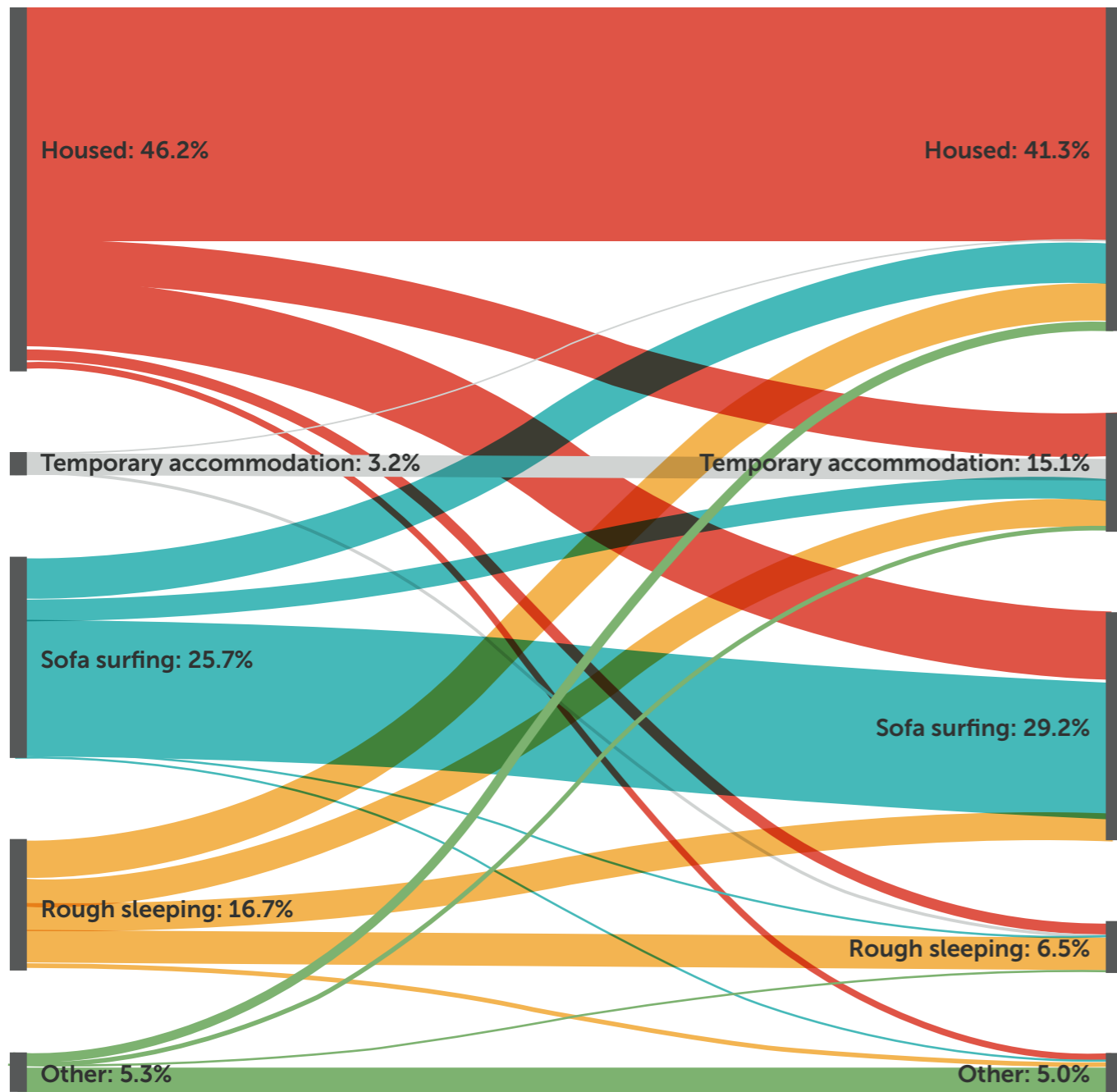
N=545

Figure 3.2: Flow between living situations in Wave 3

Housed: 43.9%
Housed: 57.2%
Temporary accommodation: 6.9%
Sofa surfing: 28.5%
Sofa surfing: 21.4%
Temporary accommodation: 13.5%
Rough sleeping: 12.2%
Rough sleeping: 4.0%
Other: 8.0%
Other: 3.4%
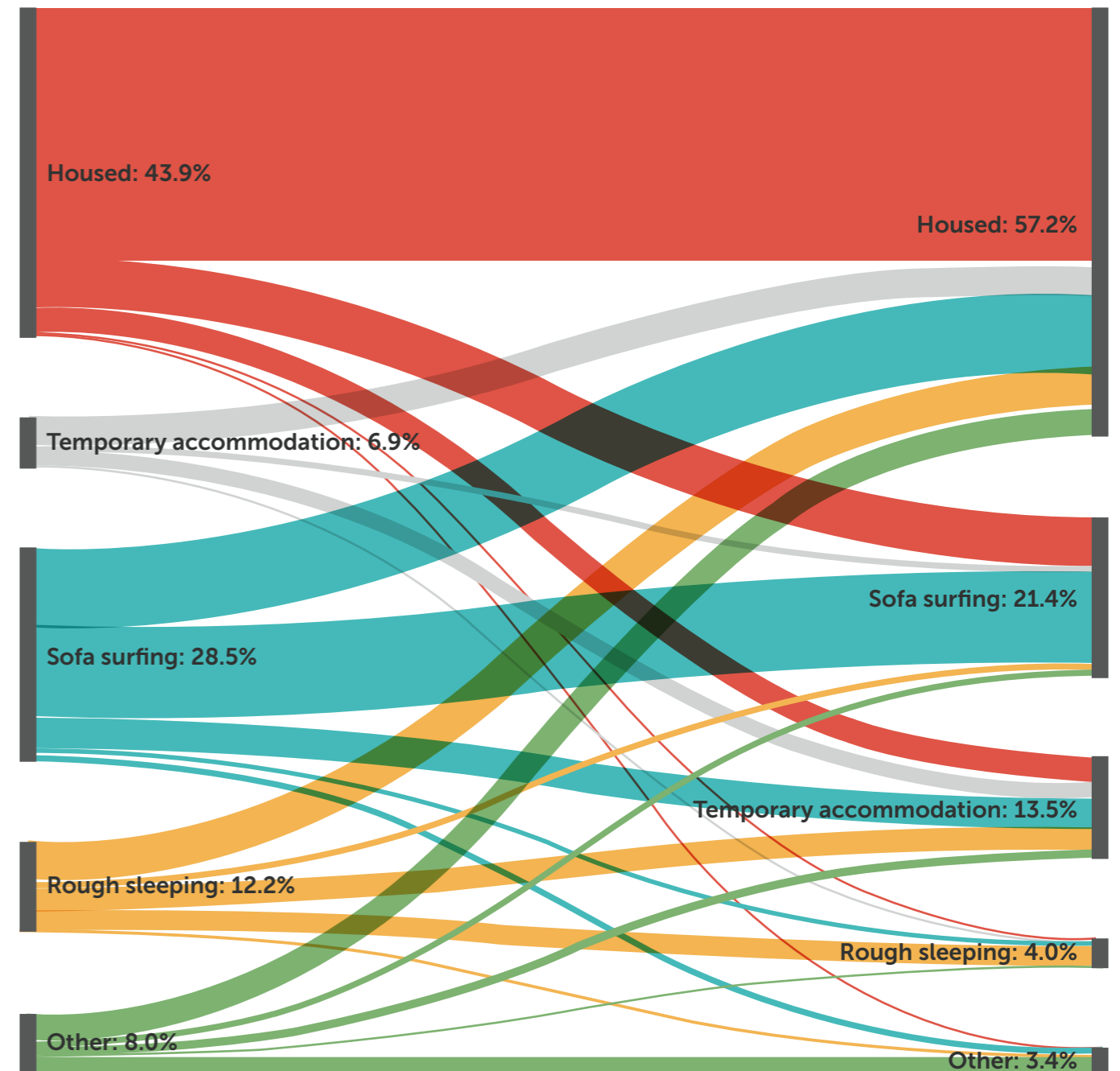
N=448

"I was bounced around, but I was bounced around what you might call more sort of shelters for a little while."

"I was put on like a waiting list, I had to wait for a very long time, so therefore I have two little boys so I was moving from one place to the other taking my boys to school, so it's like I've moved up and down and it's, it was a bit stressful."

The length of time between initial presentation at Housing Options and a housing outcome also varied a lot. While some people had to move accommodation quickly and frequently, others lived in insecure situations for long periods of time – for example, up to 2 years – due to long waiting lists for social housing.

"I was given my first temporary accommodation, which was a bedsit for my two children and I, one room. We then, we stayed there for approximately six weeks and then we moved to our second property, which was in a hotel but was one room again, and we stayed there for approximately another six weeks. And then we were given our third temporary accommodation, which was a house but was out of Borough, which was in XXX. And we resided there for two years and then I managed to get this property through the Homefinder website."

3.3 How people felt about their housing outcome

Whilst it is clear from government statistics that more people facing homelessness are being helped under the HRA, and whilst our research suggests more than have experience a positive housing outcome, this does not tell us whether more people are moving into secure and suitable housing. For support to make a lasting difference and for housing to be sustainable, people must have access to a home that is both secure – meaning they will be able to stay there for the long-term – and suitable for their needs. In order to understand whether the housing outcomes above were appropriate, in the final wave of research we asked people whether their situation was secure for at least 6 months, and whether it was suitable for their needs.

Overall, 50 per cent did not think their situation was secure for at least 6 months, and 58 per cent did not think it was suitable for their needs. More worrying is that only 30 per cent of individuals reported their situation being *both* secure for at least 6 months and suitable.

Figure 3.3 shows that it was more common for people to think their situation was neither suitable nor secure, than it was for them to feel it met at least one of these criteria. It is also striking that people owed the prevention duty were 7 percentage points *less* likely to feel they were in secure or suitable accommodation after using Housing Options, compared to those owed a relief duty, illustrating how the pressures staff are under lead them to prioritise relief cases.

As shown in figure 3.4, those living in rented properties, either within the private, social sector, or in supported housing, were most likely to report their situation being both secure and suitable (with 49% of those in social housing feeling this way). Not surprisingly, people who were sofa surfing were most likely to report their situation being neither secure nor suitable (with 64% feeling this way). However, there were examples of people in all accommodation types who felt they lacked security or suitability.

Figure 3.3: Percentage reporting whether their living situation is secure and/or suitable
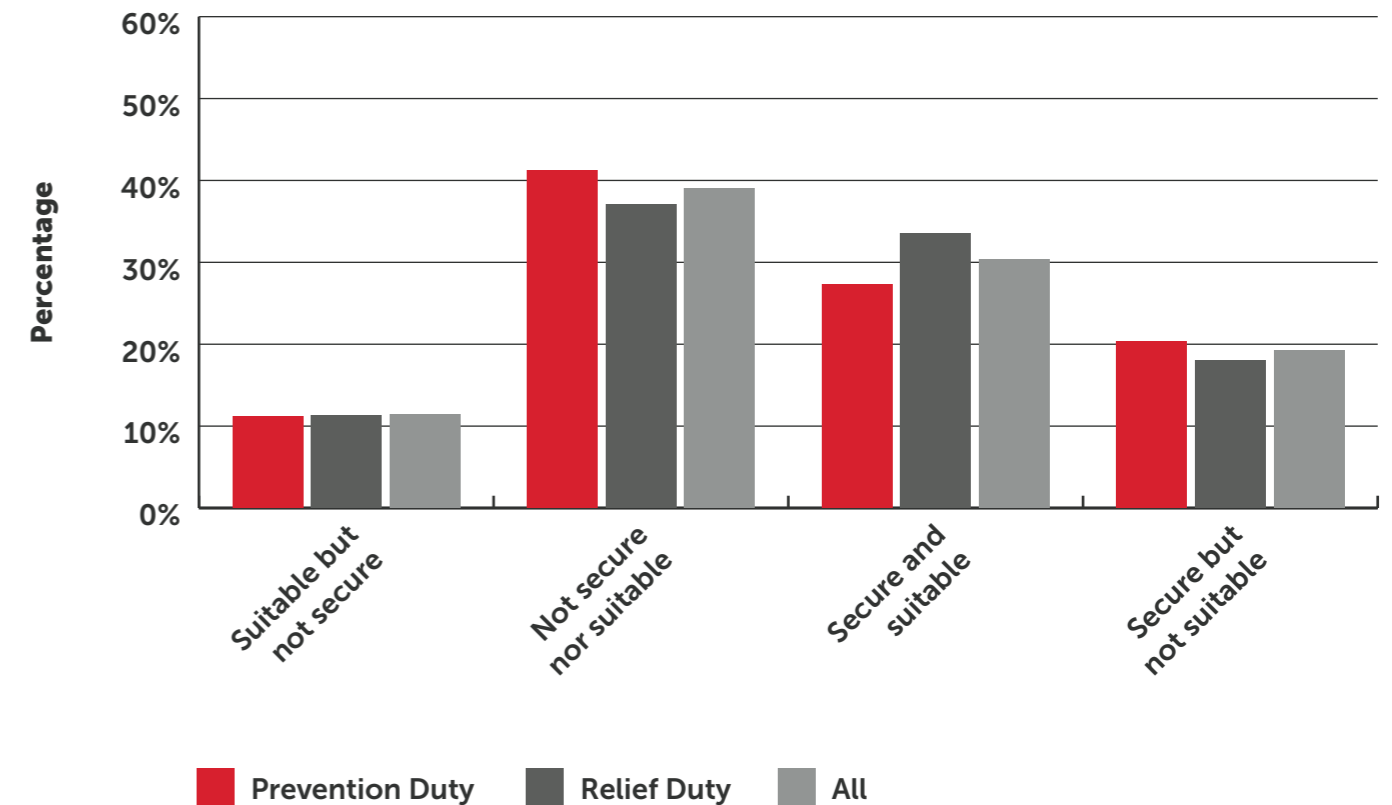
N=405

In our conversations with people across the research, a wide range of reasons emerged as to why people felt their housing situation after using Housing Options was inadequate. We have grouped the most common reasons into different categories below – though it is worth noting that some people experienced issues in more than one of these categories. In addition, whilst a lot of these relate to 'suitability', many felt that living in an unsuitable home could have an impact on how likely it was they would be able to stay there for more than 6 months – for example, if they felt it was in poor condition, they may have felt they wouldn't feel safe living there for this period of time.

People who were still facing homelessness
Some people were still facing homelessness after using Housing Options, including 9 per cent of people sleeping rough and 24 per cent who were sofa surfing. As previous research has shown, the experience of rough sleeping has an enormous impact on people's susceptibility to violence, and both experiences have negative impacts on people's physical and mental health.[35] In addition, both these types of tenure were fundamentally insecure in requiring people to move often.

35   Sanders, B. & Albanese, F. (2016) *"It's no life at all": Rough sleepers' experiences of violence and abuse on the streets of England and Wales.* London: Crisis. https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/types-of-homelessness/its-no-life-at-all-2016/

Figure 3.4: Security and suitability of living situations according to type of accommodation

Legend:
- Secure and suitable (red)
- Secure but not suitable (dark grey)
- Suitable but not secure (medium grey)
- Not secure nor suitable (light grey)
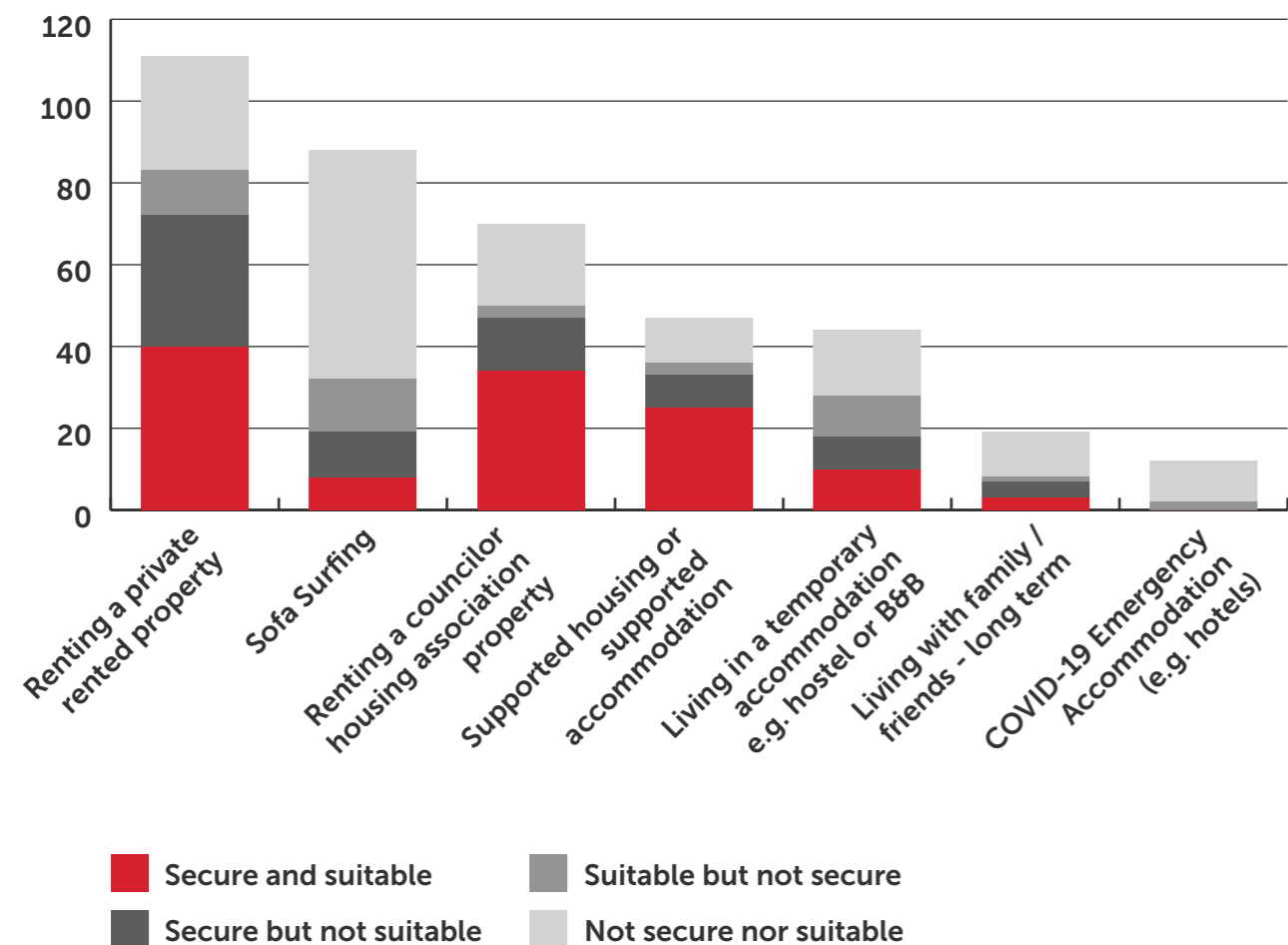
In addition, as noted above, there were also many people who remained under the threat of an eviction, but who had not received any practical support with this. This included people being asked to leave their home by family and friends, as well as private sector landlords. One participant described how they were experiencing a family breakdown and that Housing Options had not provided any new accommodation, but only led to him and another family member sofa surfing interchangeably instead.

"Two, three weeks ago... they called me to let me know that they could no longer help me, and how I had a place at somewhere. Which I didn't, because I've

contacted this place and they said, I don't have a place, that I'm on a waiting list. So yeah, they basically just let me go... at least put me in a hostel or help me [find] a property at least. It's just shocking... I was in my car. And then they spoke to my mum and told her, my mum said OK, he can stay here for some bit, but I won't be able to stay in the house. Which means that she was out of her house."

He described remaining anxious about the situation leaving him at risk of experiencing worse forms of homelessness.

"Obviously I would rather just try to get into my own space as much as possible, so I don't have to depend on people. Because when you depend on people, that's when you can obviously become homeless once they're tired of you."

Insecurity and affordability in the PRS
Many people moved into or remained in the PRS after their contact with Housing Options, but the nature of their home or the PRS more generally meant they didn't feel their homelessness was necessarily resolved. Some felt their living situation was expensive due to one or more of high rent, high living costs, and low income from benefits or employment.

"They were pushing me into private renting as well, and I'm like I can't afford private renting, do you understand? You know for private renting it's like - £700, £600 a month, and then if you're on Universal Credit getting what £1,200 when you're paying rent, what're you going to eat? You're going to die of starvation I guess."

"I mean right now, yeah, it's creeping right up at the moment. I think over the next couple of months it's really eating into what available money I've got left over. And of course because I'm sitting in the house all the time I tend to be, actually I tend to be eating a lot more. I do get a lot of assistance, I do get some assistance from a local food bank but now I still have, my food bill you could say has also increased. So, yeah, it's, yeah, having a house has proven to be a little bit more harmful to my finances as they are at the moment."

"The private sector, it's not very helpful as well. The rent is gone high. It's so unfair. Why is the rent gone so high? It's like it's not giving people opportunities to

rent anymore... you have to earn three times the rent and I don't earn that much, so I'm stuck."

People also described lacking confidence over whether their contract in a PRS property would last for very long.

"If I move there, and I move in and the bloke whose house I've moved into they say after six months, right, get out, then I've got to, I'm starting all over again and I don't want it at this time in my life."

One participant described how due to a lack of alternatives she had chosen to move into a property where she was concealing the fact she lived with a child from her landlord, despite knowing that she could be evicted if found out.

"Here I can stay for another year because I renewed the contract. So the landlord gave me another year to stay here but they, they don't know that I have a child... . I don't know what will happen if the agency finds out that I have a child because it states in the contract that kids and pets are not allowed. So I'm not sure if I'll be faced with eviction or anything like that. But I just pray about it that he will not find out."

Some staff felt there was a need for major changes to the PRS in order to open up more accommodation solutions for their clients. Suggestions included implementing rent caps and increasing property standards with better access to the range of PRS needed, particularly considering access to large properties for families, and PRS that is accessible and suitable for those with disabilities. This was seen as particularly important at the prevention and relief stages, when the PRS is used more than at the later, Main Duty stage.

"The big structural change that needs to happen is that we need to do something about the private rented sector so we either need to change it so that it's more affordable, longer term, and more attractive or we need to shrink it and there were different mechanism in place that can be introduced to do that. I know that the affordable commission have come up with some but us, like most local authoities, are using it as pseudo social housing and it isn't appropriate to have people that need longer terms stability in tenancies that are 6 or 12 months long and that are generally unaffordable without local authority intervention. So that's the big structural thing that needs to change."
(Manager)

"Externally for better outcomes I still think there should be a cap on private rents but also progress around the standards of private accommodation so that actually they just externally, they should be a different focus I think around the use of private rented accommodation so that it's, there are longer term tenancies available and it's, it is another option in terms of the additionality for affordable housing being delivered."
(Manager)

Issues with location
There were a range of reasons why people were frustrated by the location of their accommodation. This included people who disliked having to move to an area they were unfamiliar with, and others with concerns about their accommodation's distance from places of work and education, as well as people's support networks and family. This could in turn have an impact on people's cost of living and quality of life as they worked out how to travel from their new location.

"[I'm] in a temporary accommodation. It's too long to where I work... By bus, it took me about 2 hours 15 minutes, 15 to 20 minutes. Then by train, it's more quicker but it's expensive.... I have to wake up early, like 3.30am, 4.00am, to make my journey because I have to resume 7.00am."

"I was moved quite far away from my kids' school because I, we're court ordered so me and my ex have 50/50 custody. So my kids have to go to school 20 miles away from where I live... If there's any accidents or anything then we're late for school because we travel down the [A-road] which is always busy, renowned for crashes. So if there's any slight problem we are majorly late for school."

Some in major urban areas bidding to live in social housing described how difficult it was to find options in an area they were familiar with or where their family was based. One participant was anxious that the council would wash their hands of her if she didn't bid for a property in an unfamiliar area.

"I tried to bid for some properties but the properties that are showing on my account are all, they're nothing, nowhere near my family. And they're really not helpful... I was just like, I was just in absolute, I just didn't know what I would do and where to turn. I got told that basically I'd got to pick a flat whether, which, it didn't matter where, which area it were in, whether it were near my family or not, otherwise I'd be struck off the list."

One person described how the temporary accommodation she had been housed in for nearly a year was far away from her children's school and from key health services.

"I want them to give me another house... where I'm living is far too, where my children's schools are, so I have to travel every day... It's almost 2 hours... one of my daughter is sickle cell, I need to be going to the hospital. The hospital round here, they don't have A&E. The A&E is far, and it's like, you have to travel again... I just want to move close to where my children's schools are and hopefully the hospital, because sometimes I always go in and out of the hospital because of my daughter. Sometime she just have crisis in the middle of night, and it's not so easy to get to the hospital like that... I have to pay £4.90 so it's expensive to go out in the morning too much. Even the train is too much... the manager just called me, send a letter to me and called me that the only thing I can do is try to change their schools, because this section that will finish, he didn't think they will accommodate me, they will put me to another housing so I should just change them to another school, but I can't change them, because the children, they're happy where they are."

Safety concerns
Related to location, some had significant concerns about the safety of their accommodation based on the area they were living in or other residents in the building or property, something noted in particular by families with young children, or by people living in hostels.

"I'm private renting on the worst estate possible.... there's drug dealers on the street, there's domestic violence, there's arguing, it's just horrible. If you don't fit in you're hated, basically."
"I can explain to you, there was four beds and there was one leader who'd been in prison for five years. And he was bossing it up and doing drugs in the room and it got all a bit tense. So, I was

out of there, I wasn't going to hang around for that. Yeah, so, for me it couldn't work."

Safety concerns also extended to unsafe aspects of the property someone was living in, with people feeling this made the home physically risky to live in.

"At the beginning I could cope being here because the accommodation has cameras. It has, it made me feel safe but now the longer I'm here the more unsafe I'm feeling for the, yeah, for the area. But for the actual accommodation because my son is getting to a certain age, the flooring, things are just not safe for him here any more."

"It was all right when I was pregnant but now that my child's come, he arrived a month early, and since he arrived it's quite awkward, I've got to bring him up and down the stairs to deal with him in the night, or even throughout the day, you know, I can't just leave him in the hall on his own."

Poor facilities
People living in shared accommodation described how limited and shared facilities had a large impact on their day-to-day lives.

"I say obviously I've got to carry [my baby] up and down the stairs to make a bottle. Because currently the fire alarms in the rooms are really sensitive so I can't have a kettle or anything like that in my room. So I have to climb up and down the stairs with him to make his bottles on a night..."

Others in more self-contained forms of temporary accommodation talked about their facilities being limited.

"When I was in the temporary accommodation I had a tiny, little fridge, like the small fridges, they've got the top bit a freezer. Yeah. And basically I couldn't afford to buy food every day and it just wasn't big enough to store food in, so I went to this person and they helped me get a fridge from Children in Need which brought it into the temporary accommodation and that's still the fridge that I'm using to this day."

Some moving into rented homes described these having no or very limited furniture, something that people felt was understandable but was particularly challenging when they had little time to prepare to move in.

"They set me up with some charity like Furnistore to get me some furniture and I managed to pick up some other bits and pieces. Basically they actually did, so when I think about it they did help me get up and running, yeah, within a relatively short period of time and I think when I first moved in I was still sleeping on the floor. There was, this place was actually empty. There was no furnitures, furnishings or anything."

Issues with size and overcrowding
Families in particular talked about being in accommodation where there was a limited amount of space for all household members, and the challenges of looking after children in need of entertainment in a small home.

"With the kitchen it's on the very small side. The living room isn't very big. The bedroom, obviously having both of our stuff in, bed, cot, isn't very big and like I said just how hot it gets. I didn't realise how hot it would get. So that is something I am going to obviously try and speak to my housing officer about. I know obviously everyone's struggling

with this heat and things at the moment but it is reaching ridiculous heats and especially with no freezer so no ice."

"We have no garden... They always seem to house the people with children where there are no gardens or outdoor spaces that they can play in. But they're quite lucky because we've got a massive field just behind our house so they can still go and play but I don't have a garden for the kids to be able to play in securely."

"The house was, so it was put down on the listing as a two bed property but the second bedroom was so tiny you could only get a bed in it. So I gave the kids the bedroom and just lived in the living room for four years."

One person described living in a private rented property that was extremely small for her and her child, due to the unaffordability of other properties on the market.

"Here, where I live, I have no bedrooms. It's less than 50m2 for space. It's like a kitchenette I live in... I just have the bed and a kitchen here and that's it. It's literally step from kitchen, it's really awful, yeah. And my son, he's just, we literally play in bed because we don't have any space to play anywhere."

Another described how the problem of lack of space was exacerbated by her partner's family not being included in her homelessness application.

"There's me and my two children, also my partner lives with me which they're aware of, and my partner has three children. Now he has two of the children every single weekend, and he has his daughter in the school holidays, obviously they won't take that into consideration either. I've

currently got the smaller bedroom because we're in a two bedroom and obviously the two children have got the other bedroom, and I've got the smallest bedroom, and in my bedroom the only thing I can fit is a double bed and a set of draws, and they wanted me to also fit a cot in there obviously once the baby comes. Which I've got in the front bedroom which the kids have, because it's the bigger one. I've got bunk beds for my son and daughter, and then the other two boys that come and stay on the weekend share a single bed, but they won't take his children into consideration at all, even though he has them, like he has them, tomorrow he'll have them tomorrow until Sunday, then next week he has them Wednesday and Thursday, so he has them half of the week anyway. And because my partner doesn't get any benefits for his children, they won't even take that into consideration, they just want us go away."

Issues with overcrowding were also raised by participants living in shared accommodation.

"In terms of the facility, not a great deal, they limit the number of people allowed in communal areas at any one time. Not really an issue for me, personally, because I don't use the communal areas anyway because I try to keep my head down and stay out of the way for the large part."

Lack of follow-up support
A common problem cited by participants in this research who were helped into accommodation was that they often felt there was little follow-up from Housing Options once they were in their new home. This meant that if there was an issue in the new home, and one they couldn't necessarily resolve alone, this could leave them feeling vulnerable or unsafe.

"Nobody really phones you about anything but, and nobody lets you know that everything's OK, or are you OK? Or how are things going? There is no one that does any follow up. Although they know that I was literally, nearly homeless, and I was rushed into there on the very day that I should have moved in, moved out from one place, it was awful, because no one actually checked on me and said, how are you getting on? How do you feel? Is the property you've moved into OK? Because she was aware that I'd been sent to some place where there was drugs and things going on and I'm not happy about that."

"They're not dealing with the whole issue. They're sort of brushing it under the carpet, haven't they? You've got a property, that's it. That's all you need."

"I've lived in this property that I've been in now for two years, I've not heard a dickie bird from the council or anything, I could be an asylum seeker or anything and they wouldn't give a crap."

In some cases this was leading to people staying in temporary accommodation for longer periods of time than might have been the case with closer support.

"They are just putting me to the back only because they've just, they, only because they have housed me and they're not really focusing on the fact that I'm still in a dangerous situation that, yeah, that they're not really helping me to the way I need to be helped. But I know that they've got loads of other people that's going through worse than me. That's the only reason why I'm just not pressuring them because I'm still grateful."

"I don't know if it's because of nine months or forgetting, they didn't really speak to me during the pregnancy. They didn't really help me, they just put in one place and left me until it was time to have the baby. So it's like once I had that baby that's when I got in contact with them again and then I think they just moved me to the nearest, wherever. They just forgot my situation, they forgot, they didn't go through their notes, they didn't go through remembering what, the areas I'm supposed to be in and then they just placed me where they wanted to place me and I hadn't really no choice."

One participant described it as particularly important to provide relevant information to people upon being moved into accommodation, given the difficulty they had contacting Housing Options.

"I just think that in light of all that's going on in the world at the moment, I just think that they need to be able to sign people, signpost people in the right direction or even just produce like a pamphlet that says, even just give a list of how it works. You may be placed in temporary accommodation but this is how it works, the duration of your time in temporary accommodation, what will happen during that time. What happens when you leave, how things, just so that people know just that they approach the system and they can follow it through. If they provided that just in a pamphlet form or leaflet form it would be so, it would help and give people peace of mind. People would know that's how the system works and they'd be able to work with it. But if you don't know and you're trying to contact people and people are not contactable it's frustrating and I can see people may give up, be lost in the system,

and in all honesty that affects people's mental health and their wellbeing."

Some staff described how they wanted to do more to provide this follow-up support, especially to help people sustain tenancies, than was possible, and that this was a crucial part of homelessness prevention.

"Well, could we do more prevention? Because I think we could... I think that type of resettlement support work with the very vulnerable cohorts that we see through the homelessness is really important.... [We] can improve that engagement, and therefore improve the ability to prevent repeat homelessness, and to keep people, do the tenancy sustainment work that helps those that are more vulnerable, manage that arrangement... you do have a cohort of people who have support needs, unmet needs and you try to reach them, and they can't. And so, you have problems around trying to sustain their tenancy, and they end up being made homeless. So, then you get that revolving door of homelessness... So, I think that that is something that we would need to look at about how, not necessarily [us], but generally, how do you bridge the gap in terms of supporting your most vulnerable? Especially to sustain their tenancy and prevent that repeat homelessness."
(Manager)

"It's almost like they've been set up to fail if you don't have that early engagement around explaining about part of maintaining and sustaining your tenancy, is money management. The life skill bit is also around teaching people around budgetary skills, cooking skills. Those are all of the things that I think would be really helpful in doing good prevention. So,

there's two elements, the early intervention bit, the prevention in terms of making sure that you set them up once they've hit the statutory service, all of that support to make sure they can maintain and sustain that tenancy independently. And then there's the bit about working with them when they were [in emergency or temporary accommodation]. So better manage their tenancy. So that's what I think will be a good way of looking at prevention."
(Manager)

Suitability for health or other support needs
People with physical and mental health conditions described in some cases how they were in homes that were difficult to live in for them, or which put their health at risk.

"It wasn't ideal. It wasn't ideal because I have a disability and the first temporary accommodation we had to go up two flights of stairs and there was laminate flooring that my crutch sticks used to slip on when the flooring was wet."

"They turn the heating off during the summer and, but I weigh seven stone and I'm walking around in tracksuits because I'm freezing, and I've asked them, could they just turn my heating on? I'm so cold, which doesn't help with my arthritis either because it makes, I'm stiff. But they don't bother. They just, well, three other people have said they're too warm, so you don't come into the equation. I just, I find it, some I don't know. I just find it amazing."

One participant with severe physical issues described feeling abandoned high up in a block of flats, which as well as leading to major health risks, led to an impact on their mental wellbeing and finances.

"They put [me] on the ninth floor but it's, I were down to go on the ground floor or, well, a bungalow... I've had to wait a year before they'd put a shower in, because I can't get a bath with my legs, so I've waited a year on a ninth floor flat, and if the lift don't work, I have to phone people that'll come back to take me back home. I can't climb the steps. I'm sent home to die. They just left me in, and with all my mental health I shouldn't be on the ninth floor... So I've been dumped in this flat and now they're trying to get me out because they know they've made the mistake... I'm on the ninth floor. I can't climb the steps. There's only one lift works. And don't forget I've got blood clots. I'm on crutches, so how can I stand with the pressure going up on to the ninth floor? Let's be serious. I mean, any doctor, anybody with brains knows that... That costs me money in taxis going to my family to get a shower... in my opinion, they've neglected me and took to account my illness as I'm a nobody. Simple as. My doctors have told me, they're saying they've neglected me... "

In some cases this issue applied to someone's child, rather than themselves.

"They do have the information of my son, they do have the medical condition that he's autistic, that he's scared of heights. And there's no lift, and it's a bit of a strange place because, I even took a picture (inaudible) when she said, well, you don't have any medical condition '...' I'm like, I have an autistic son who is really terrified of being high up, even the healthcare visitor has been around and all that, and she knows that. I don't know what else to do."

A participant with complex health needs described how living in supported accommodation with people recovering from addiction made it feel dangerous for his own wellbeing.

> "The rest of the hostel are using heavier substances, it's a more chaotic environment, and that's not meaning to be judgemental in any way, shape or form. You know, it's down to you, we've all got our individual issues but there is, there's violence, there's sort of open class A drug use within the facility and it's tolerated, it's accepted to a point. And neither of those things are issues that I suffer with, so I find the environment quite challenging."

Other issues with poor quality conditions, and lack of accountability for these
There were many examples of people who moved into accommodation that was in poor condition, including people who described living in unsanitary conditions.

> "I'm scared about being in my [hostel] room overnight or whatever and a mouse just come popping out from underneath my bed or something, and all my belongings getting eaten or chewed."

> "At the moment obviously with this heatwave that's going on we are really, really struggling. There's days when the property itself with windows, curtains, everything closed reaches over 31."

> "Some of the girls have been there for six to eight months, and there's a reoccurring issue of mice and rats in the bedrooms and in the kitchen, communal kitchen, and living room area."

There were comments about landlords not fixing problems in housing.

> "I'm in a flat that needs repair that landlord won't do, on a joint tenancy with an ex partner, which neither of us can leave until we've got somewhere else to live... [the council] went through some motions, trying to get landlord to do the repairs. He did some of repairs that they wanted, they were happy with it and then they just left it. I've no contact with them since... they used to pressure them into getting everything done. Now it seems like they just can't be, how can I put it? Can't be bothered to tackle private landlords on it... if they can't get the landlord to do repairs, then look at helping, rehome the person somewhere that is suitable."

Some social housing tenants described struggling to get in contact with the right person to have these resolved. One person described being in effect blamed for the problem in their property.

> "When I first moved into my original flat it was, so the guttering and everything was leaking, so the rooms were mouldy, especially the rooms that my kids were in. And once I called them out to fix it they were like, well it's your own fault. The kids were sick because I wasn't giving them enough stuff to keep them warm. The winters were really cold, the summers were really hot and every time you asked them to do something or fix it they were like, it's your problem. Landlord wasn't helping either and they were just no help in that respect... it was because the guttering was completely leaking. Every time it rained I had, the whole of the back of the house was a waterfall."

Another described how the housing association and the council blamed one another for the ongoing issues in his home.

> "The roof leaked, my sky light leaked, I had numerous people come around and I don't know, I forgot how many times people looked, builders looked at it but it never got repaired. The heating kept going off and the toilet kept going off and this was during the winter. They sent numerous plumbers in and basically the bottom line was the whole cistern needed to be renewed, which oddly was going to cost a lot of money so they weren't really, so they got, they got six electric heaters in. They bought, brought six electric heaters so. There was also rats out the back in that place. There's basically, they had this building for four years and it, there was no maintenance done on it whatsoever so it just, it's owned by the council. [housing association] was the landlord so whenever, the problem is whenever something needs fixing the council said to [housing association] well it's your problem, you're the landlord and [housing association] said, well no because we're renting, we're paying you a, whatever it was, nominal fee to rent the building. So there was always this back and forwards going on. Yes, the shower stopped working. The bathroom floor started sinking, the toilet, it constantly ran water, yeah. Yeah, it wasn't good."

Another with asbestos in their home felt they had in effect been 'tricked' into living in their home.

> "About 21 people before us turned down this flat and we said we're going to give it a try and sadly I agreed to it. I'm sorry for each moment, because all the walls are full of asbestos. But what [social landlord] did to us... they give us a report of asbestos after we agree on the contract. So they basically tricked us. They said there's no asbestos in the flat. There's no-one else is on the phone and we're chatting with the guy in charge of the whole thing. He said, no, there's no asbestos. No, no, no, nowhere. I said, I know in those type of buildings there's a high concentration of asbestos. I read about it. I know it's dangerous for children so I would like to make sure my child is not being raised in a property like that because if it has asbestos we don't want it. And he said, no, it has no asbestos. No, no, no, no. When we were shown, being shown the flat they said, oh, it's just in this corner here in our, in a wardrobe, in a walk in wardrobe or something like that. It's just in this corner. We've covered it up so you don't have any access to it, you just don't touch it. And once we agreed to the contract he said, it might be in the walls, it might be in the ceiling, it might be on the floor, it might be everywhere. The tiles in the cupboards are asbestos. The tiles in the kitchen are asbestos. So basically all of it. And they told us after."

Other issues with temporary accommodation
Whilst many of the above issues took place in different types of housing, there were some issues unique to people living in temporary accommodation provided by the council. As well as people having to move between different accommodation, some had to stay in accommodation for long periods of time – months or even years. In addition, people described having to follow specific rules – for example, not being able to work in the accommodation, having to follow curfews, or not being allowed visitors at certain times. These problems in

combination with poor or shared facilities could mean some people were left without adequate support for their needs.

"My son is sofa surfing because I'm 62 years of age. My son is 26. He was always my carer. He'd help me in and out of a bath or a shower…. Cooking has, is becoming a major problem for me because I've got arthritis in my hands. So lifting pots with hot water in and things like that, I never know when they're going to give out. Opening jars and things like that is just a nightmare. So it's been lonely and it's been difficult without my son, because he, at 26, he needs his privacy. At 62 I need mine. So he will come and stay with me for a little while and then he goes back to sofa surfing and, I don't know. It's just difficult."

"I'm not allowed any visitors in the building, I'm not allowed people to stay, so like my partner, he's not allowed to stay overnight to help me [with the baby]… I'm not allowed any visitors due to Covid and the restrictions. No one's allowed to stay overnight, so my partner isn't allowed to stay and give me that extra support on a night."

"My main problem at the moment, is my pets. I've got two pets that I've currently got to find somewhere for them to stay or I've had to find somewhere for them to stay, because I was being put into temporary accommodation. And it's temporary accommodation so it's not, I haven't been told how long I'm going to be in this temporary accommodation, how long I've got to be without my pets."

3.4 How support from Housing Options affected housing outcomes

Unsurprisingly, given that many people ended up in poor accommodation – or remained homeless – the majority did not feel Housing Options had helped their situation that much. Among those who said that support from the Housing Office was no longer ongoing, 62 per cent said the support they'd received overall had not helped to resolve their current housing issue. However, in practice, those who received more support had a better housing outcome – showing that when given the right support under the HRA, there are improvements in people's living situations.

Among those saying Housing Options had not helped resolve their issue were both people who remained homeless after their contact, and people who felt that Housing Options had only helped them when they and/or another organisation (e.g. a voluntary sector organisation) had intervened and provided advocacy or searched for properties before support or accommodation was provided by the local authority.

Housing outcomes were worse when respondents reported they did not receive the right help to assist them. Of those experiencing a negative housing outcome, only 19 per cent felt support from Housing Options helped to resolve their homelessness, whereas 51 per cent of those who had a positive housing outcome felt this way (see figure 3.5).

This increased when the housing outcome was renting from a council or housing association property after receiving support (72%): figure 3.6 provides a detailed breakdown of the responses to this question by living situation after receiving support from Housing Options, and shows that people in the PRS and supported accommodation had more mixed views.

Figure 3.5: Views on whether support received from Housing Options helped resolve situation
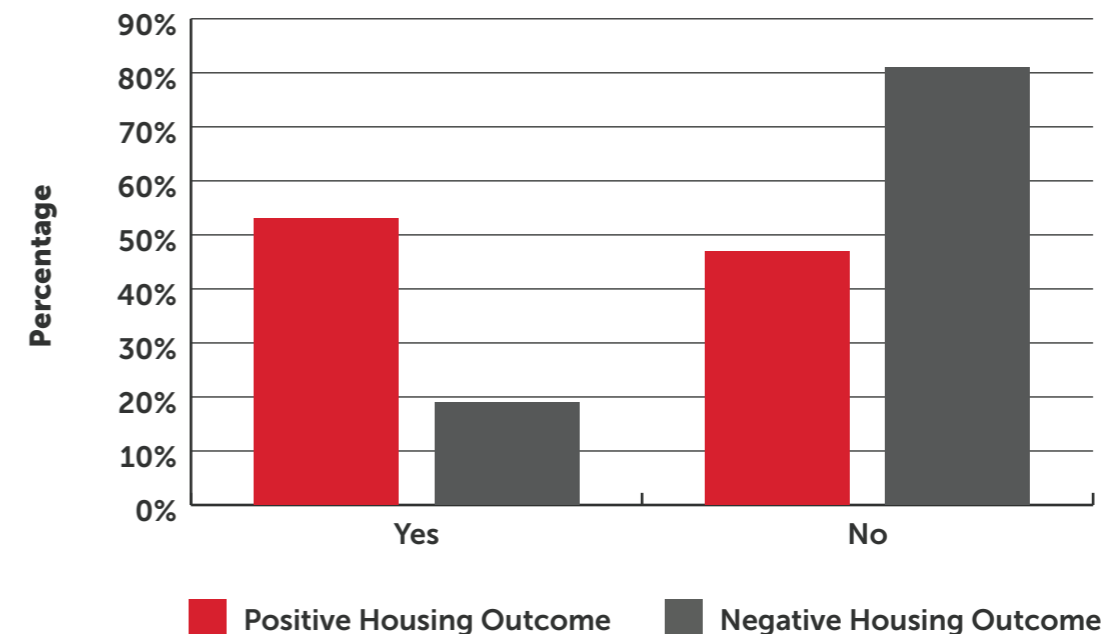
N=663. Showing % of those who felt support received from Housing Options helped resolve their housing situation, broken down by housing outcome.

The research has shown other links between level of support received and housing outcomes achieved. Households achieving positive housing outcomes received more forms of support than those achieving negative outcomes; figure 3.7. shows that for each type of support received it was more likely to lead to a positive outcome.

This is also the case for the overall experience with Housing Options – people who reported improvements in their housing situation were more likely to report positive experiences on the HRA and on most other metrics we measured in the research (see figure 3.8). Households who experienced a positive housing outcome were also more likely to have left their initial meeting feeling optimistic, to report being treated with respect and to report being able to access the services in their personalised housing plan.

In addition, the level of support received provided appeared to be worse for people who did not recall having a PHP, and better for those who did recall having a PHP. This suggests that having a PHP is crucial for ensuring a housing officer considers what support can be provided for each person in a more systematic way. figure 3.9 shows that those who were aware of their PHP were more likely to have received each type of support. Among those who were aware of having a PHP, the most common forms of support were receiving information on accessing the private rental sector (56%), advice from Housing Options (38%) and being referred to other services (23%).

Housing outcomes are clearly affected by the availability of support from Housing Options. If an outcome was achieved with assistance from Housing Options it is more likely to be a positive, suitable and sustainable,

Figure 3.6: Views on whether support received from Housing Options helped resolve situation, among those with positive housing outcomes

N=399

Figure 3.7: Proportion of those experiencing positive/negative housing outcomes that received different types of support

N=1432
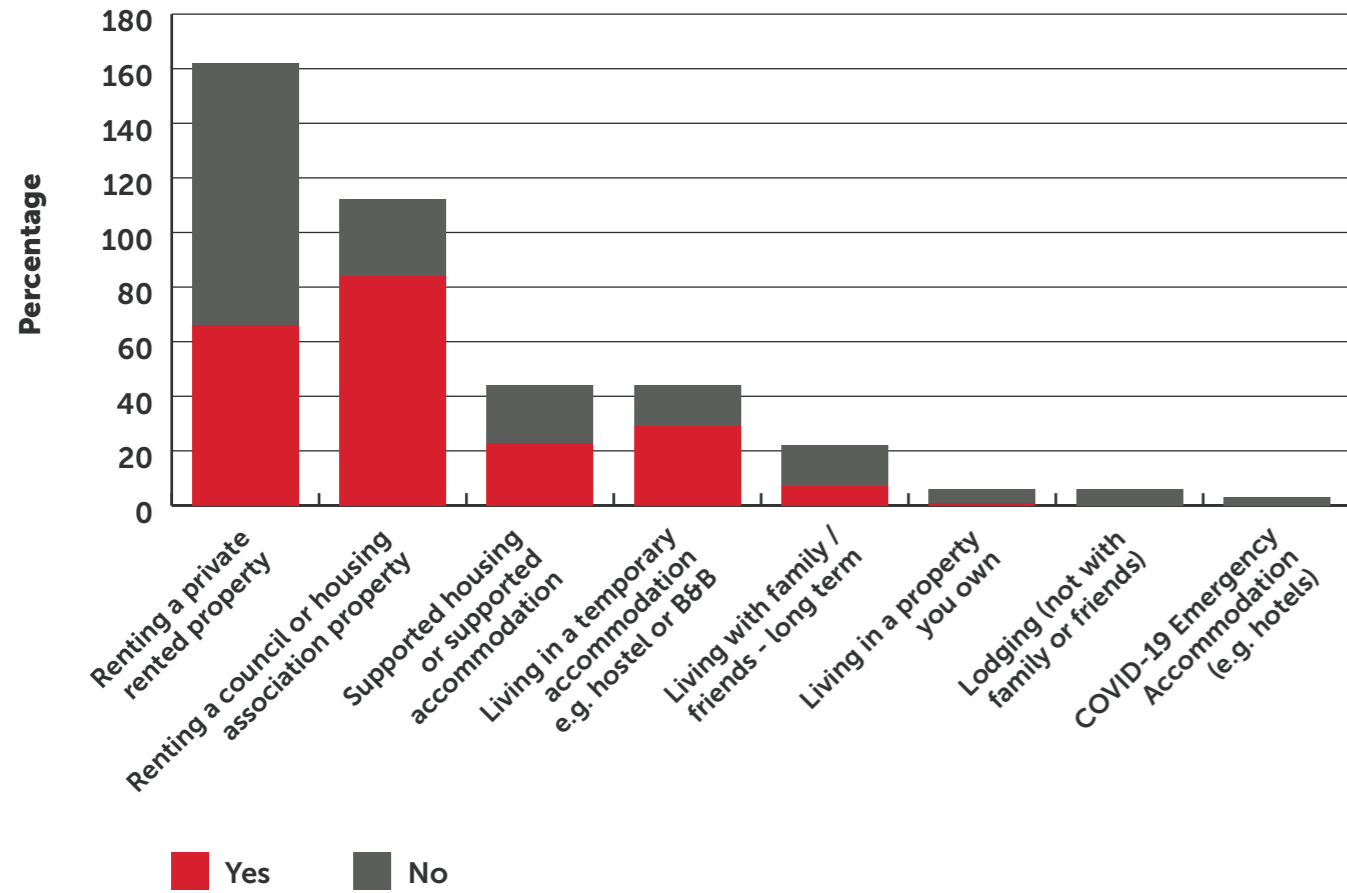
whilst if the housing outcome cannot be attributed to the work of Housing Options it is more likely to be negative. Overall this suggests that when key elements of the HRA are working well – when PHPs are used correctly, when appropriate support is given, and when experiences of staff are more positive – people's housing situations improve. This also demonstrates why it's important for as many people to be given 'full' support as possible rather than having a non priority cohort

Experiences of different types of support

There are a wide range of support that Housing Options can provide or signpost people to. Table 3.3 shows the type of support survey participants recall receiving, and shows that throughout this research, the most common form of intervention offered to those going through Housing Options was information on accessing the private rented sector, with 33 per cent of those we talked to in the most recent wave saying they received this support.

Despite the links between provision of support and positive housing outcomes, interview participants were often disappointed when they only received advice on accessing the PRS. Some had already investigated the PRS themselves and did not feel it was a sustainable solution to their situation,

either due to affordability issues and problems with landlords accepting applications of people receiving benefits, or with a child.

"£970 a month. I was shocked. I was shocked. How am I going to afford this? I sent [the housing officer] my income, and sent her my expenses, and literally I did not even have £970 to pay this bill. Considering I'm a single mum having to pay for everything, uniform, school, meals, clothes throughout the winter, and it's really expensive to be a single mum, plus some tax and all the bills included, and food, and the car insurance, and petrol, and

everything. It's, besides I also have debt and credit cards, so I wasn't able to pay £970 and I told her that... I was having meetings and stuff with people and I was going for views, but nobody would want to rent to me with a child... renting the house is even more difficult now. So you have to earn three times the rent and I don't earn that much, so I'm stuck."

"No-one is ready to give me housing because they will say that they, we don't take DSS, yeah, because you have little children."

Figure 3.8: Overall experiences of people with positive/negative housing outcomes
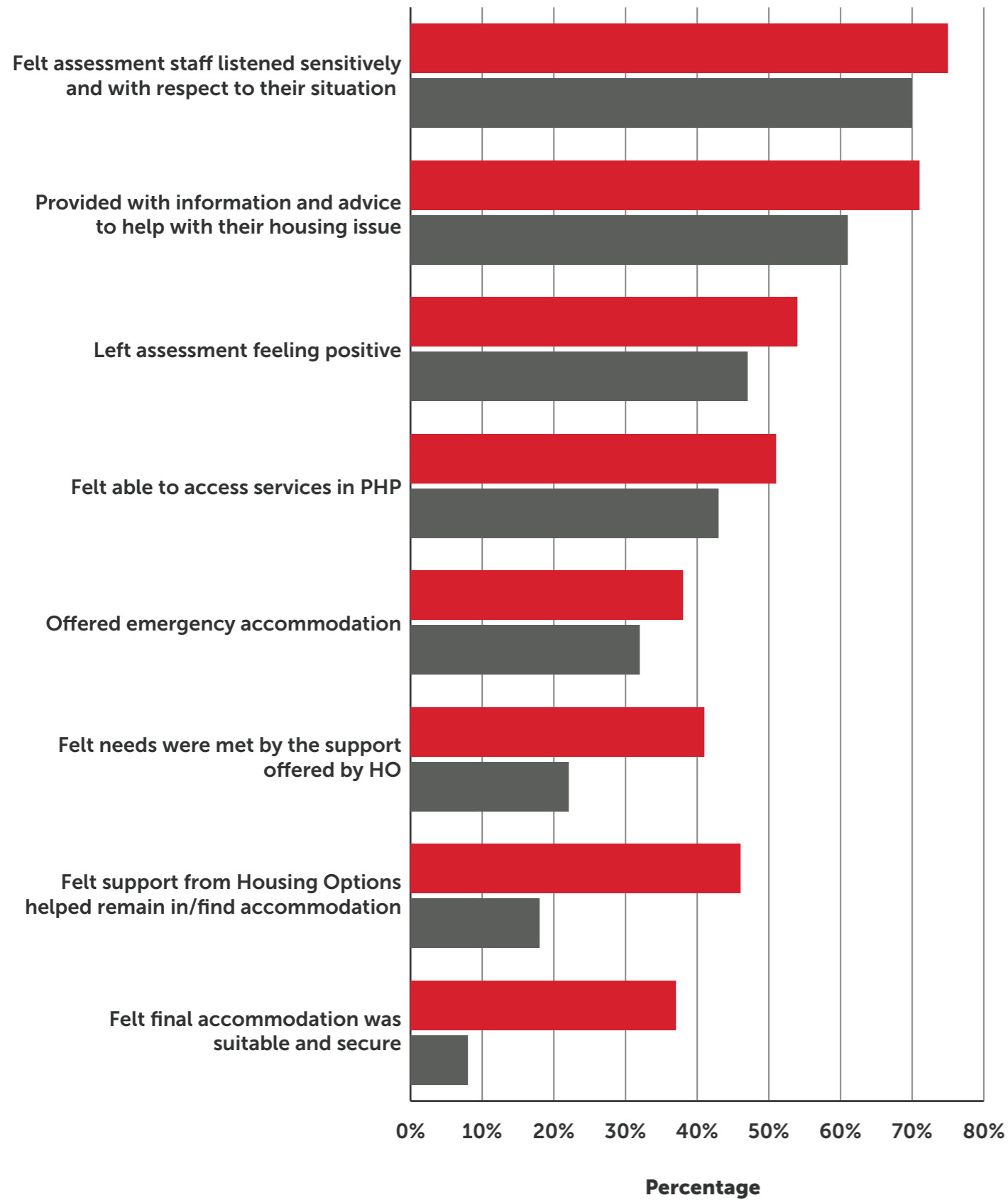
N=405-1432

Legend:
- % of those who had a positive housing outcome
- % of those who had a negative housing outcome

Figure 3.9: Proportion of people receiving support according to recall of having a PHP
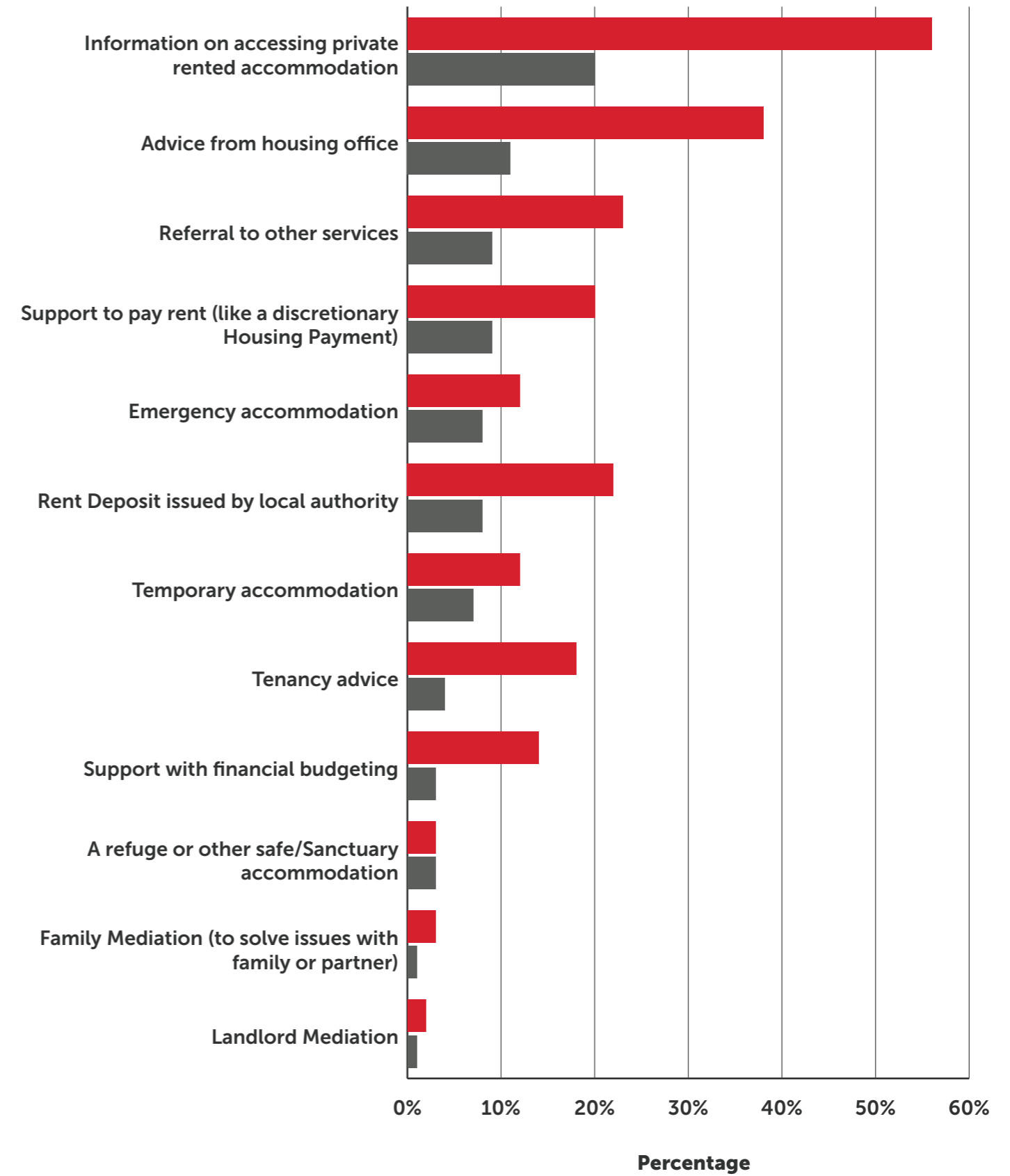
N = 448

Legend:
- Aware of having a PHP
- Not aware of having a PHP

Table 3.3: Types of support provided by Housing Options

	W1 No	W2 No	W3 No	W1 %	W2 %	W3 %
Information on accessing PRS	223	99	147	41%	23%	33%
Advice from housing office	179	104	92	33%	24%	21%
Referral to other services	135	104	63	25%	24%	14%
Support to pay rent (e.g. DHP)	96	47	58	18%	11%	13%
Rent Deposit issued by local authority	120	54	57	22%	12%	13%
Emergency accommodation	77	52	44	14%	12%	10%
Tenancy advice	86	62	41	16%	14%	9%
Temporary accommodation	80	61	39	15%	14%	9%
Support with financial budgeting	82	44	32	15%	10%	7%
A refuge or other safe	28	22	14	5%	5%	3%
Family Mediation	24	16	8	4%	4%	2%
Landlord Mediation	14	13	6	3%	3%	1%

Table 3.4: Referrals to other services provided by Housing Options

	W1 No	W2 No	W3 No	W1 %	W2 %	W3 %
Homelessness service or charity	27	24	28	5%	5%	6%
A drug or alcohol service	2	10	3	0%	2%	1%
Mental health service	7	10	3	1%	2%	1%
Jobcentre Plus	9	9	3	2%	2%	1%
Domestic violence services	4	4	2	1%	1%	0%
Legal service (like a law centre)	7	2	0	1%	0%	0%
Women's service	5	3	0	1%	1%	0%
Adult Social Services	2	4	0	0%	1%	0%
Migration service	0	1	0	0%	0%	0%
Children's Social Services	2	2	0	0%	0%	0%

Note: numbers supported into emergency and temporary accommodation do not include participants citing this as their current living situation upon completing the survey, highlighted earlier in this chapter.

"I think maybe they should probably be a bit more aware of when they say go private, they should be more aware of just how some, how a lot of, probably 90% of the landlords, of how very demanding they are of you not doing certain thing like owning a pet or being on benefits. Which is partly discrimination."

Some also described the properties that a housing officer suggested being irrelevant to their circumstances.

"[The housing officer] would phone me up and say look, I've got this place, I've got that place, this estate agent and he'd give me the numbers, so he didn't actually do the work, he'd give me the contacts to actually go and see them. And the people that and the estate agents that he sent me to was ridiculously, I don't know why he sent me there and he couldn't answer why he would do this. The estate agents, he was sending me to places where they don't take benefits. Even though he knew I was on benefits. He would send me to places and they'd say well we haven't spoke to [housing officer] and we haven't got any flats, I don't know why he sent you here. And it just seemed a lot, it seemed like he was showing that he was doing his job but he was giving me anything to do just to make him look like he's doing his job. Because the places that he was giving was non-existent to be honest."

Those who received less common forms of support such as mediation, referrals to other support services and rent deposits described these as being extremely valuable.

"I think they paid the first month or first week's deposit because this place was, they charge weekly. So I managed to get in. They paid for that. They set me up with some charity... to get me some furniture and I managed to pick up some other bits and pieces. Basically they actually did, so when I think about it they did help me get up and running, yeah, within a relatively short period of time."

"So then my mum agreed to everything, she said that she would help me stay home until I find a place, she signed the paperwork, the application was completed. She then told me what I needed to start looking for."

"I left thinking really positive like, 'I didn't realise I could go down the private route.' The reason that I had never done that was that because I couldn't do the first month's rent and deposit, they've made it so that I can now."

But there were examples of people not receiving relevant support for their needs, despite having been through traumatic situations like domestic abuse.

"I think for somebody who has been, has experienced domestic abuse I think that there should have been much more support

that was given to my family and I. That clearly wasn't given. Even if it's specifying posts to different agencies and everything that could help, I didn't receive anything like that, or my children didn't receive anything like that. I've had to fight for them to get support via, through CAMHS, through their schooling. Nothing was given through the council."

A younger participant described how a lack of financial support and advice on how to manage his finances and live independently meant that he was now in rent arrears.

"It was just basically, that's the property you're going to be getting, this is when you can view it, this is when you can move in, you're on your own, basically... we're still struggling with certain things now like water and sewage and things like that I fell behind on because, well I didn't know what number to call, I didn't know who to get in contact with or anything like that. It was the first time I'd lived on my own and no one helped me out with any of that. Sorting out the gas and electric, I had to rely on friends and stuff to help me out with, how to go about doing that. So yeah, it was a learning curve for me basically... I'm currently in rent arrears because when I was in the temporary accommodation, out of the rent which was above what the council would pay for what I was in, so I fell into rent arrears there and then because of other financial difficulties when I left a job, I had to wait so long to be able to transition my money over, I got behind with the rent again then."

Concerningly, in the final wave of research, it seems that the pandemic context led to a decline in the number of people reporting receiving every single type of support, relative to in

the first wave of our study, with some of the biggest reductions being seen among those who were given financial support to pay their rent or issued with a rent deposit (down from 18 per cent and 22 per cent, respectively, to 13 per cent and 13 per cent, respectively). For many people, financial support to access a PRS property is vital to allowing them to secure such accommodation. The continued trend of providing information on accessing the PRS without providing such financial support is likely to raise challenges around access and affordability.

In addition to being asked to detail what support was received, participants were asked specifically whether they were given advice or information to help with their housing issue. Between wave 1 and wave 3 there was an increase from 62 per cent to 73 per cent in the proportion of people who said yes (with the proportion across all three waves of research being 63%). This figure should arguably be higher given that all approaching Housing Options should be eligible to receive advice or information. There was also a reduction in the proportion saying advice they received from Housing Options was relevant, with only 60 per cent saying this in wave 3 relative to 74 per cent in wave 1. This indicates that the advice and PHPs being delivered may have become more generic as time went on, and that support given remotely was less personalised.

Interviews suggest that some irrelevant advice related to people being advised to pursue inappropriate accommodation options – for example, homes that were inadequate for someone's support needs or financial situation (as noted in section 3.3).

"I think the first, very early on they came, they said, we've got a house share for you of £x, and I just fainted – A, that it was a

house share for someone in my condition, and, B, because the costs were just phenomenal, and it was a nonstarter... they're not asking the right questions when they're trying to house people. Why would you stick someone with terminal cancer in a house to share with other people who, first of all, wouldn't know what the faintest to do in an emergency, and probably could not supply any kind of support to that person... Bedrooms, I've no doubt, on the first floor, no way of getting to the first floor. These people weren't thinking. They had no idea what they were dealing with, and I don't think they were particularly concerned with what they were dealing with, they didn't even ask the question."

Other participants described receiving nothing more than basic information, or even receiving advice that they thought would worsen their financial situation.

"The advice really was basically get into debt. Sorry we can't help you, you'll have to either get a loan or get a credit card so you can afford to do a deposit with a private landlord, which as you know with a private landlord or an estate agent the time you pay for fees and deposit and everything else you're talking about two, three grand by the time you've paid all their fees etc to rent a private property off them."

"I've been getting phone calls now and again but no help... I haven't got no help really... They didn't really give me that much help. They just gave me a little bit of information to get this and get that, that's it really."

"They gave me a booklet which had loads of different other housing associations, and loads of charities on them, loads of

different private rented situations, tenancies that they were pushing me more towards rather than them actually saying, we will help you. It was more, oh they'll help you over there, or see that person, or see that person, rather than them actually wanting to help me. And I found that quite, well, to be honest, off putting and a bit lazy to be fair."**

Whilst clearly the provision of support does have some positive impact on housing outcomes, these findings suggests that more can be done to make support less orientated around general advice and provision of accommodation, to be more holistic, addressing the wide range of issues people facing homelessness experience. This kind of support cannot be provided by Housing Options alone.

Prevention support
The best way to end homelessness is to prevent it from happening in the first place. A positive impact of the HRA has been a greater focus on prevention, with more people able to access support when they are at high risk of becoming homeless than before. In our study, 70 per cent of those at risk of homelessness remained or were accommodated after going to Housing Options, compared to only 43 per cent of those currently homeless. However, it is clear from this research that more can be done to improve prevention support both in how the HRA is delivered, but also in the wider homelessness system.

Our analysis shows there were missed opportunities to help people at risk of homelessness at an earlier stage. Figures 3.10 and 3.11 separate out the flows from wave 3 of the research into those owed prevention and relief duties. It shows that whilst the vast majority of those owed a prevention duty were previously 'housed', only 77 per cent of them are in this position after going through Housing

Options, with 8 per cent being placed in temporary accommodation and 15 per cent ending up sofa surfing. By contrast, the majority of those owed a relief duty were previously sofa surfing (57%) or rough sleeping (24%) but many of these households end up seeing improvements in their housing outcome, with 40 per cent being housed, 19 per cent placed in temporary accommodation and a further 29 per cent remained sofa surfing and 7 per cent rough sleeping.

This illustrates that there is more of an emphasis on relief work over prevention and often due to high caseloads.

Under the HRA Housing Options staff felt that they had few opportunities to deliver preventative forms of support, and that they were mainly dealing with 'crisis management' due to the huge numbers of people already facing homelessness and owed a relief duty, as well as issues highlighted in the previous chapter such as under-resourcing, and pressures to move people out of temporary accommodation. Staff highlighted how this had an impact on how much individuals were focused on delivering prevention.

"I'd like to see a prevention team, or some change in the structure where we could have more of a prevention focus. Because if you've got case officers who's got prevention cases and really urgent relief cases it's inevitable that they will spend the time on the urgent relief cases because those people have got nowhere to stay that night and are at risk because of that."
(Team Leader)

"So they, because they'd got that experience and skills around that I suppose and felt more confident about it. But yeah, we have got some staff who are, who will automatically think about prevention. We've got other staff who I would say still just, if you look at the case and you think,

they should be jumping on that as a prevention and we've still got work to do to get staffs' heads round that. But I think that the timing of the pandemic after HRA had been in for a couple of years by then?"
(Team Leader)

"For me with preventions, if you're under 35 it's a joke because there's nothing for my under 35s. The majority of my caseload is under 35s, parental evictions and for whatever reason they've got to leave where they are. They're not priority and there's no, you can't find a flat for £515 a month, or a room, even a room in a shared house. I have a landlord that sends me rooms every week and they all start at £870. So if that young person is not working, you're just renewing the prevention duty every 56 days because they're just, sometimes they're sofa surfing, they're from pillar to post or they're still at home waiting and it's just, it's practically impossible to rehouse."
(Frontline)

"I think there always was, anyway, but there are definitely certain officers that have more of a prevention head than others. There are some that will just instantly see a case and do everything in their power, they'll know everything about prevention, and they'll be really good with that. And some people that maybe won't, they do think about it, but maybe not in the same way as others. So I don't know, I think it's always, I think it's always, I mean even pre HRA I think it was always something, but I guess with HRA it's maybe made it a bit more kind of in the forefront, I guess, yeah."
(Team Leader)

Figure 3.10: Flow between living situation among those owed a prevention duty
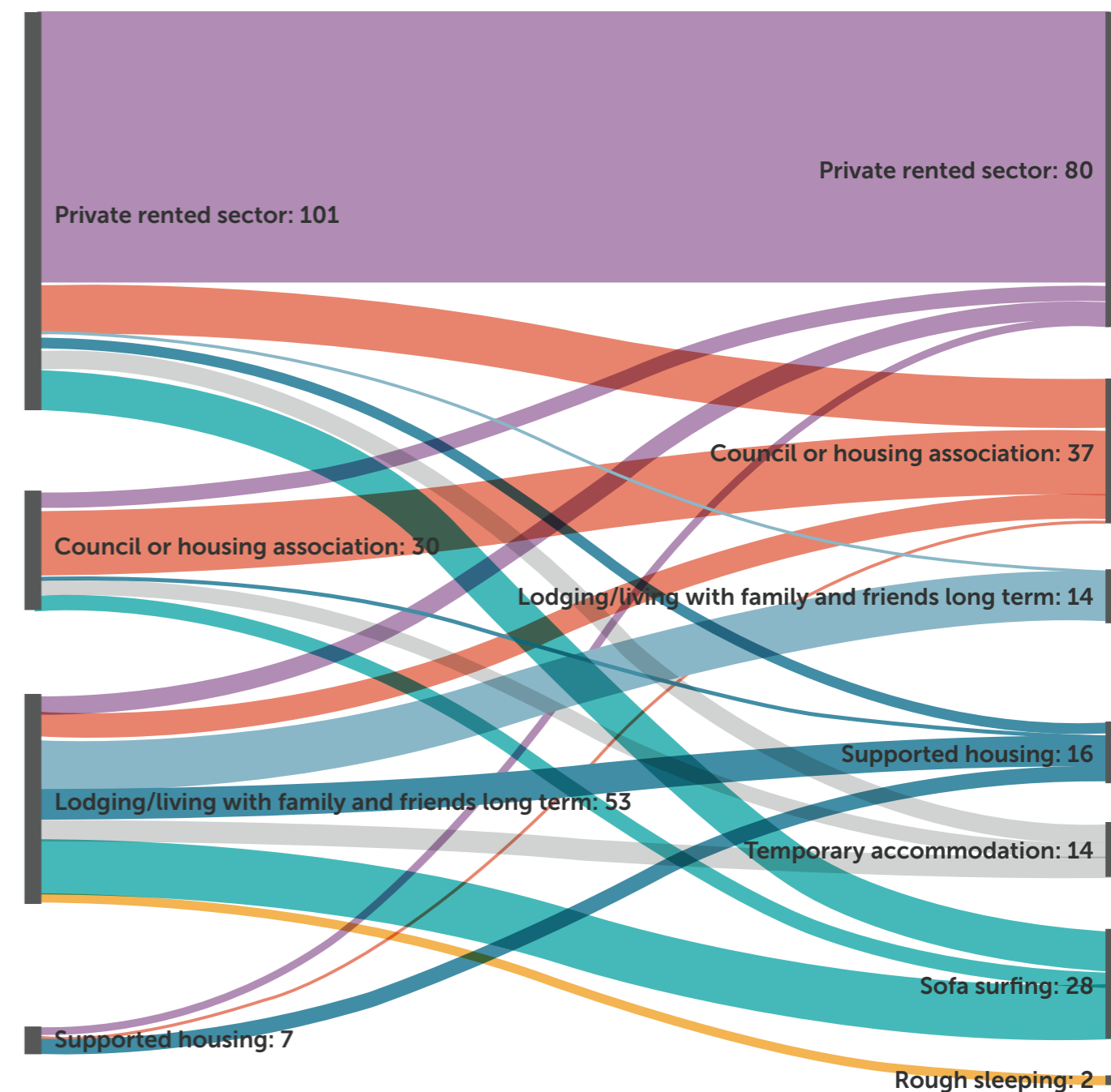
Figure 3.11: Flow between living situation among those owed a relief duty
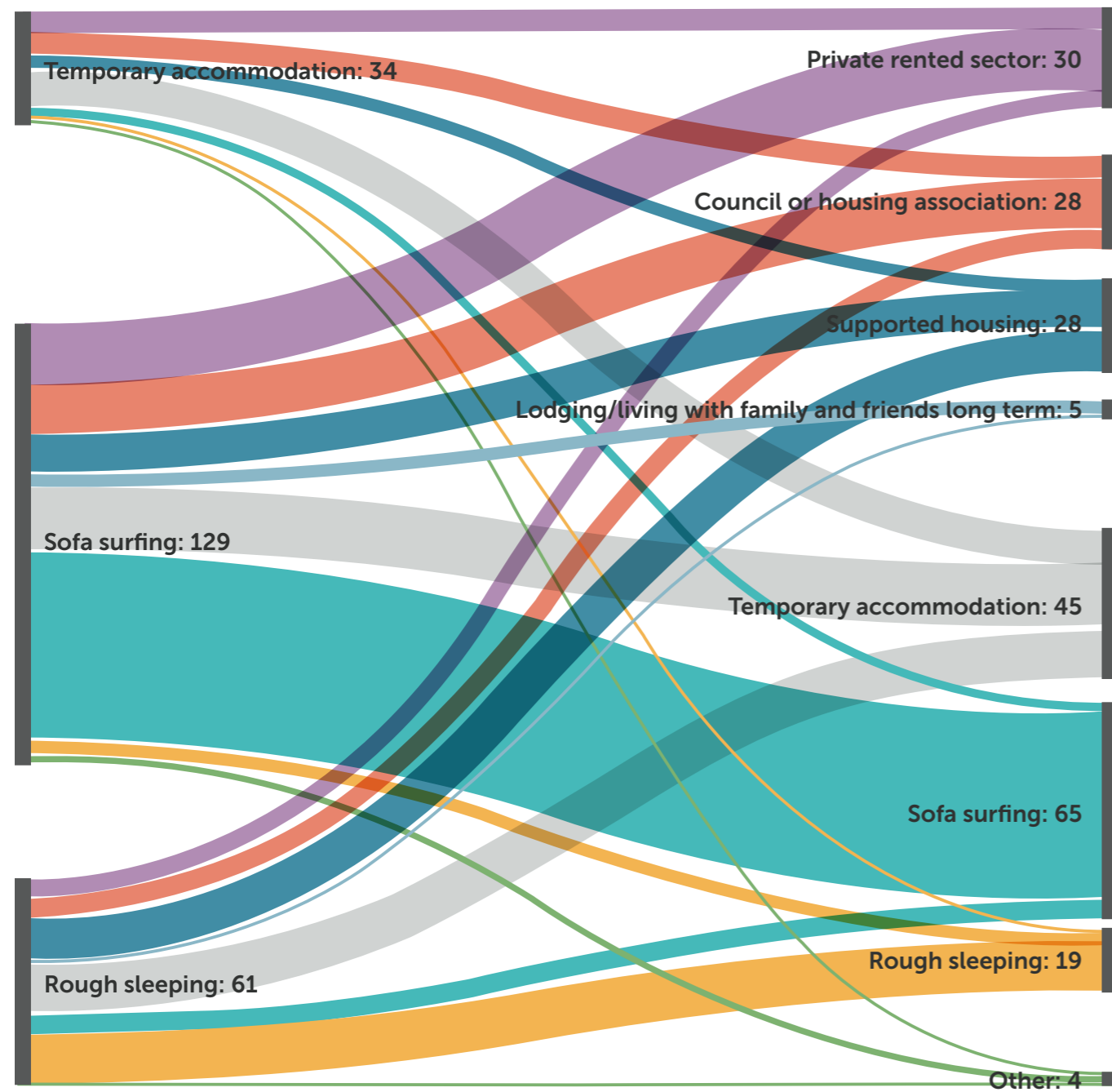
The fact more relief cases go onto new accommodation is partly due these options only becoming available when the relief duty is owed for people already experiencing homelessness. In practice this simply delays some people's homelessness. The issue comes to life when hearing from people who came to their council for support due to a 21 or other eviction issue. In many cases participants were told not to do anything until they had actually been evicted, under the threat that they would be considered intentionally homeless if they chose to leave earlier.

"As I said to them when I spoke to them I said, well, when the guy's trying to move me, the landlord, I said, I will be 55. I said, I don't really want to be sofa surfing at the age of 55… wh at I thought was if I told them before he started changing in case he come and knocked on the door and said you haven't got anywhere to live I don't, I thought let them know first that I was going to be in a situation. Because it's got to the stage where they're saying sit in your flat, wait till he turfs you out, get a court case, blah, blah, blah."

"Quite often you're asking someone to stay in a situation that they want to move aren't you? And that's, it doesn't feel like good customer service and where you're trying to, you recruit staff based on customer service skills and that's kind of where we all come from, from a bit of an ethos, so it often feels like the worst option to ask somebody to stay or, or stay in a very similar situation." (Team leader)

Some participants also reported out of desperation tried to be evicted from an unsustainable living situation, to accelerate support from the council.

"Even my landlord's put a letter in saying that he were making me homeless, he were going to evict me, because it's not suitable for me. He don't want me in that area, he's a lovely landlord, he doesn't want me in the area and still waiting… I had the letter and everything to evict me, they wouldn't accept it… They've just said that, just see what happens, basically. If he makes you homeless then we'll have to help you but until then we're not going to do owt, but he didn't want me physically homeless because obviously I've done nothing wrong to make myself homeless. It's not like I've not paid my rent or owt, it's just him trying to get me out."

"I've bid in the last, oh, two years bid on numerous properties where I'm number one on the list in order and not heard a thing from them… It's extremely frustrating to be quite honest. I should have had somewhere by now… So we [supported housing landlord and tenant] had a discussion on the phone just a few weeks ago and they said, well, the next step is we evict you or we give you an eviction notice. They don't like to do this. They will not evict anybody. I've been trying to get them to do this by not paying the service charge which is £15 a week."

When prevention support was given to help to remain in a property – via landlord mediation or challenging illegal evictions – this was found to be extremely valuable.

"[My housing officer has] basically been a voice of common sense and reason. I've been in touch with her over, every so often she's got in touch with me or I've got in touch with her when more things have happened in the house where I'm living. And say I get, got a new notice to quit and she helped, she's helped me negotiate with the landlord and calm the landlord down really. Because

this lady believes what I say about what's been happening to me, whereas the landlord doesn't believe me. And she's really been in my corner, you see. So when I've had problems at the house and the landlord has come down on me like a pile of bricks, she's been the voice of reason. And because she works for the council, she's got more knowledge and more authority about housing, more my landlord has."

"I ask council for that help because the property I was living previously was sold and there was few issues with the, that was the landlord was unfair to us and then I said that this is happening in the council. They give me a case and then it took about three weeks from when I started to say that I have to move out because previous landlord insist that we have to move, we have to move out because she sold the house. But they spoke with the landlord, they find me a place and then strictly I could move here to the new place, so it was amazingly quick... they spoke to my previous, former landlord, landlady it was actually. So a bit hard because they said that it is illegal... she had to give me the money which she owe, illegally from me. So everything was over quickly, cleverly and so I could sleep properly."

Some staff nevertheless felt that it was important for people facing homelessness to approach for help as early as possible and wanted there to be more opportunities to improve awareness of their services and reach people not coming forward for help.

"I was a support worker as well so it's just my instinct to want to be more supportive and I think I'm glad that there's more support workers in place now to work with people... but you don't have time together with all your clients. So this is what I keep saying to my

team leaders and trying to think that I need time to be able to do my job properly... So I'd like maybe a shift in having the space to be able to help people properly to then end the cycle of homelessness and therefore doing homelessness prevention rather than them keep coming back through."
(Frontline)

Some staff felt there was therefore a need to incorporate 'early intervention' approaches to preventing homelessness further upstream within the HRA.

"So the opinion of the act I think it's, it feels like it's a large step in the right direction but we're not finished yet in terms of the approach that local authorities should be taking around preventing homelessness. In the spirit of what gets measured, gets done, the fact that [colleague] talked about the 56 days threatened with homelessness whereas we know the right thing to do is to be as upstream as possible, even before people are threatened with homelessness and do work with them. And for us to be able to do that, apart from finding the funding to do it and we know it's the right thing we need to be able to somehow demonstrate the value of that and we need a mechanism of talking to government about that."
(Manager)

There was also a view that involving other agencies in the homelessness system was key for effective prevention.

"I think the culture for prevention though, it's just, it's got to, for it to be truly successful it's got to be much wider than the housing department and we're not backed up are we by adult and social care or mental health or NHS services. And everyone's view is,

if there's a problem with housing then the solution is to move you, housing location and it does nothing to teach resilience to people. So (...) let's resolve it, like ASB, let's resolve it by moving it and we never, we just have this cycle of continuous problems. And sometimes obviously it is the answer, but I'd say that that's a huge problem, locally in this authority and I suspect across, nationally as well, I think."
(Team Leader)

This suggests that as well as ensuring staff have the capacity to work with people under both prevention and relief duties, more prevention work needs to be happening 'upstream'. Currently people can only be helped under the prevention duty if they are facing homelessness in the next 56 days. In addition, people may not want or know to ask for help, whether because they are unfamiliar with homelessness services, they feel some embarrassment about approaching them, or may not have acknowledged the severity of their current housing situation. There are opportunities to help people in these situations both by involving other organisations in homelessness prevention, as well as doing more outreach work.

Emergency accommodation
Housing Options provide some people with emergency housing and accommodation, designed to be a short-term form of support given when someone has nowhere else to live whilst the council looks into other forms of support to resolve a person's housing situation. The use of emergency accommodation has been increasing for years, at an increasing cost to local authorities that staff told us prevented them from spending money on effective prevention activities.

The use of emergency accommodation increased in wave 3 as a result of Everyone In – 43 per cent of participants in the final wave were

offered emergency accommodation, compared to 33 per cent in the first wave. Across all years, around 4 in 5 people (81%) accepted the offer of emergency accommodation. In practice, there are many types of emergency accommodation: Table 3.5 shows what kinds of emergency accommodation people experienced in the final wave of research, with a fifth (21%) being placed in hostels.

People's views of their emergency accommodation therefore varied depending on how suitable it was for their situation. It was seen as extremely valuable when serving its immediate purpose to support someone without other options – particularly those with children.

"It wasn't like a bed and breakfast or something, it's, and even it's not a hotel. It's like Airbnb, I think it's agency, but they provide furniture, furnished house... It was three bedrooms, there was toilet, sitting room and we spent the whole week there following city centre. So a really good one, location and everything was available."

People struggled, however, when their accommodation felt unsafe.

"It was a private landlord... Paid for by the council... that was one house, three bedrooms. The other two guys, one had just come out of prison and was a schizophrenic. The other guy was basically an alcoholic who had been deported from America. So that wasn't, yeah, that wasn't ideal but if you, you're not going to be choosy when you don't have anywhere to go. But the problem, that was really expensive because that was £750 per each of us and then when we got there there wasn't even any beds. So they had to get us beds for the first night and it was all kind of thrown together and, yeah, and there was

Table 3.5: Types of emergency accommodation used, Wave 3

Emergency accommodation type	Count	Percentage
Hostels including direct access provision (e.g. emergency centres and short term homeless accommodation projects units)	34	21%
Bed & Breakfast hotels	31	19%
Self-contained accommodation (with exclusive use of a kitchen and bathroom)	30	18%
COVID-19 Emergency Accommodation (e.g. hotels)	20	12%
Shared accommodation (own room with shared kitchen and bathroom)	18	11%
Temporarily in Private sector accommodation paid for by the council	11	7%
Nightly paid hostels (crash pads, youth hostels)	7	4%
Temporarily in Council Housing	6	4%
To be confirmed – currently being assigned emergency accommodation	4	2%
Temporarily in Housing Association	2	1%

also rats in there as well. So it's, yeah, it's not, I wouldn't expect a hotel but it wasn't, I've been in two accommodations put up by the council and they've not been of similar standards as far as I was concerned."

Some felt their emergency accommodation was poor as a result of the pandemic, with more people needing to be accommodated at a time when people were at risk of infecting one another.

"I was in emergency accommodation, however it wasn't really suitable. It, I was shielding as well at the time, and this was prior to vaccinations, and of course it was a large, shared block."

"It had been basically a hotel for builders and people who stay while they're working, basically, it went from that to being a homeless shelter and the people what was coming in, there were drugs freely being taken, people stealing things out of every room, everything like that… I wouldn't go outside because they were always outside smoking drugs, well, everything like that. As soon as you got to the hall going, coming into the reception, you could smell drugs and such, and I just didn't feel safe."

Those accommodated in hotels during the pandemic described a mixture of experiences. One person had a mix of high-quality facilities but a lack of basic necessities like a bathroom, or a kitchen.

"At the hotel where they've lodged me, so they only used to provide breakfast… there was no cooking in the hotel… I literally had – I was left out of pocket. With that, I had to feed me and son for the four weeks that we were there because we didn't obviously have a cooker, so by the time I'd buy the hotel food, which was like £12 per meal, or £13 per meal every day for four weeks, or I'd do a McDonald's or KFC or whatever."

Another person described one hotel being uninhabitable.

"The first one where they put in were absolutely disgusting, and covered in bugs, and cockroaches, and shit, so I left… I'd turn the light off and then somebody phoned me and I answered phone and it were, there were just bugs, and roaches, and shit everywhere, all over room, but they scuttle away very quickly don't they, so you can't get a picture neither… so I walked out, like 1 o'clock in the morning, phoned them next morning, I were like, yeah, get me dealt with sort of thing, because I am not going back there… after that they moved me somewhere else, a different hotel, and that was not covered in bugs, so it was an improvement… There were a little kitchen area, nothing that you could really use properly, but it was manageable for the time being."

There was also evidence of people staying for longer in emergency accommodation than it is designed for, and this becoming worse under Everyone In. The average number of days spent in emergency accommodation increased from over the three waves of research from 8 days to 21 days and then finally 47 days in the final wave. The amount of time that those spending longest in this accommodation remained there for increased from 95 days in wave 1 to 125 days in wave 3.

Whilst a small part of the increase in time spent in emergency accommodation in the final wave of our research is driven by the provision of emergency covid-19 accommodation - with the average number of days spent in this sort of accommodation being 120 days – those in other forms of emergency accommodation also saw big increases in the length of time spent there – with the average number of days spent in non-covid 19 emergency accommodation being 41 days in the final wave. Participants described how longer stays in emergency accommodation were detrimental to their emotional wellbeing, and made them feel insecure about their living situation.

"You put me in a hotel for four weeks, you weren't giving me any money, I was feeding myself and bathing my six-week-old baby in a sink… You have to think about people's kids, obviously their lifestyles, you can't just do things to people because you wanted, you're ticking off a list."

Worryingly, at the time of speaking to us, 29 per cent of participants did not think their local authority was looking to move them into a more permanent accommodation – making some people feel they would simply return to a cycle of being homeless once again. Similarly some simply did not want to use emergency accommodation if they felt it was unsafe or could be detrimental to them.

"INTERVIEWER: If you went to the council and they offered you a hostel or emergency accommodation, would you say yes to that?

"PARTICIPANT: No, because I've just got off heroin and stuff like that, and hostels are full of smackheads and that, I've had real bad, I've actually gone to a hostel and I ended up on gear through

being in a hostel. There's more drugs in hostels than there is on fucking streets."

Others felt they would no longer be eligible for such accommodation following the end of the pandemic.

"I know they did, the only reason I got that accommodation in the first bloody place was because of Covid. And now we're out of Covid they've told me that they wouldn't, emergency accommodation wouldn't be available to me at the moment."

3.5 What the pandemic tells us about housing outcomes

"All Covid did was highlighted how bad the situation was in the first place. It wasn't that the situation was great before, because there weren't properties. The reality, there weren't enough properties, Covid just highlighted every single aspect of unfairness throughout everything really, education, housing, you name it. Poverty, Covid just highlighted everything. Can't hide it anymore, it's out there."
(Frontline)

After the Covid-19 crisis began, the Everyone In initiative saw thousands of people rough sleeping or at risk of doing so supported into accommodation, with local authorities given funding and guidance to support this. In addition, the government introduced a range of measures aimed at supporting people's financial situations.

In previous sections we have described how in wave 3 of the research housing outcomes improved – whilst the levels of support offered dropped and interactions with staff worsened. Much of this is likely due to the influence of extra workload in general and the emergency nature of the early

pandemic. Our conversations with staff about Everyone In and the pandemic, however, reveal much about how the HRA works under normal circumstances, as well as during the pandemic.

The pandemic increased levels of housing need more generally, as well as making services accommodate those normally excluded for not meeting eligibility criteria, due to the ongoing health emergency. This led to improved support for people sleeping rough in particular. Some staff suggested this was proof it was possible to help people previously seen as too challenging to support.

"Everyone In wasn't just about accommodating people that we wouldn't have done normally, although there was big part of that, Covid also created a lot of homelessness for people that we would have a duty towards normally."
(Manager)

"At the start of the pandemic some of the people we put in the hotels and apartment blocks who were entrenched rough sleepers, were people who had been out on the streets for years, where we've been trying to work with them and get them into places, but virtually everywhere had turned them down or evicted them. And we've had a few issues I have to say in the hotels and I've been tearing my hair out occasionally, you had a few sleepless nights with some of the individuals, but by and large we haven't had anything major happen and you think to yourself, if these people were that dangerous, how is it we've managed to keep them in a hotel for months on end when everybody else has said, 'no, too dangerous, too risky'?"
(Team Leader)

"Everyone In specifically, from a rough sleeper point of view it's been fantastic because at one point we had circa 200 people accommodated in temporary accommodation of some description, which was amazing because those people would otherwise probably be out on the street or maybe sofa surfing."
(Frontline)

"Under the government's Everyone In initiative we opened up accommodation, which at one point we had 4 units, 2 hotels, 2 apartment blocks, for rough sleepers including rough sleepers with No Recourse to Public Funds and we've still got 17 people accommodated in that route at the moment."
(frontline)

Everyone In allowed councils to focus on solutions to rough sleeping in a way that previously was not possible. Housing Options worked closer with the rest of the council to find solutions for cases that are often too complex for one service to solve on their own. This led to a reduction in rough sleeping which services were proud of and want to be able to maintain.

"We were so chuffed to get numbers on the streets, I know it's counted by the annual and bi monthly counts, down to below 20s in January which was absolutely incredible for [area]. It's on the rise, yeah, but we don't want it to get anywhere near where it was before and I think In May 2019 there were 110 people and I think there were mid 50s this May. So I this is us trying to, working with the HRA, working with outreach to try and keep the numbers of people on the streets lower."
(Manager)

In this context, caseloads increased, and accommodation needed to be found quickly, all whilst LAs were

adapting to remote working and lockdown restrictions. Staff noted they created action plans that were less formal than usual, and that statutory paperwork such as PHPs were back-dated afterwards.

"We had to basically act, what was it, 24, 48 hours wasn't it. So we struggled if I'm honest to keep up on the practicalities of the legislation so to keep up on doing Personalised Housing Plans, that sort of stuff immediately. We literally, we must have done over 2,000 placements during Everyone In so it was an incredible task."
(Manager)

"I think possibly then I would agree with the scrambling around afterwards doing Personalised Housing Plans was the main issue, not necessarily acceptance of any duties but actually making sure that there were plans in place for everyone purely because of the time span in moving people in negotiation with hotels etc. But, yeah, most people went in with a plan and plans to move on from that accommodation afterwards. Sorry, no not necessarily a personalised housing plan, [...] but we knew what their plan and their exit was going to be but we did have to catch up."
(Manager)

"So it did cause ourselves a bit of an issue of making sure that we've got everybody and everything was recorded right and all the rest of it but that, I'm confident that did happen but it did happen after the fact for some cases because the key thing for that individual really was that they had somewhere to, we could either get them off the streets so we could get them out of the shelter that night and be accommodated."
(Manager)

The health restrictions of the pandemic also meant that cases could not as easily be discharged using typical strategies. Staff who normally used intentionality or evictions from temporary accommodation said they needed alternative methods to close cases. This shows how such measures were not always used as a 'pure' way of judging whether or not someone should receive support in the first place but were used as purposeful ways of excluding people from support in the context of limited housing options. The central government directives of the pandemic therefore seemed to disrupt Housing Options culture and gatekeeping practices, leading to improved outcomes for lower priority cases.

"We weren't evicting people from temporary accommodation because we couldn't and even if we would have wanted to they would have then been picked up through Everybody In anyway, so it became a futile course of action even if we wanted to take that course of action. And if we're just thinking about decision making, if there was some cases where, we made for example an intentionally homeless decision or we might have made an intentionally homeless decision, because we knew that, well that's just going to end up with, on a case by case basis, but sometimes you know that, that individual is inevitably going to end up rough sleeping and just picked up by another team and it, a pointless exercise so we tried to look for other outcomes rather than just intentionally homeless and off you go, see you later. So we just tried to be a bit more, just getting better outcomes really."
(Team Leader)

"Me personally I was using the HRA five tests at the assessment stage but it was more like the pandemic was almost more of a priority. So

for example like the enquiries and investigations that we usually make I was definitely not quite as inquisitive."
(Frontline)

This was echoed by participants who saw Everyone In as being responsible for them receiving the support that they did.

"If I would have been made homeless and been in this situation without Covid, I think to be honest, I'd still be one of these people between the cracks. I wouldn't have been seen. It was only because of Covid and everybody being put into the hotel where I was that they actually picked up on me, otherwise I just would have become another statistic. That's my honest opinion, because before Covid, how many people were just on the street, sleeping rough? As soon as Covid starts, they was literally going round and taking everybody off the street and putting them into hotels and, so if that wouldn't have been the case, I think a lot of homeless people it would have been Hell. We'd still be in the same boat."

"If it wasn't for governmental pressure I think at the time to get as many homeless people off the street as possible I probably would still be homeless."

The increased demand and broader eligibility criteria meant that normal discharge routes were removed. However, this also increased caseloads, which as shown elsewhere in this report had a negative impact on the quality of support.

"The threshold's low at the moment anyway with regards to the legislation and obviously with the pandemic hitting, the threshold was not there at all really, because we had... Everyone In at one stage and obviously that had a massive

impact in regards to obviously officers then having caseloads, high cases in general, with having more cases where they are actually in temporary accommodation."
(Team Leader)

"So that, that was probably a difficult thing, because that was quite stressful for us because normally you try and assess, does this person really need temporary accommodation, but it, but the threshold lowered so much that it was really, really difficult to almost refuse anybody."
(Team Leader)

"Well in terms of the rough sleepers, I think the legislation bit was effectively redundant, because what we were having to do is that when, particularly when we was having to scale back some of the accommodation, we were having to think, well we're not just going to put people back out onto the streets again. So, within reason regardless of whether people were owed a duty or not, if they were in housing need, we would try to get them some accommodation."
(Team Leader)

Staff also described how ordinarily, even if these situations are not always appropriate, there is a reliance on people with family/friends, including sofa surfing, whilst other activities are ongoing, such as looking for a suitable PRS tenancy, arranging benefits to cover new housing costs, or waiting to successfully bid for social housing. But the pandemic meant that for health reasons fewer people could remain in such living arrangements whilst waiting for more permanent accommodation. As well as pushing staff to use more appropriate accommodation options, this was also a drivers of increased use of temporary accommodation through the pandemic.

"But you couldn't exactly in the middle of the pandemic when socially distancing, negotiate for a 17 year old to go and stay with a 70 year old grandparent because it could be against the social distancing. So cases that would never ever have gone into temporary accommodation before, were going into temporary accommodation. And that obviously was difficult for our senior managers sometimes outside of the immediate service when people were saying, well why are your temporary accommodation numbers so high, because the actual number of new homeless applications wasn't, didn't reflect that."
(Team Leader)

"I think the temporary accommodation has been the single biggest problem for us through the pandemic. Because as well as the rough sleepers, what you might call the ordinary homeless cases if you can call them ordinary, and that's a weird way of putting it, well a much higher proportion of that client group were going into temporary accommodation because prior to the pandemic if we'd established that somebody couldn't remain in their existing property, we'd often say, have you got family and friends you can stay with and perhaps negotiate with family and friends."
(Team leader)

"I think this is a positive thing in some ways, but I can't, I'm just thinking of one particular example where it was a lady in priority need and with a child, who was living with a friend and in, if she'd been able to continue living with that friend we would have, from our point of view we'd have been happy about that but obviously that isn't a stable home for that mum and child and they were asked to leave because the resident

was home working and trying to home, she was a teacher trying to home school her class and having someone else sleeping on her sofa wasn't compatible with working from home. So I think it brought into, there was a lot less goodwill for really genuine reasons. And but in some ways I think, well, that wasn't a stable home anyway for the, for that person, so is it a bad thing necessarily, even though it put pressure on our service." (Team Leader)

Housing Options services needed to find routes for cases which would not normally get access to accommodation via the HRA. Services used a mixture of approaches including using the Localism Act and giving direct offers for the accommodation that they had available. In some cases people were placed directly into more permanent accommodation.

"As part of Everyone In we went to direct offers only in the early days and we suspended HomeChoice and by far the way that most offers came through are in house landlords. Some housing associations almost stopped doing lettings in that period of time although they did comply with us making direct offers to their vacancies just for homeless clients so that was useful." (Manager)

"We had like a direct let process where, well we've still got it to a degree, but because no properties were being advertised for people to bid on through choice based lettings, so any properties that were becoming available we just had control of those within, between rehousing services and ourselves and matched people directly to those properties ourselves according to who we knew had got the greatest need." (Team Leader)

"We placed people under localism into emergency accommodation which, so people that were ineligible but also those that are non priority need so those that wouldn't necessarily have usually been placed into accommodation. So, yeah, so how effective did we find, I think it's been useful so we have gone back and done personalised plans for everyone so I think that was useful to manage expectations for clients, yeah." (Manager)

Officers talked about other tools they used more than they had previously to support cases, such as DHPs and an uplift in benefits.

"You seen much more rent arrears and Housing Benefit, DHP has been a good thing, it has been there to help." (Frontline)

"During the pandemic that's a tricky set of scenarios because people are not able to work and then, you can find a property but they're not working so they're benefit capped and you're in this real ditch really and it's difficult to get out of it because there's not much in the way of employment and DHP isn't forever, so there's an issue there that became maybe even more apparent during the pandemic." (Frontline)

Hotels were used to increase the options available to implement Everybody In. Whilst staff saw that these were not ideal for many cases, the needs of the situation required a fast increase in options.

"The first one that we opened and the first one we that we were using was quite problematic at times it would be fair to say because you can't just sweep everyone up off the street, it's got complexities, place them into something they're not necessarily

used to without any support. So we did have quite a lot of problems with one particular hotel and had to put the [charity name] support in as a result of that and unfortunately, we lost some clients through that but obviously, we kept, swooped them up and placed them elsewhere." (Manager)

Staff felt that most of the cases placed in hotels went on to a more permanent accommodation. This was achieved through joint working and ensuring there was a plan for each case and appropriate options available.

"It's mainly been through our operational management group meetings so we've closed two of the hotels now and we've moved people either onto private sector accommodation, HomeChoice, or perhaps within our commissioned pathway depending on the level of support that each individual client needs. And, yeah, we're due to close the next one at the end of July, most people I would say have gone out with an option so, yeah." (Manager)

"It's been a massive piece of work hasn't it but I can pay testament to the amount of work that goes into identifying somebody's move on option and its work that's done with us and our partners. And when we were in the office more there were whiteboards with numbers and move on options and I think that collaboration and joint working really paid off. But as well as moving on from some of the, everyone in sites, two of the sites, in particular, the one that was the youth hotel provided a really useful place for people to go even before supported housing so we held a lot of people who were chaotic in there who would have not fared very well in some of our larger supported housing schemes." (Manager)

Learning from the experience of Everyone in and the success of the more joined up approach to tackling more complex cases led to the creation of more flexible options, with increased support for those who need it.

"It acted a bit like an improved version of a shelter that we commissioned [charity] to run which then had to close because of Covid and part of the move on planning we've had to replicate, look to try and replicate that provision elsewhere but we haven't got a building that we can do that in so we've been using a core and cluster approach for some of our houses where we've got a number of shared rooms. So we've got the house and they're managed by another organisation so we're bringing a few of the houses together then providing high levels of intuitive floating support from ... and that's the meeting that Andy had to go to just then because I think we noticed that that was a really valuable resource for enabling people to come off the streets who wouldn't have fared very well in other commissioned services." (Manager)

However, the main barrier identified to this approach working in the longer-term is the availability of move-on options, so that there is room in rough sleeper-focused accommodation for those who need it.

"The big issue is move on and if we could get better, horrible phrase, if we can move people in a timely way better throughput then we can help more people, we can get more people housed who are rough sleeping. So it's been a big push and a big drive for us and the navigators that we commission in the pathways to move people on from supported housing to enable those that were in accommodation that need support to be housed

in that accommodation. So it's a massive organisational piece I think and one of the things that we're really proud of is that very few people have returned to rough sleeping compared to the numbers that we've housed. I think around about 800 more than 800 people now have been moved on positively, from everyone in accommodation and I think it was maybe in, it was over ten maybe in the mid teens of people that have gone back out onto the streets at this point in time who once were placed in accommodation so, yeah, really please with that."
(Manager)

"So that was just the most efficient way really using the properties at the time for the people who needed them most. But yeah, there's, the lack of move on accommodation, because obviously people weren't moving out generally, weren't moving around, so just such a lack of move on accommodation. And in the early months of the pandemic some of the supported accommodation providers just weren't brining any vacancies online either so we couldn't access them, so we're just getting more and more people in temporary accommodation that were just, had no, on very, very limited options for."
(Team Leader)

Temporary accommodation filling up quickly in turn affected how quickly services could respond to new emergency cases. For accommodation designed to move people off the streets quickly to not become a permanent form of accommodation and work effectively, there needs to be enough suitable options afterwards, whether this be through social properties or affordable and stable PRS tenancies.

"But when we've been doing the assessments, I suppose we were set up really to assess people and then refer, try and find same day options to prevent homelessness. And with the supported accommodation people haven't been, no one's been leaving any of the accommodation, so we haven't really had those options to get people housed quickly."
(Team Leader)

According to the 2022 England Homelessness Monitor, people working on housing and homelessness issues in local authorities, the public sector and in charities have said they think the pandemic has helped to 'accelerate' the aim of the HRA to support more single households, as a result of fewer families approaching local authorities for homelessness support in the first year of the pandemic, as well as Everyone In providing new support to rough sleepers (who are often though not always single).[36] What interviews with staff also reveal is how central government leadership can also lead to positive improvements in service provision and culture. The pandemic also changed the homelessness system to one where the use of eligibility criteria reduced greatly, and housing outcomes improved – raising questions about the value of these criteria in the first place.

3.6 Why Housing outcomes are constrained

Staff felt there were a range of issues that affected their ability to deliver positive Housing Outcomes – including lack of funding, short-term funding, under-resourcing (as noted in the previous chapter). In addition, they suggested that the people who were most likely to end

up in a positive housing situation were those who could navigate the system – for example, by providing relevant evidence to support their application. This suggests once again some bias towards those who are more 'proactive' in their homelessness application, and some frustration with those perceived as not making an 'effort' to resolve their own homelessness.

"Because of the amount of demand and the amount of things you're expected to do within a timescale... you're going to get, hopefully one good assessment that you get an idea of what that client's needs are. If they then don't produce any evidence to substantiate that or they don't have any evidence to substantiate that it's, the whole case can just fall by the wayside, basically, if the customer is not proactive. There's a lot of proactive, there's a lot of expectation that they need to be proactive to actually get a result because, and that's because we don't have the time that we really need to do, the level of enquiries that we are expected to do to satisfy ourselves and to get to a reasonable conclusion for that client. So, it does have an impact."
(Frontline)

"[We're] trying to get people to take some responsibility to help themselves and we're, all we're meant to be doing is giving them direction [and] providing often a lot of information regarding private rented, despite the fact that everyone, as has been said again wants social housing. It's sort of like you need, we don't just magic stuff out of nowhere, you need to be doing this and making efforts and that, and yeah. As, again I don't, they often don't even open with the housing planner or the emails, let alone go out there and try and do something themselves. I mean

yeah, that's not everyone, but a large part of the people that come through to us, yeah."
(Frontline)

But the greatest barrier identified by staff to achieving more positive housing outcomes was the lack of available housing, noted by many different members of staff in our interviews and focus groups with them. People felt this was true across different types of tenure, and felt their area had both limited social housing stock, as well as a private rented sector that was either also limited and/or expensive.

"There isn't no accommodation, certainly temporary accommodation, there's no temporary accommodation and again it all falls back to housing. There's no housing, some people are in TA for three, four, five years. Some people are in B&B for longer than the required time, because again there's no housing so it all comes back to housing."
(Frontline)

"We're seeing property prices still rising, we're seeing rent's still rising, we're seeing the private sector, in the last 15 years, 20 years, someone correct me if I'm wrong, having replaced the social sector as the second biggest form of tenure after owner occupation. And so, yes, it is a challenge and so delivering on the HRA is difficult simply because it assumes that there are properties available for everyone who would be owed either a prevention or a relief duty."
(Manager)

"Obviously it hasn't brought more options and outcomes for people, so it's not like we've got this Act and then suddenly there's more options to move people to, that's been, that's the problem I think... The fact that there just

36   See page 55-60, Watts, B., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Young, G., Fitzpatrick, S. and McMordie, L. (2022) *The Homelessness Monitor: England 2022*. London: Crisis. https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessnessknowledge-hub/homelessness-monitor/england/the-homelessness-monitor-england-2022/

isn't enough resources out there in terms of accommodation, private rented, supported accommodation, to use, to relieve homelessness or prevent homelessness within them 56 day periods. And I think that's the bottom line with it.
(Team Leader)

"I do think, for those more complex cases, it's, we could have all the time in the world and we just don't have the resources, the availability of properties for them. But that's, I don't think that's the HRA's problem, I think that's an availability issue."
(Team Leader)

Related to this, some staff noted that investment in Local Housing Allowance rates was too low for them to have an impact on people being able to afford accommodation in the PRS.

"We identified that on Right Move... 2% of all properties being let were at or lower than local housing allowance rates. So that's a scary challenge but at the same time there's an effect there on low income households, whether or not they're waged as well as benefits recipients or they're just purely living on welfare benefits, there is an issue that even if the rent is covered as a result of the reason LHA uplift and we're pegged now for the foreseeable future at £100 a month per property type than we were pre pandemic that is indeed helpful but it still only accounts for, let's say somewhere between 2% and 5% of the private rented market."
(Manager)

"The amount the landlord can charge... I'd have it even cheaper than [LHA rates] because if somebody works full time, but they're not on a, they're just on a standard wage, how are you going to afford to pay £500, £600 a month, plus everything else?

And you see some people's rent that's over a grand, I just don't think it's reasonable. And I think it should be cheaper than the LHA rate, to be honest, but I think they should definitely cap how much landlords can charge rent, yeah, definitely. And I think that would increase housing dramatically, to be honest, and the standard of it."
(Team Leader)

A consequence of this was the over-use of temporary and emergency accommodation, including inappropriate forms of temporary accommodation like B&Bs. In addition, whilst there was evidence of people spending long periods of time in temporary accommodation, the high cost of using this amount of temporary accommodation also led to a pressure to discharge people from it into other options.

"We can only do what we can do, we are at the end of the day here to try and enforce the housing law, but yeah, when you have senior management saying, 'Oh, but you've got to try and prevent homelessness and drive down temporary accommodation,' it's like, well but look at the legislation, if the client meets the legislation how can we not prevent that person going into interim temporary accommodation?"
(Frontline)

"We've got a backlog of people who are on the homeless priority band which would be B and B and it's taking a lot longer, so people are staying in temporary accommodation a lot longer, people are having to keep people open on their caseloads and monitoring those cases a lot longer. So it's all having, I think the fact it's taking so much longer to rehouse people has had, as a result of, which was as a result of the pandemic."
(Frontline)

"From a safeguarding perspective, our offer of temporary accommodation is usually, nine times out of ten, it's a refuge. And the refuges, I totally understand any reluctancy to go into them, because they can be anywhere in the UK."
(Frontline)

"[Our area] now has a significant overspend on temporary accommodation and that threatens our ability to do, to fund prevention services so that's the big challenge that I've got is that since inheriting that pressure and the fact that we've got loads more people in TA because of what happened with Covid there is a payoff between covering TA costs and funding prevention services."
(Manager)

"Some of our emergency accommodation types, and I'm only saying this because it's going to be anonymised, just to put it out there, is some of our providers are corrupt and really unprofessional and I think they're nasty pieces of work and we don't have a choice but to work with them because we've got to house our clients."
(Frontline)

People facing homelessness were often aware of the shortage of housing as well.

"I'll tell you what else annoys me, you go round and you see all these empty houses and everything like that and you see big houses and everything like that... Why don't councils convert them old houses into something and put them in?"

"That you have to wait for two years for one property is not the fault of the council houses but it's the lack of the houses that are available, The whole service has failed in... trying to get me a

place... But I don't think that was their fault, it was more like if there are no houses available then they can't really do much about that."

This was brought to the forefront of experiences in a few different ways. For example, people applying for council housing often noted the huge waiting lists they were part of, with those in lower bands saying it seemed unlikely they would move into social housing in the near future.

"I was just basically looking for houses and bidding on them, bidding takes time, because there are about 200 people applying for the same house, and the certain places which everybody prefers... It takes real, sometimes it takes up to four years to find a place."

"I were arguing with them about the sequence, like you go in band, D, C, B, whatever, and what I were arguing about, I'm in band B, but I don't see, everybody that tells me, you won't get anything unless you're in band A, so I'm thinking what's the point in having all them other bands, you might as well just disregard them, and, because every time you bid, you won't be getting owt."

Some described being given advice on how to navigate social housing waiting lists tactically in order to increase their chances of finding housing.

"They've mainly told me to bid on Homechoice and just be mindful of where I'm bidding. If I bid for like high rises and in rubbish areas I'm most likely to get it."

"The lady was trying to, she was trying to see if I could stay longer in my current accommodation, and in my mum's, at my auntie's at the time. And she said, oh if you do manage to stay, we will put you higher up on the social housing waiting list, and it would,

because I would be considered to have been preventing my own homelessness."

One person also described feeling less likely to succeed in bidding for social housing due to having lower digital access and skills.

"You have to bid on the net. So you have to either have a smartphone or you have to have your own computer really, to do it. And, or, alternatively, if you don't have a computer then you can go to the library to use the public computer, or you can go to the housing office, they have computers there as well. But, I'm not sure I like that system because you keep, if you haven't got a computer you keep having to make the trip somewhere to the library or to the housing office, to go and bid for, say that you're allowed to bid for three properties every couple of weeks or something like that. And then you're always 50th on the list because there are people with more points than you who are further up, who have bid first, and you have to keep doing this. If you don't keep bidding, it looks, it's taken, they take it as if you've lost interest and you don't really want a place anymore, so you keep having to make these futile bids. And you have to make a lot of effort. If you haven't got your own computer it's a big, big effort to do it."

"I haven't got a computer. All I've got is this smartphone that I'm talking to you on now. And I'm not really very technically up to date with it either. I can't, if I get a big form on this little screen on my phone, and I have to expand it so that I can read it and see the boxes to tick. Right, I'm ticking one box on the right hand side of the page, and then I have to go over to the left hand page, the left hand side of the page, and

then when I'm dragging it across I inadvertently touch a button which navigates me to something else. It's a nightmare for me."

In addition, many participants described feeling under 'pressure' to accept housing options that they saw as inadequate or inappropriate – for such reasons noted above such as suitability for their health condition, affordability, and location in relation to work, education, or a support network.

"I think the other thing is that they expect, like, the reason we've approached them is because we can't afford to private rent, so they push very much for the private rented route that we can't afford."

"They told me that you have to go and view it, you have to accept it, or if you don't accept it then they've fulfilled their commitments. I actually injured myself quite badly trying to view the flat on the second floor, but I accepted it, because they said if you don't accept it then we won't do any more. Then the MP had a look at it and social services had a look at it and they told me to decline it, so I took their advice and declined it. And I'm still battling, even though I never moved in, I'm still battling with [XXX] Council because they're trying to charge me for council tax, even though I never moved in."

This pressure manifested itself in a few ways. Some wanted an alternative housing option as soon as possible to leave a current situation, or were concerned about how long it might take before a better option became available. This meant some people tried to access accommodation that they knew might be inadequate for them – for example, a disability or health condition.

"Every week you're hopeful. You know what I mean? Thursday comes and you hope to God. I

mean, this morning I bid on a property on the 20th floor. Now, I know that sounds ridiculous but it's got a lift and it's got the disabled sign with it, so that's what they're saying, if you've got a disability, it's fine. And for me, I think if I've got to bid on a tower block, then I'd rather be on the top floor, then because at least I get beautiful views and it's quiet, and there's nobody above me that's going to knock me out. And I don't have an issue with that, as long as the lift works. So that's what I bidded on this morning, and I'm crossing my fingers because I've come in at number 17. A lot of people don't want to live in tower blocks because they're frightened of fires or things like that, but that's in the fate of the gods, isn't it, really?"

"I was just bidding like for anything because I was getting in a bit of a panic. And, but there was like 300 and something people in front of me or 200 people on some flats, and that was like early on Tuesday morning when the biddings went, when they posted the bidding."

Others felt the pressure came from their housing officer – either that the officer was trying to persuade them to accept the option, or that there was a threat of the council no longer supporting them if they refused an accommodation option that the local authority considered suitable.

"I was told if I didn't accept that, obviously I was offered a place, and if I refused it, that's where the liability ended."

"It was very much along the lines of, this is the place we've given you, you can't say no to it, basically, take it or leave it."

"I got this call from the Council. He said, well, I've got you a place. If you don't take it now we're

washing our hands of you. In other words their duty of care has been done and I wouldn't be eligible for any help or assistance for at least a year… Without looking at it, knowing where it was and all that… when he said they were going to wash my, their hands of me or other words they'd done their job, well, what could I do? I had to take it."

Overall 19 per cent said they turned down an accommodation offer. The most common reasons for doing this were that it was too far away from work, education or one's family (15%), that it was in poor condition (14%), or fear of the area. However, some people who did not reject accommodation offers described regretting this decision. The participant described earlier who moved into a flat with asbestos described how for financial, health and family reasons she thought her current situation was worse than it had been before moving in.

"[The house] was absolutely horrible and we invested about £2,000 in there to bring it to a liveable stage… I'm sorry every moment that I accepted. It's absolutely horrible. Horrible… Three companies said to us no and refused to come and put carpet in our flat because they said it's a high risk of them inhaling asbestos… when we came to see the flat we said, look, we need to give notice, one month to my, to our landlord because obviously we didn't put our notice down before seeing this flat. And they said, yes, there's no problem, you can give the notice, we can keep the property for you. And after that they called us to give them the deposit and we didn't, we were, we paid, basically we paid council tax and rent in two different, for two different properties in the, in only month… that was the money for my son to go to nursery and we keep

my son home because we don't have money to put him in nursery because our money went to do the floor... we work opposite shifts and we barely can see each other me and my husband because these people tricked us."

3.7 Overall views on housing outcomes and support

When asked whether Housing Options had met their expectations, overall participants were fairly evenly split, with 42 per cent saying they had, and 44 per cent saying they had not. Those who experienced a positive housing outcome were more likely to say their expectations had been met (with 48 per cent feeling this way compared to 35 per cent of those who had a negative housing outcome); the figure was even higher for those who felt their accommodation was suitable and secure (59%).

Those who had felt they were in a secure and suitable living situation were grateful for the support they had received in accessing their home. One participant described what it meant to them to have their own home, including the positive impact this had on their wellbeing, as well as being able to realise their potential.

"**PARTICIPANT: It felt cold obviously because it was like concrete and wood, but once you got the carpets put in and everything else, it felt great. Going out and buying my furniture, being able to say, this is, just felt really good.**

INTERVIEWER: So does it feel like a home?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah. Slow and steady getting there, yeah. Obviously when you first move into a place, it takes a bit of time to get it exactly how you want it. You get, trying to decide what's

necessary, what doesn't fit, what isn't necessary, stuff like that.

INTERVIEWER: What impact do you think your contact with Housing Options has had on you now being in your current situation?

PARTICIPANT: It's driven me to actually try and help people more. I recently got my Level 2 in counselling and stuff, (...) skills and that has a lot to do with it, I want to try and help with the homeless situation and stuff like that. To try and help people not go through the situation that I did and possibly in the future maybe try and educate the council more about what mental effect it has on people when this sort of thing happens, which I don't think is something that's fully understood yet."

Those who could not access accommodation or who felt their accommodation was inadequate described feeling stuck.

"**I also have a little one and the rent is very, very expensive, like £900, over £900 for two bedrooms, and I can't afford that. So I'm stuck now because I don't know what to do. I have, I am literally, I have no choices.**"

There were some participants who told us in detail about how they 'gave up' on Housing Options and chose to live in risky situations. As well having immense personal costs these decisions seemed in practice seemed likely to lead to a worsening homelessness situation. One person described moving back into a motorhome despite it being unsuitable for his health condition.

"**We got a flat in the end, but if it had have been done a lot earlier, then maybe I wouldn't have run up that amount of debt just trying**

to survive... It was a nightmare living in a motorhome because I could have days where I couldn't move my hip so I couldn't drive the van... Me and my 14 year old daughter was homeless for nearly 2 years and it took the social, it took the housing 2 years to sort this out, but I've had to, excuse me, I've had to run up so much debt and borrow so much money to survive those 2 years that I now cannot afford to pay the debts that I owe and the bills of the flat... if my daughter goes into care it'll be me on my own anyway... I'll just have to move back into the motorhome and live on the street. To be honest I haven't got a problem with that, because that's fine.**"

A domestic abuse victim described moving back in with her ex-partner.

"**it [was] a domestic abuse situation... you have to wait for two years for one property... he and I have decided to work things out, and I have decided to stay here, and not move out. I don't understand the point of working where a system is working against you so I'd rather make up with him than have to fight with them people and discuss it with ten people where the ten people are not even ready to listen to you and they're being stubborn, and they're being basically abusive... I'm finding the solution to my own problem and [location] Housing Options has nothing to do with it.**"

The impact of a poor housing outcome could leave people incurring huge costs in order to making their living situation more suitable, as described by one person living in social housing.

"**It was just really, everywhere was just really awful. Had a few issues for the first week, water taps were broken, leaking water under**

the kitchen sink, so it was just crazy... it literally took us a good two, three weeks of phone calls, spending 30, 40 minutes waiting on the phoneline just to get appointments like three, five days after... I wasn't expecting to walk into a five star hotel obviously, but yeah it did cost me quite an arm to fix the place up, and I think because I have children as well, I don't know who was staying here but it was very, very disgusting... But I didn't have a choice, I had to accept it because the other place they were offering was so far away from my mum, and I've got two kids, my mum's my biggest support... There was mould under the kitchen sink, there was mould in the bathroom. There's even now with all the scrubbing that I've done, there's mould on the cupboards in the kitchen. It's like, it's just obviously there was water leakage in the kitchen as well, which obviously left a massive stain. I spent nearly £800 or more... it was just like I had to settle for it. Because they were like oh, well if you don't take this one, we're going to put you on the back of the list for six weeks, or for six months. OK so I've got kids I have to sort, settle them in, they've been in hotels, another house for over eight weeks. I just wanted to settle them.**"

The participant with an asbestos issue described being afraid to raise a complaint about her issues because of the risk of eviction, despite feeling her situation was worse than before.

"**They said, oh, you need to put, how you call that? A complaint, a formal complaint. And we didn't do that yet because we are afraid they're going to say just 'You need to pack your bags and go... We are in a council house but it's way worse... I'm telling you I'm coming home crying every day and I go to work crying as well. I feel more happy at work than I am at home.**

And that's impossible for every human being on this planet to be more happy at work."

These issues could also have an influence on whether people chose to approach Housing Options again – either because they didn't believe any accommodation would be available to them, or because the only accommodation options would be detrimental to themselves – or even others around them.

"When I was classed homeless they put me in emergency accommodation for three weeks and then there was a guardianship scheme... but they closed that scheme down. The only accommodation they offered me was for £900 a month which I couldn't afford so, basically the council's said they now don't have a duty of care on me and, yeah, I'm back living in the van... They sent me an email last week to say that within 21 days they were going to relinquish any duty of care over me regarding me being homeless. So, yeah, that was the last time I got an email from them. But it's basically because they set up this one, they gave me one option for this place and because I didn't view it, I didn't say, I didn't actually say no to it, I didn't say yes to it and they've decided that because of that then, yeah, they've just washed their hands of me."

"They're saying unless I'm homeless which technically I am, they're saying I've got somewhere to stay because I've got a sofa so I'm technically not homeless... They've told me, they've literally told me off the record, live on the streets and then I can class as homeless, but if I've got a sofa I'm not classed as homeless... if they were more open to single males because when it comes to housing we're the bottom of the list."

"I just sleep anywhere... They tried to find a hostel, I told them to shove it... I wouldn't go into a hostel, I'm not a smack head, I want to wake up in the morning when I know my money in my wallet or in my pocket... I went in once and all it was doing was arguing and arguing and I said if I don't leave I'm going to smash somebody in here, I'm going to smash them in. I'm not one who just stand back and just let somebody push me over."

As noted earlier, people tended to have either low or no expectations about what support they would receive from Housing Options. This contrasted with staff views that many people come to them mainly to access social housing.

"The reality is most people come to us for their council house and it's not even for their flat in [area], it's the house that they're after, most people. And they're like well, I don't want, a lot of people just say, well I don't want private rented, I looked at that but I've come to the council because I want my, you're the council I've come to the council because I want my council house." (Frontline)

"I do, I struggle with it a little bit regarding relief duties, prevention duties at the start with client whose sole focus, and you're going to change the sole focus, is to go into social housing. And they're not going to be interested with anything else, because I just think it just puts barriers in the way." (Frontline)

It is true that when given a list of different types of support a council could provide, people did choose housing as the forms of support that would have been most useful – as shown in figure 3.12.

However, it is important to note that rather than being a pre-existing motive for approaching Housing Options, it seems people chose these from the list simply because they felt like the best solution. One participant described how they didn't see the point of returning to Housing Options without assurance that they could be put in some kind of accommodation.

"INTERVIEWER: what would they need to do to make you feel like you felt comfortable to go there again?

PARTICIPANT: I don't know. Don't even know... Maybe just basically know that I'm going to be getting a, somewhere, a property or something at the end of, you know. Maybe like a guarantee that yeah, everyone should get a place or something if they do whatever... I mean no matter what their, someone's situation is, everyone should have somewhere to stay. No matter how much money they owe, no matter how much rent they owe, they're putting women and kids out on the street."

It was also notable that some staff admitted that housing was ultimately the kind of support that would be the most relevant for many people who approach them. Staff felt there were reasons why clients in their areas may have a preference for certain accommodation types. Based on the current PRS market and shortfalls in housing benefit many see social housing as the best option for them, and some staff were sympathetic to this.

"You might say we have a somewhat legacy historical model in that a lot of people who walk through the door in acute housing crisis still see social housing as a solution and that party might be cultural in terms of, I don't mean their individual culture but cultural to the city in that

we still have that model but also that is hugely informed and their preferences and choice is hugely informed by the market around them. You can naturally see why people would gravitate to that." (Housing Options Manager)

In this respect, it seemed that staff who felt people's interest in social housing was 'unreasonably' high – regardless of whether or not this was true – were frustrated not because this accommodation type was inappropriate, but because it was in short supply.

"I suppose I hoped that they'd say, 'Oh, yeah, why don't we just ring this guy up and you can go and stay at his house.' But obviously that didn't happen. I thought that they would have a list, I thought they'd be able to show me a list of properties where they were friendly landlords who accepted housing benefit or accepted, you know, where I could, you know, a list of people I could ring or they would help me to ring people."

"I hoped there'd be more options, like, places to stay for people that are homeless... I thought they'd have more options than just one... I thought there'd be a lot more. But it's like they wanted me to go to that one."

Figure 3.12: Types of support that respondents felt would have been most useful
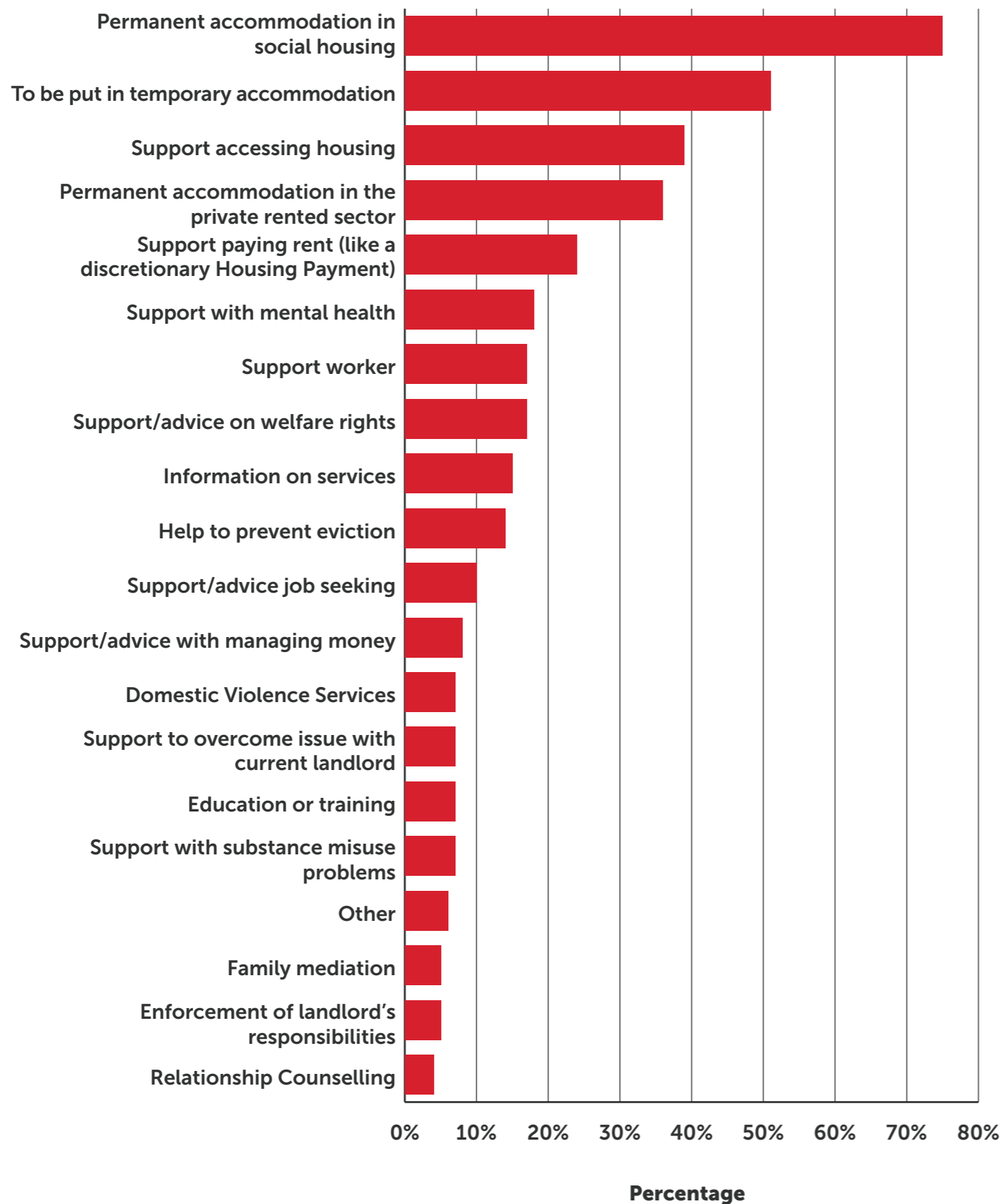
N=1432

Chapter 4
How the HRA works for different people

This chapter provides more detail around how experiences of the HRA vary for different groups.

Whilst the research has included a wide variety of individuals, here we have chosen to highlight some groups where we could identify notable differences in how the HRA works for different people.

We have then selected a series of key quantitative measures, also used in earlier chapters, that help identify how positive or negative people's experiences of Housing Options and their housing outcomes were. Table 4.1 provides an overview of how the above groups' experiences and outcomes compare with one another — with better and worse findings highlighted in green and purple, respectively.

It shows that two groups in particular are having both worse experiences and outcomes than others: people with multiple support needs and people sleeping rough when they approached Housing Options. It also shows that some groups have a significantly poorer experience for one measure in particular, if not others. For example, whilst families were more likely than others to see an improvement in their housing situation, they were the least likely to feel their final accommodation was suitable and secure for at least 6 months.

It is worth noting, however, that this approach to comparing groups excludes people facing homelessness who did not use a Housing Options service. In the following sections we have therefore drawn on interviews with such people as well.

Table 4.1. Overall experiences of different groups ('N=50-1432')

	% of whole research sample	% of families	% of single people	% of people with multiple support needs	% of people discharged from an institution	% of people sleeping rough when they approached Housing Options
No advice, assessment or support provided	17%	9%	22%	22%	27%	33%
Provided with information and advice to help with their housing issue	67%	71%	64%	61%	67%	56%
Felt assessment staff listened sensitively and with respect to their situation	73%	75%	73%	67%	80%	73%
Left assessment feeling positive about their options	51%	52%	50%	44%	61%	52%
Felt able to access services in PHP	47%	48%	48%	41%	*Not applicable, base size too low*	54%
Felt needs were met by the support offered by HO	35%	36%	34%	29%		29%
Offered emergency accommodation	35%	35%	36%	42%	45%	45%
Told in priority need	28%	35%	23%	42%	25%	40%
Felt support from Housing Options helped remain in/find accommodation	38%	48%	25%	34%	26%	22%
Felt Housing Options met their expectations	42%	45%	39%	38%	44%	34%
Experienced a positive housing outcome	56%	64%	47%	51%	55%	47%
Felt final accommodation was suitable and secure for at least 6 months	30%	22%	35%	30%	*Not applicable, base size too low*	
Remained homeless after contact with Housing Options ended	46%	33%	53%	57%	48%	67%

4.1 Families and single people

Government data on homelessness applications to local authorities shows that just under one third of applicants facing homelessness between April 2018 and March 2021 were households with 1-2 adults and one or more dependent children; 62 per cent were single adults with no children.[37] This included a lower proportion of families in the 2020-21 financial year, likely as a result of being favoured by the nature of financial protections during the pandemic.[38] Our survey sample included a moderately higher representation of families, with 37 per cent being people with a child under 18, and only 50 per cent being single people without children. Most households with one or more children under 18 in the sample were single parents – 69 per cent were the only adult in their homelessness application.

Whilst families had more positive experiences of Housing Options support, and were least likely to remain homeless or be excluded from support, on many dimensions the differences are not that great (see table 4.1.). However, there are some notable differences in the types of support different household types could access, with single people being seven percentage points less likely than families to have received information or advice, 12 percentage points less likely to have been told they were in priority need, and 15 percentage points less likely to feel support from Housing Options helped them find or remain in accommodation. Whilst some of this is unsurprising given how priority need and other eligibility criteria favour families, the differences nevertheless illustrate whether single people feel supported by their local authority. More striking is that advice and information should be provided regardless of people's household composition but was clearly given more to larger households.

It is also worth noting that awareness of support being less available for single people without children (without necessarily being aware of the specific term 'priority need') deterred some people from trying to access support. For example, a man sofa surfing with friends described feeling it was pointless for him to pursue Housing Options due the perception he was not eligible for help.

> "I lost my job… I couldn't pay my rent, a month later I was evicted and ended up on the streets, and I've been homeless ever since basically… I've approached the council about it… But they put me on band four and I've been bidding for three years now, three years September… They've just fobbed me off… they're saying come back when you're on the streets but I'm not going to stay on the streets when I've got the sofa to live on… Put me in hostels or somewhere, just somewhere more permanent than a sofa surfing, if they put me in a hostel then I can prove to them that I'm ready for my own place and stuff but they won't even give me that chance… I'm not being funny but a single female will get a place just like that but with males they say, well, you're a male, you're all right."

Stronger differences are noticeable in relation to housing outcomes. On the one hand, families were much more likely to see a positive change to their living situation after contacting Housing Options. Sixty four per cent of families had a positive housing outcome, compared to 47 per cent of single people, and 56 per cent

37 Department for Levelling Up, *Housing and Communities (2022) Live tables on statutory homelessness*. DLUHC: Online. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness
38 See page 70-72, Watts, B., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Young, G., Fitzpatrick, S. and McMordie, L. (2022) *The Homelessness Monitor: England 2022*. London: Crisis. https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessnessknowledge-hub/homelessness-monitor/england/the-homelessness-monitor-england-2022/

Figure 4.1: Experiences of Housing Options support according to household composition

N=886-1432

Figure 4.2: Security and suitability of living situations according to household composition

N=405
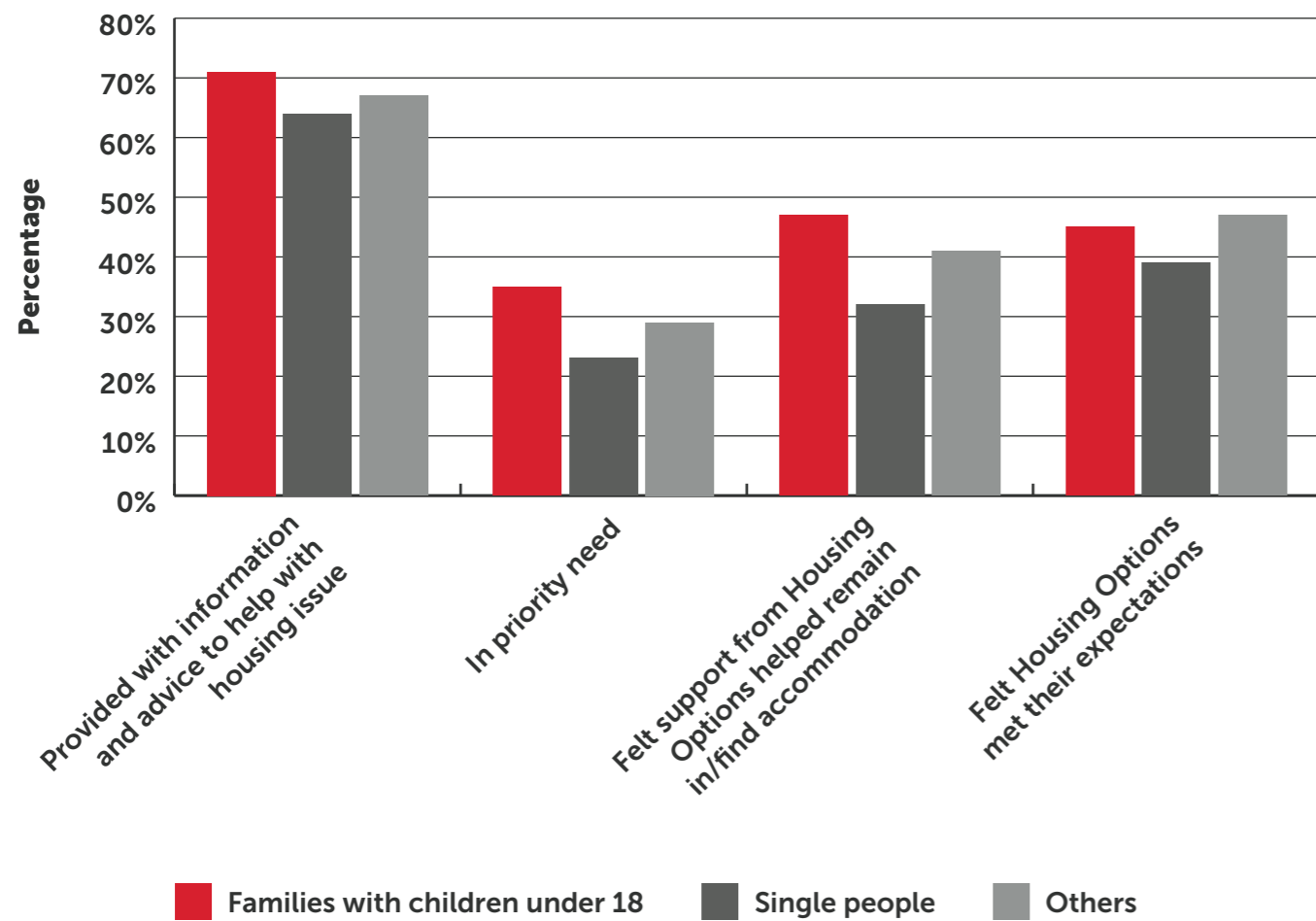
of those with another household composition. However, despite being more likely to remain in or move into accommodation after contacting Housing Options, families were less likely to feel it was adequate. Figure 4.2. shows that in wave 3, less than a quarter (22%) of families felt their accommodation after using Housing Options was secure for at least 6 months and suitable for their needs. Of all options, they were also most likely to say it was neither secure nor suitable (rather than feeling it was either secure or suitable, or both). It is concerning that as noted above, most people feeling this way were single parents who have less support than other families.

Reasons for feeling accommodation wasn't secure or suitable varied wildly as noted in Chapter 3. A mother of three living in temporary accommodation described her frustration at both having lived there for nearly a year but also at its unsuitability for her family in general and for one of her children's support needs.

"I'm still in the same place... I just continue bidding every week. That's it... It's annoying. Whenever I bid, I ended up at the end of the bid, I'm number 300 or something. And I thought I was on a priority... because I'm on the fourth floor and I have an

autistic son, it's kind of hard. But what can I do? ... They do have the information of my son, they do have the medical condition that he's autistic, that he's scared of heights. And there's no lift, and it's a bit of a strange place... even the healthcare visitor has been around and all that, and she knows that. I don't know what else to do... and the fact that we have to take two buses to school as well... they did a bit of security but sometimes the gate was open so it's kind of, you sleep with one eye open because some people just want to party downstairs... It's not safe."

Housing outcomes were more positive for women overall (58% per cent positive) compared to men (51% positive), though differences were not that great between single men and women (49% positive among single men, compared to 47% positive among single women). What is more striking is that single men were 13 percentage points less likely to say their accommodation was suitable and secure, compared to single women'.

Figure 4.3: Housing experiences of single men and women

N=203-743

Single men without children   **Single women without children**
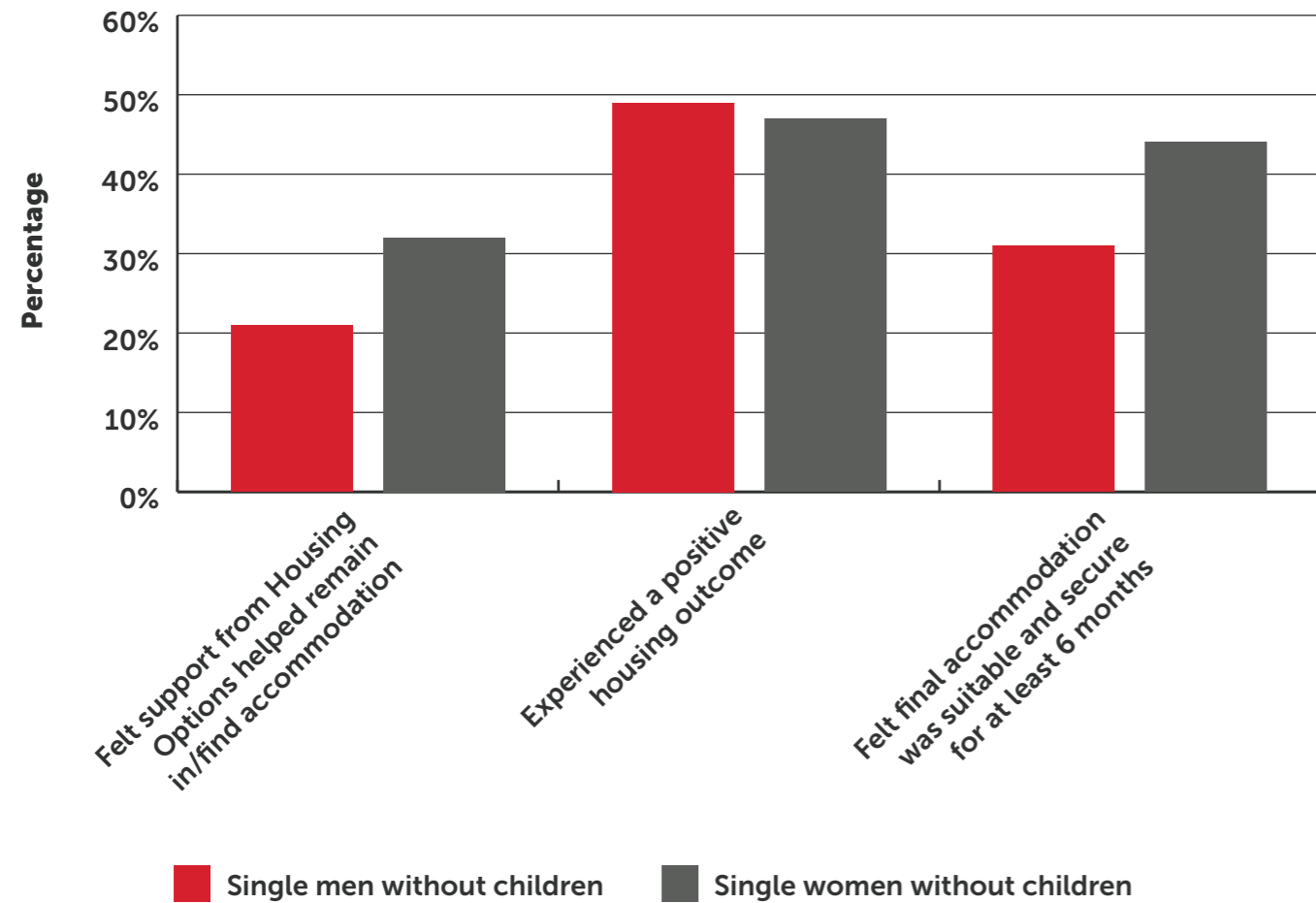
4.2 Support needs

Differences according to number of support needs

Around half of all households registered as facing homelessness between April 2018 and March 2021 included a person with a support need such as a disability, experience of domestic abuse or a history of repeat homelessness. Within this group, roughly half of households had 2 or more support needs.[39] Our own research sample was much more skewed towards people with support needs – 84 per cent in the survey had one or more needs. In addition, 40 per cent could be described as having complex needs, due to the presence of 3 or more support needs, the intersection of which can create additional challenges.[40]

39   See Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2022) *Live tables on statutory homelessness*. DLUHC: Online. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness

40   We have defined the following as a type of support need in this analysis: Previous experience of homelessness; A diagnosed physical health condition; A diagnosed mental health condition; A disability; One or more learning difficulties; Experience of domestic abuse; Experience of drug issues; Experience of alcohol issues; Experience of offending or criminal justice issues; Experience of the care system. It is worth noting that a wider variety of needs are recorded by local authorities than could be used in our survey, so the actual proportion of people with support needs in our sample may be higher.

Findings from the survey show that having a support need often means you have a worse experience or outcome than others under the HRA – despite needing help with additional challenges as well as homelessness. In addition, people with complex needs have even worse experiences and outcomes than other people, across most ways of measuring this. This reflects other research showing how people with this kind of 'multiple disadvantage' often face a unique form of dislocation from society that means they can fall through the cracks and not receive the right help.[41]

Figure 4.4 illustrates experiences and outcomes according to number of needs. Across all metrics in the graph, those with complex needs have the lowest score, and there is often a trend where the more support needs you have, the lower your score is. As well as having worse experiences of advice and assessment, only 29 per cent of those with complex needs felt their needs were met by Housing Options support – 18 percentage points lower than those with no support needs.

In addition, 57 per cent of people with complex needs remained homeless after their contact with Housing Options had ended. Across most measures, single people with complex needs have a worse experience than other household types, with 5 per cent fewer feeling Housing Options met their expectations. One participant with complex needs described Housing Options not following through with expected support.

"I've been sleeping out for the last three and a half to four year[s]... all they [Housing Options] really done was they took our names, done the application and everything like that, and they just put us on the list, they haven't even given me a bidding number yet... I was supposed to have a worker, and every time I was supposed to have a phone call or have any contact, it never happens. So, we just drift apart, and everybody went back, and I just, I was stuck with, just stuck with the homeless teams and outreach teams and stuff like that, because the council were just rubbish with me. Didn't really, they didn't really want to know. They just, I just felt like I got fobbed off by them... So, it just fizzled out, less and less and less contact, to the point of no contact really. There were no support."

He described finding it easier to engage with Housing Options when a professional from another organisation was there to help him.

"When I haven't got nobody there, they just, like I said, they'll take me in and they'll just, they'll get me to answer a few questions and then they will ask me to come back a few weeks' time, and the same thing just repeats itself really. So I've got everybody coming round but no-ones been going up there with me. When I've been up there with the Street Outreach team it's been a little bit different... somebody else is representing you... It makes a big difference because they don't, they can't fob you off..."

Another participant with complex needs felt that Housing Options had showed a poor understanding of his mental health when directing him towards emergency accommodation.

"I got out of jail, and I had to meet my probation officer at [the] Council, and when I got there, they actually, they said that they had nowhere for me and put me into emergency accommodation

41   Bramley, G. and Fitzpatrick, S., with Edwards, J., Ford, D., Johnsen, S., Sosenko, F. and Watkins, D. (2015) *Hard Edges: Mapping severe and multiple disadvantage in England*. London: Lankelly Chase Foundation. https://lankellychase.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Hard-Edges-Mapping-SMD-2015.pdf

Figure 4.4: Overall experiences according to number of support needs

N=405-1432

No support needs **2 support needs**
1 support need **Complex needs (3+ needs)**

in [XXX] which failed me a lot because I've got real, I'm, I've got anxiety and depression, I've had it for years, I got abused by my dad when I were younger. And I'm under, I've been referred to a psychiatrist for, they think I might have a split personality disorder... I always feel like I'm not getting the right help, do you know what I mean? I've got a lot of issues going on and I don't, it seems to get brushed to the side, like everything is getting brushed to one side for some reason... You have to mention your background and stuff [to the council] and then they start thinking, 'hang on a minute you mentioned jail in your background and stuff,' they don't want you... Don't just think, 'oh because of his background think they don't deserve a nice place'"

He also felt that going into hostels had been detrimental to him, indicating the need for accommodation that was accompanied by support for his mental health.

 "I'm actually, do you know when I'm in prison and stuff like that, I'm OCD, so I am a clean, you know when I'm indoors, I do like to look after me, well I do like to look after myself in general when I can. I like to wear nice clothes, I like to, I'm a clean guy well, but because of my health at the minute, I'm not too thingy. But if I had a nice place, I'd look after it. Do you know when they put me in shitholes it, it gets me down... I've just got off heroin and stuff like that, and hostels are full of smackheads... I'd end up getting down and depressed, because I don't like, I don't know, I can't be arsed being around loads of people, it's just like being in jail but with drugs."

Differences according to individual support needs

Disability
Whilst more likely to have a more positive housing outcome, disabled people were also more likely to feel this accommodation was neither secure nor suitable for their needs. Indeed, they were also significantly less likely than others to feel their needs had been met by Housing Options, with only 22 per cent feeling this way compared to 38 per cent of others, and less likely to feel able to access services in their PHP.

One of the only areas where disabled people had a more positive result than others was in being recognised as priority need. This suggests that whilst disabled people are formally recognised a priority for accommodation, this is not actually reflected in either the quality of accommodation or other support being provided.

There is a huge variety of disabilities, and there were some differences according to the type of disability. For example, people with learning disabilities were less likely to receive information and advice to help with their housing issue – only 57 per cent received this, compared to 69 per cent of those without a learning disability. This reflected a general sense that the accessibility of Housing Options support was poor for this group. One participant described finding it difficult to complete the required paperwork when using a Housing Options service without additional assistance.
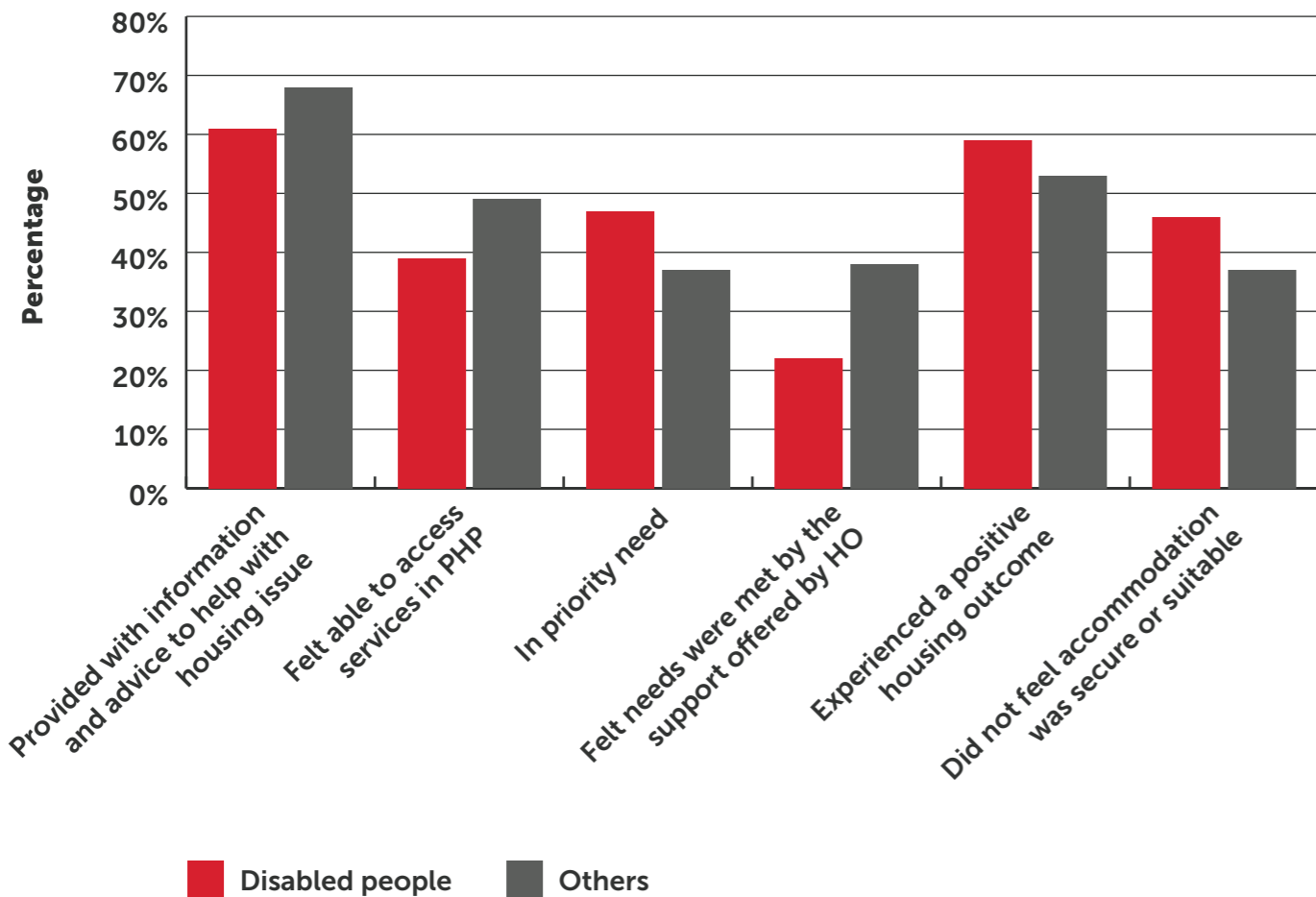
 "My marriage broke down and that's what, I didn't really have anywhere to go, to be honest with you... for cultural reasons I don't really get on with my family because they're very strict... because I don't have any children I'm not a priority... I don't really know how to access services, to be honest with you, I don't know

Figure 4.5: Overall experiences among people with disabilities

N=405-1432

Figure 4.6: Housing Outcomes according to presence of health conditions
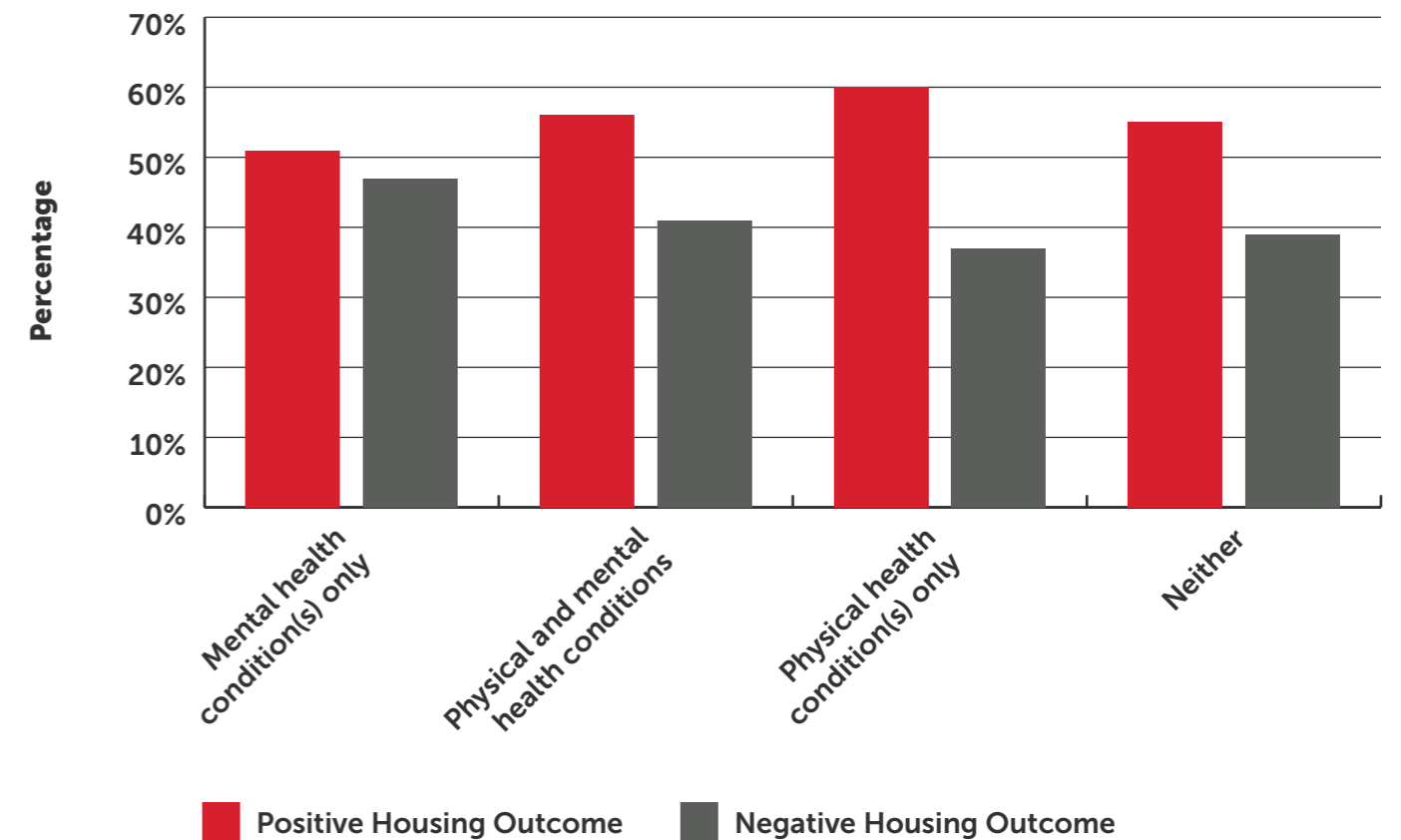

N=1381

about information where to go and get support... my mental health has really suffered, really deteriorated mind, yeah, because the practical support's not out there... I like face to face support, I find that more helpful... knowing how to go about, I need some support how to go about doing it, I'm not very good at filling in forms and things like that, practical things so I need support, a little bit of a confidence, I struggle with forms... they could help me with the procedure to apply for housing, fill in forms, etc, support me... because I need that type of support."

In addition, there were more positive housing outcomes for people with physical health conditions, and worse outcomes for people with mental health conditions. Figure 4.6 shows that 51 per cent of those with mental health conditions experienced a positive housing outcome, compared to 60 per cent of those with physical health conditions (excluding people with both types of health condition). Figure 4.7 shows that 41 per cent physical health conditions were more likely to feel their accommodation was secure and suitable, whilst only 26 per cent of those with both physical and mental health conditions felt this way.

This suggests that positively, people with physical health conditions are prioritised for accommodation, but it is clear more can be done to provide them with appropriate accommodation. One elderly participant described how after a landlord evicted him after 12 years living in a PRS home, he was offered a high-rise flat that was unsuitable for his health, and having to 'compete' with others for alternative options.

"I'm disabled, so what good is a building on the sixth or seventh floor to me... . I get more help from Help the Aged than I do from the council and I haven't even got a social worker, they've abandoned me, the district nurse don't bother coming now... they

were rubbish, apart from the first person I spoke to that got me registered and got me on the sort of fast track because of my disability and I'm going to be houseless, homeless, so that's the only person that tried... the council that come up to rent you have to, you go into an auction, well, so if I need one more than the person that bids higher than me, I don't think that's fair, do you? I don't think they should be auctioning, trying to get the most rent that they can get, they know what the, what it's worth and what rents they're getting, why go to an auction for it? ...if somebody's wanting a council house which everybody's entitled to then no, it goes up for auction,

Figure 4.7: Security and suitability of accommodation depending on health condition

	Not secure or suitable	Not secure but suitable	Secure but not suitable	Secure and suitable
Physical health condition(s) only	37%	9%	13%	41%
Physical and mental health conditions	43%	8%	23%	26%
Mental health condition(s) only	38%	14%	18%	30%
Neither	37%	13%	19%	31%

Percentage

■ Not secure or suitable   ■ Secure but not suitable

■ Not secure but suitable   ■ Secure and suitable
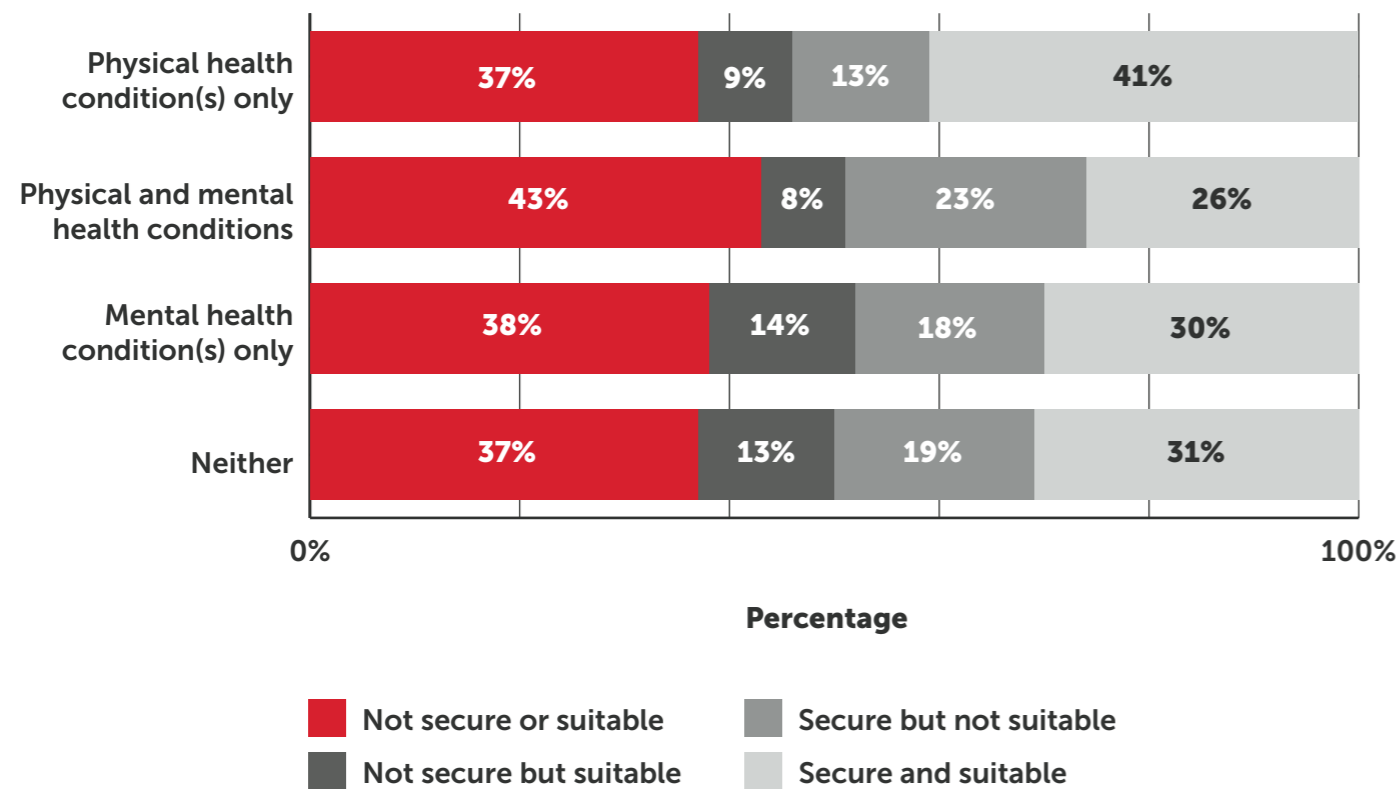
N=405

see who's going to pay the biggest rent, not on the necessity of the person that's wanting one, I don't understand that, do you?"

Care leavers
Young people aged 18-24 experienced worse housing outcomes than all other age groups, with only 47 per cent experiencing a positive housing outcome compared to 64 per cent of people aged 55-64 – a clear illustration of how the homelessness system has to prioritise certain groups in the absence of sufficient housing stock. However, experiences were even worse for young people who have experienced the care system, only 44 per cent of whom experienced a positive housing outcome. In addition, only 29 per cent of 18-24-year-old

care leavers felt their accommodation was suitable and secure, compared to 40 per cent of 18-24-year-olds without experience of care.

This is likely influenced by the experience of care leavers falling into homelessness when they leave care without a clear plan for what accommodation they will move into and suggests the homelessness system could do more to support them in this situation.

It is also worth noting that experience of the care system had a negative impact on people's housing outcome in later life – regardless of age, only 50 per cent of people with experience of care had a positive housing outcome, compared to 55 per cent of others.

A care leaver now aged 45 was not attempting to use Housing Options, and had been sofa surfing for a year – not knowing that he may be entitled to additional support because of his experience in care.

"I'm basically sofa surfing... When I left the care system I was homeless for a bit so, yeah, I've been homeless before... when you leave the care system you're pretty much left on your own just to defend for yourself... [now] there's a, there was a lot of drug use, people just coming and going into the properties and I was being threatened as well.... Yeah, by one of my neighbours so I just didn't feel safe, to be honest in there so I just decided I'm not going to put up with it. My mate took me in and I've been sleeping on his couch pretty much ever since... I've not approached the council, to be honest, I'm a bit nervous about doing that because my friend who's putting me up is not really meant to have me there.. he could get evicted putting me up... I've spoken to other people in the centre, other users in the past and they've complained that they've gone to the council and not been given any help at all... I'll be honest, I could be wrong but I get the impression that the council aren't really obligated to help me at all... I haven't approached the council, that's my fault because I don't think they can really help."

Domestic abuse
Twelve per cent of survey participants said their homelessness had been caused by an experience of domestic abuse, with around 4 in 5 of these participants saying it was the main reason they approached Housing Options for support.

In a similar vein to people with disabilities, those whose homelessness was caused by domestic abuse were in formal terms prioritised by Housing Options, and had either similar access to or greater support than others – but this did not always translate into better experiences with staff. Whilst they were 19 and 18 percentage points more likely than others to be told they were in priority need and to be offered emergency accommodation, they were 7 and 10 percentage points less likely to be provided with advice and feel able to access services outlined in their PHP.[42]

This reflects some poor experiences with staff that some participants told us about. One participant described living in accommodation that felt unsafe as it inaccessible to her ex-partner.

"I've got two children. I was married and I was going through domestic abuse... my husband was, we wasn't currently living together, but it is still going through domestic abuse. Because we were living separate and he kept on coming to the house, driving up the road because the police couldn't stop him from doing that, because the road I live on is currently classed as a through road, so they couldn't do anything about it... I was going through the domestic violence team, and they referred me on because there was nothing that we could do to stop my ex partner from coming up this road apart from me moving so that he didn't know where I were.... [Housing Options are] not really easy to be honest, they're hard to contact."

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42 As noted in the introduction, the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 gave victims of domestic abuse automatic priority need status. Our fieldwork was largely completed prior to the Act coming into force, and so results almost entirely reflect the legislation that existed prior to this.

Figure 4.8A: Overall experiences among domestic abuse survivors

N=405=1432

Figure 4.8B: Overall experiences among domestic abuse survivors
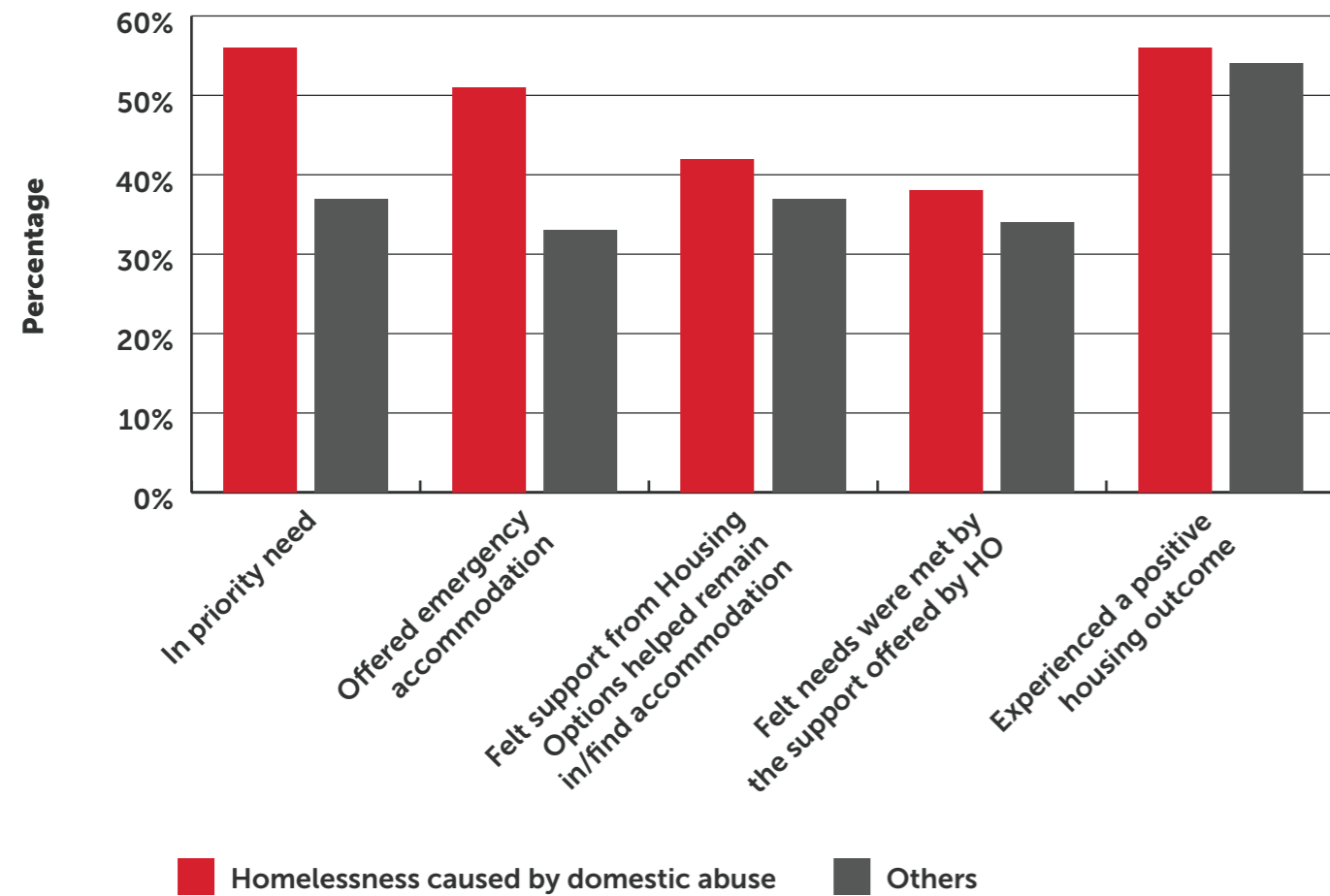
N=405-1432

4.3 Living situation when approaching for support

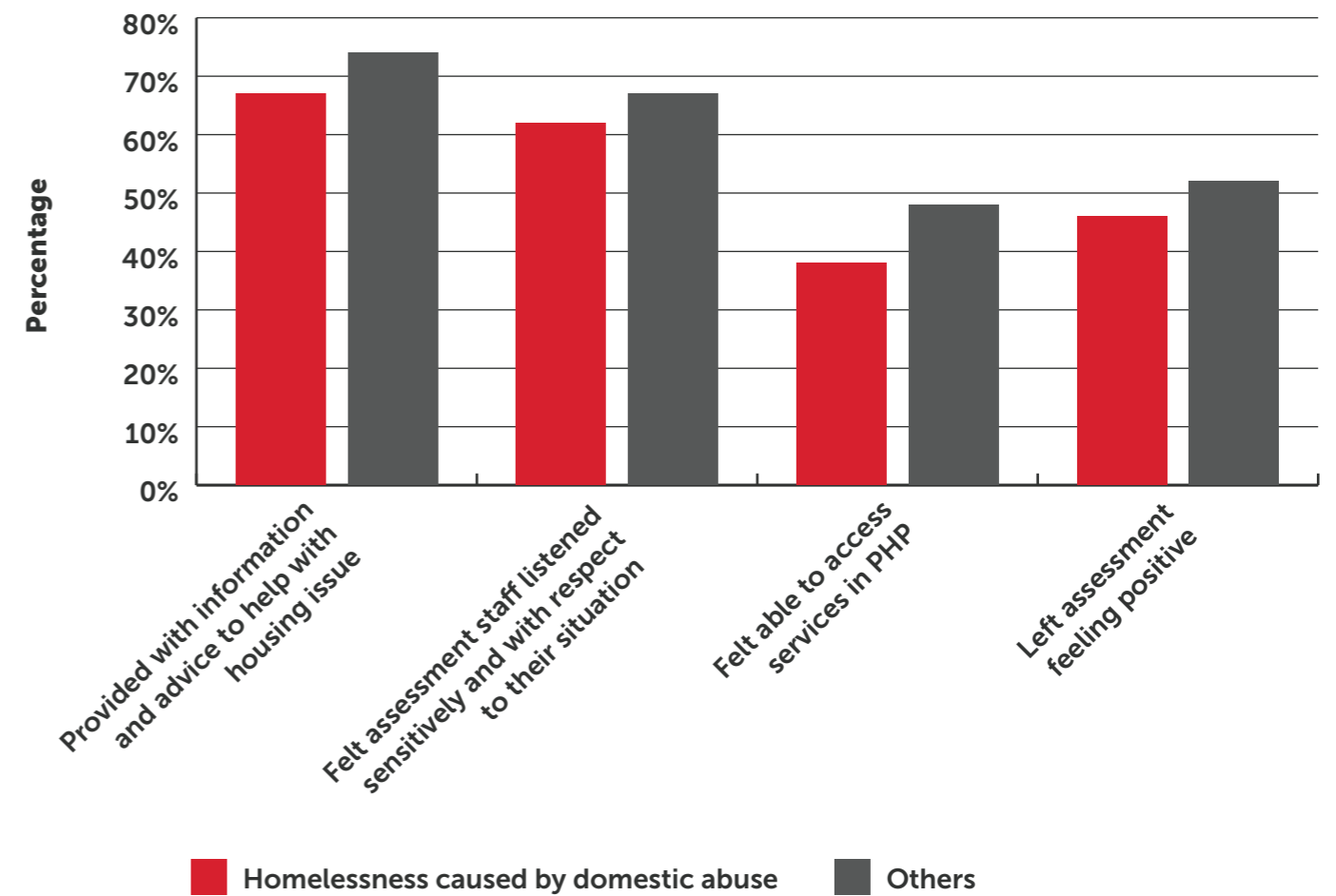As noted elsewhere in this report, people approached Housing Options from a variety of living situations, including sofa surfing, rented accommodation and temporary accommodation. In this section we have explored in further detail the experiences of people in the two types of living situation who according to the survey had the 'best' and 'worst' experiences respectively: those who approached because they were being discharged from a hospital or prison without a secure home to move into (7% of all survey participants), and those who were sleeping rough when

they approached Housing Options for support (18% of all survey participants).

Those discharged from institutions tended to have either typical or better experiences than others. They felt more positively about assessments and PHPs; compared to the whole research sample they were 7 per cent more likely to feel assessment staff listened sensitively and with respect to their situation (see figure 4.9). After using Housing Options they were 8 per cent less likely to feel their accommodation was neither suitable nor secure; overall this meant they were 7 per cent more likely to say their needs were met by Housing Options support.

This suggests that the pathways to homelessness support taken by those discharged from institutions – likely to be different from others as a result of the involvement of a hospital, probation, or other service in providing access to homelessness support – may be more effective than the more typical routes used by others. However, a larger-scale piece of research with this cohort may be needed to verify this, particularly given the low sample size for this group, as well as some conflicting evidence. For example, this cohort were more likely to say they did not receive support,

advice, or an assessment compared to other audiences (see Table 4.1 – though it is worth noting that this too may be due to the involvement of non Housing Options staff). In addition, our qualitative interviews suggested there were often issues experienced going from the prison system into housing. One participant described going round in circles between prison and inadequate or unsustainable accommodation, and feeling that neither Housing Options nor probation services were helping to change this.

Figure 4.9: Experiences among those discharged from institutions and people sleeping rough

Legend:
- People discharged from an institution
- People sleeping rough
- Whole research sample

Figure 4.10: Experiences of people sleeping rough across Waves 1-3

Legend:
- Wave 1
- Wave 2
- Wave 3

N=236-268

"Currently they've got me in a bedsit... I'm always in town shoplifting because I ain't going to live like that, I'm going to prison. And as soon as I get let out of prison there's no housing and I'm coming straight back to the streets... when I come out here they're not even asking me nowt like that or why I'm out here and what's brought me on to the streets. They just try to get me and put me back in somewhere instead of coming out here and saying, 'oh right, what's your problems and issues and stuff like that?' If they came

round and asked people more things like that they'd get more places. But what they're doing is just grabbing a bunch of people and sticking them all in a fucking house. And they're all arguing with each other and wanting to move 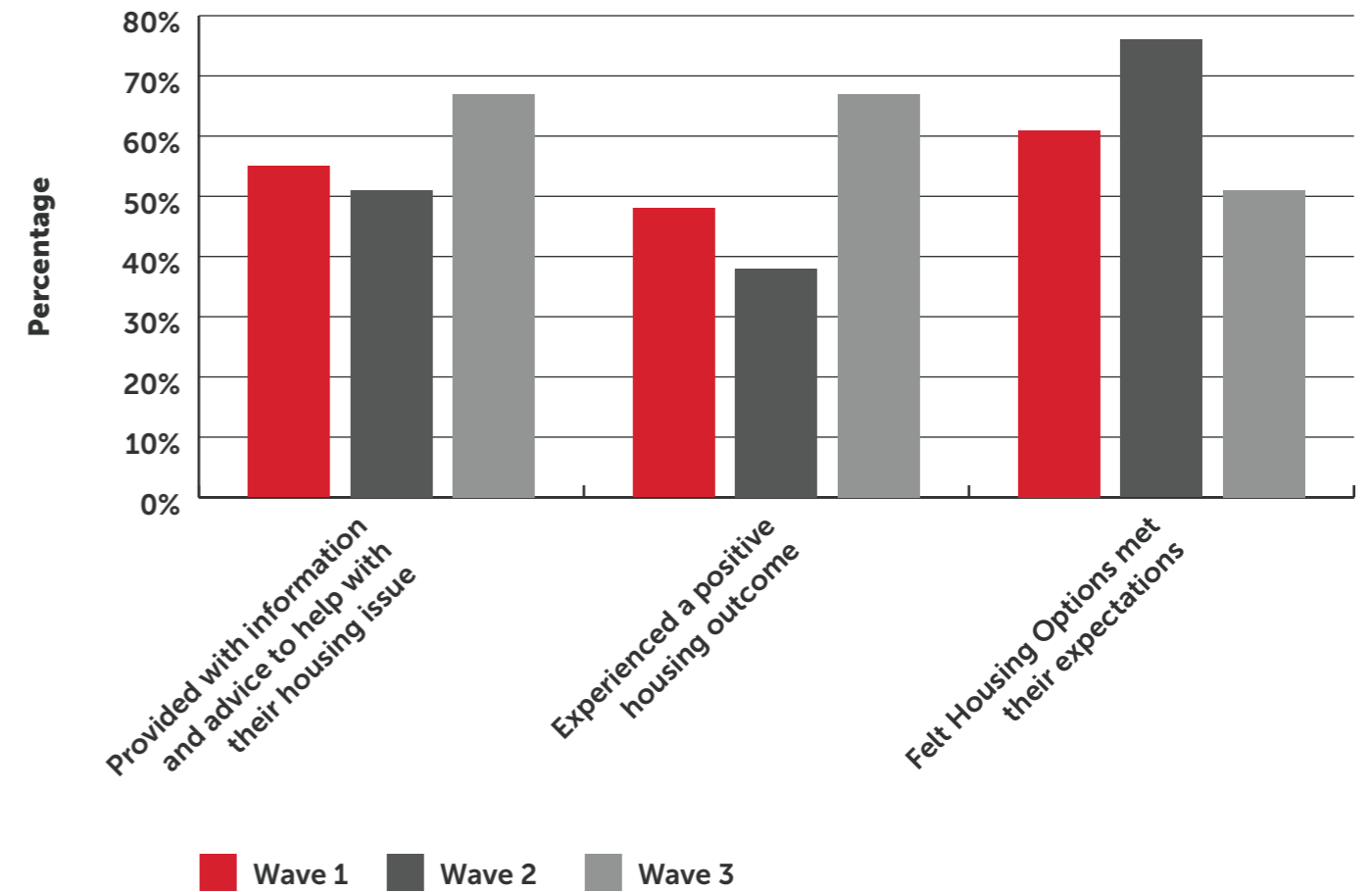out... You know probation officers nowadays, that's what I'm saying to you, mate, all they want to say is hi and bye and fuck you off these days. Instead of somebody doing something with us nowadays, nobody wants to do owt with us... Rather than get help to you and get you moved on, and she were always like, they're all

the same circles mate. That's what I'm saying to you, they try to keep us here. We're trying to get, we get so far with them and then they put us right to the back again... just keep us in like a little circle... We've been kept in a fucking, like a little loop thing... You get so far and that's it. We either get told, oh, no, we've failed somewhere or we've done something wrong."

People sleeping rough, by contrast, had some of the biggest problems accessing and receiving support. As shown in Table 4.1, two thirds (67%) remained homeless after Housing Options support ended, and a third (33%) received no support, advice or

assessment from Housing Options; compared to others, they were twice as likely not to receive any of this. Less than half (47%) felt able to access services outlined in their PHP, reflecting staff suggestions that this tool is less effective when trying to support people in less stable living situations. This group provide particularly low ratings of Housing Options overall support: only 29 per cent felt their needs were met, and only 22 per cent felt support helped them to remain in or find accommodation.

During Everyone In – which coincided with wave 3 of the research – unprecedented levels of support were given to people sleeping rough or at risk of doing so. This was broadly reflected in the experiences and outcomes of people sleeping rough in survey. Figure 4.10 shows that the proportion who received advice and information from Housing Options and who experienced a positive housing outcome was much higher in wave 3. However, the proportion who felt Housing Options met their expectations declined, showing that whilst more accommodation and support was available, the quality of support delivered was weaker. This suggests that whilst on the one hand Everyone In demonstrated how it was possible to accommodate more people in the current system than previously thought possible, accommodation alone does not necessarily end someone's homelessness sustainably.

One participant described how after years of sleeping rough, their life completely changed during the pandemic, and how in late 2020, they found themselves being moved into social housing.

> "I was just redoing my shack hidden in the woods... But I got this call from the Council. He said, 'Well, I've got you a place. If you don't take it now we're washing our hands of you.' ...what could I do? I had to take it... my housing officer at the time, kudos to him, he's just bang, got everything done and dusted. OK, that's his job done, move on to the next day, next person. So, yeah, I was really quite pleased with him actually... I think... as soon as I got myself registered they accepted that I had a need..."

Had it not been for the pandemic they think they may have remained homeless.

> "Someone told me... that some of the councils were under pressure to solve the homeless problems. So if it wasn't for governmental pressure I think at the time to get as many homeless people off the street as possible I probably would still be homeless... I do know of other people that have been homeless dealing with councils, especially my friend for example she only had one contact from her housing officer and that was to give, I think the only contact was giving her a name of a charity and the second contact was, well, we've done our 56 days duty of care, tough luck... The funny thing is this Covid-19 thing hit just at the cusp of my 56 days and so it was extended."

Nevertheless, they were finding it challenging to now adjust to having a more settled lifestyle away from the street – demonstrating how important it is for people to have follow-up support to help them adjust to their new lives and assist with the practicalities of sustaining their tenancies and addressing any physical or mental health needs'.

> "Since this Covid thing, yeah, nobody's checked in on me... my electric bill has, I mean right now, yeah, it's creeping right up at the moment. I think over the next couple of months it's really eating into what available money I've got left over. And of course because I'm sitting in the house all the time I tend to be, actually I tend to be eating a lot more... my food bill you could say has also increased. So, yeah, it's, yeah, having a house has proven to be a little bit more harmful to my finances as they are at the moment... I mean generally I was a lot fitter, stronger, more energetic when I was homeless because I had things to do like collect firewood, keep warm, get food but my expenses were so low. But now

> I'm in a place my expenses have gone right up and I'm getting fat and unhealthy. It's, oh gone from, one extreme to the other... at the moment my arthritis is starting to set in now because I've been so sedentary. So when I wake up in the mornings or when I wake up I'm in a lot of pain so that does affect my outlook on the day."

He felt that in spite of some bad experiences over the years it was important for people in similar situations to keep trying to access support.

> "I mean right now when I speak to people I will tell them to go down this route because it doesn't matter if it takes a while and you get all these hurdles you've got to keep going on, don't feel disheartened or downtrodden because of it, yeah, because you probably will end up meeting that one counsellor that will move heaven and earth for you because everybody likes to say, 'Well, I was only doing my job and blah, blah, blah.' You'll meet someone that's going to, yes, do their job."

4.4 Other factors to explore in further research

It has not been possible in this report to explore how experiences of the HRA have varied according to two other important, and inter-related factors – geography and ethnicity.

As noted in the introduction, the research took place in six research locations, including two London boroughs. Whilst we have conducted some analysis according to specific locations, there are few clear patterns in the findings, and understanding these is challenging due to the anonymous nature of participation

in this research, as well as the many factors that have an impact on a person's experience with a particular service in one location (such as local housing supply, access to different accommodation types, the local economy, and differences in structure and staff resourcing at different Housing Options services).

In addition, whilst the research included people from a range of ethnic backgrounds, these also vary according to research location – with, for example, a much higher representation of people from Black, Asian and other minoritised communities in London locations compared to non-London locations. Differences in experience and outcome according to ethnicity are therefore influenced by the unique characteristics of the six research locations and Housing Options services.

Both factors, however, are important to explore in order to obtain a fuller understanding of how the HRA and wider homelessness system works for different people – particularly given that people from Black, Mixed, and Other ethnic backgrounds are disproportionately likely to experience homelessness.[43] Crisis have recently begun a research project into experiences of homelessness and housing insecurity amongst Black, Asian, and other minoritised groups, and this will be an opportunity for us to explore this issue further.

An important starting point for this exploration will be to understand the impact of different housing markets on experiences. One pattern that was clear from our analysis was that London's pressurised housing market clearly had a negative impact on people's housing outcomes (see figure 4.11). After using Housing Options services, people in London

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43   See page 22, MHCLG, *Statutory Homelessness Annual Report 2020-21, England*. DLUHC: Online. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statutory-homelessness-in-england-financial-year-2020-21

Figure 4.11: Experiences of housing among Londoners and Non-Londoners
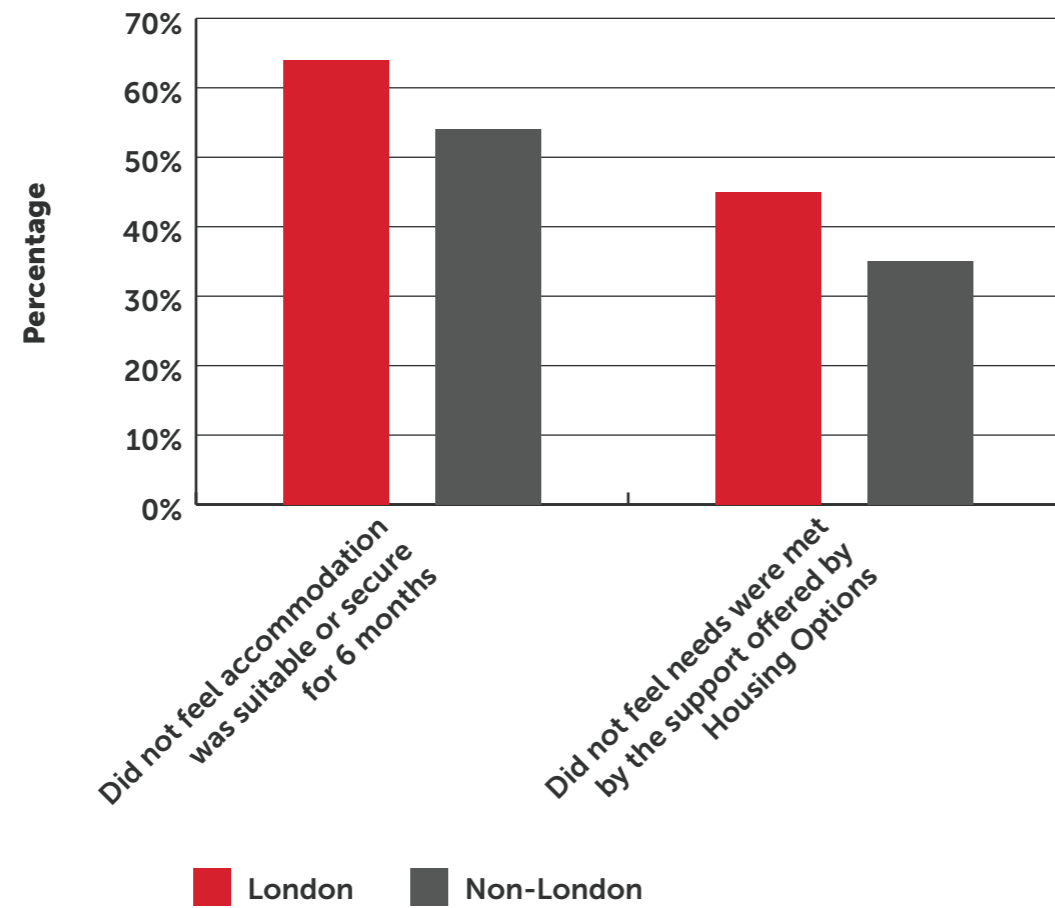
N=405-1432

were 10 per cent more likely to feel their accommodation was neither suitable nor secure for 6 months. This in turn seems to have influenced whether people felt their needs were met by Housing Options, where again Londoners were 10 per cent more likely to feel their needs were not met. We hope to gain a stronger understanding of this through further research.

Chapter 5
Conclusion and recommendations

The HRA is one of the most significant changes in homelessness legislation in England. Four years on the research has evidenced the extent to which the Act is helping people facing and recommendations on what more can be done to end people's homelessness.

5.1 What has improved under the HRA?

Housing outcomes have been improving for a larger group of people accessing help in the years since the Act was introduced. Whilst many people are not in appropriate accommodation after going to their local authority, our analysis highlights that participants ended up in a more suitable and secure living situation if they received more support or felt Housing Options had helped them to remain in or find accommodation – showing how critical their role was.

One of the reasons for these improvements is the HRA's prevention duty. People owed this duty often have better outcomes, with 58 per cent of those whose prevention duty ended in 2018-21 secured accommodation, compared to only 40 per cent of those whose relief duty ended.[44] Prevention can only work when support is provided early and in a timely fashion;

importantly, the HRA created an opportunity to do this. Designing a system that enables more households to remain accommodated prevents the traumatic experience of losing accommodation but it also stops people's living situations becoming more complex, and therefore harder to solve.

To complete the 'reasonable steps' LAs must take to prevent homelessness, affordable and accessible accommodation options are needed, as well as services that are able to act quickly enough to find them. Often the best solution at the prevention stage is to find alternative accommodation, helping people to leave an unstable or dangerous situation. But this research has shown that some people are being asked to remain in unsuitable situations waiting for an eviction before more support can be provided. In many cases, local authorities are still delaying action until the 56-day window has elapsed – people are in effect asked

44 Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2022) *Live tables on statutory homelessness*. DLUHC: Online. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness

to become homeless, which goes against the ethos of what preventing homelessness should mean.

There was also a mixed response from staff about whether their service prioritised prevention, depending on the design of their services and the availability of housing and tools to truly prevent homelessness. There were mixed interpretations of what can be recorded as prevention activity, with some working within a strict statutory definition, and others doing and recording earlier interventions. Some LAs had been making progress developing practices such as community outreach and delivering support through visits in their communities. However, the pandemic interrupted these developments and it will be interesting to see how this progresses in the coming years. There is still need for an improved understanding of what preventing homelessness looks like and which services need to be involved. Prevention needs to go further upstream, engaging with households before they are at the point of losing homes, receiving eviction notices or forced on to the streets – this would place less of a burden on Housing Options alone, and widen access to preventative support.

> **"It feels like it's a large step in the right direction but we're not finished yet in terms of the approach that local authorities should be taking around preventing homelessness. In the spirit of what gets measured, gets done, the fact that […] talked about the 56 days threatened with homelessness whereas we know the right thing to do is to be as upstream as possible, even before people are threatened with homelessness and do work with them. And for us to be able to do that, apart from finding the funding to do it and we know it's the right thing we need to be**

> **able to somehow demonstrate the value of that and we need a mechanism of talking to government about that."** (Manager)

> **"I think the main challenge is making sure that people are coming to us at an earlier stage hence the community outreach."** (Manager)

One of the HRA's strategies for improving homelessness prevention was the Duty to Refer. This report shows the Duty is successfully connecting more people to Housing Options when they engage with other services. It has also helped to promote the provision of advice from other services. The above-average experiences of hospital and prison leavers highlighted in chapter 4 may also be linked to the Duty to Refer and involvement of other agencies in homelessness support (e.g. when delivering assessments). However, the delivery of the Duty to Refer was seen by staff as problematic, with Housing Options sometimes being sent very limited information about individuals referred to them, meaning they have to work harder to build up a picture of their needs. There are some elements of good practice in this area but for many staff there needed to be a much stronger relationship with the NHS, community mental health teams, the probation service, and others.

Effective prevention has a number of positive impacts for services: reducing the demand for accommodation options for those with greater need, reducing TA use, allowing the PRS to be a more viable option, and most importantly, stopping people from experiencing homelessness and the associated trauma that it causes.

The HRA has delivered tools designed to deliver personalised support, intended to change the role of staff from being chiefly about decision

making towards providing a plan and support that will help someone based on their needs. The assessment process is giving staff a fuller understanding of people's situations and giving clients more contact and a better experience, with the majority of participants finding them useful and leaving them feeling positive about their options. PHPs, when engaged with effectively, have a measurable impact on housing outcomes. Referrals, rent deposits, tenancy advice, and support with budgeting are highlighted as being particularly effective forms of support for those who had positive housing outcomes. This illustrates the importance of 'soft' support in a housing officer's role – having a strong toolkit and time to use it is vital for staff to deliver this.

However, over the course of the research, the number of participants who did not have positive experiences at the assessment stage increased. Too often, people were not connected to the other support services they needed. Support can also drop off after initial contact with some participants struggling to get in contact with their housing officers. The positive feeling participants had on leaving the assessment shows the value of these interactions but all too often the follow-up and outcome – or lack of it – did not match this early positivity.

Whilst the number who recalled having a PHP increased over the course of the research, the proportion remains low at 50 per cent. The intention for PHPs was to create a live document that outlines the support and actions needed to secure accommodation. The majority who said they had a PHP felt it reflected their needs, was clearly explained, and that they could understand its content. But only half felt involved in its creation and very few had their PHP updated, and over the course of the research these experiences worsened. Staff had mixed views of the effectiveness

of PHPs with many seeing it as an added administrative burden that took away from the support that they could provide, whilst others saw it as a positive tool for a building a picture of someone's needs and highlighting what actions their clients needed to take. The low recall of PHPs shows these mixed views, and the fact PHPs are rarely revisited, are having an impact on delivery, with some staff admitting being unable to complete them properly. Mixed with our finding that those who were aware of their PHPs had better outcomes, this shows the importance of consistency and for all cases to have a person-centred plan. Currently PHPs are not live documents that are updated and discussed during the 56 days of available support. Staff highlighted this was mostly due to lack of time which for some was caused by high caseloads. This is potentially also a reason why many service users felt their amount of contact time reduced post assessment and the creation of their PHPs.

Housing Options managers highlighted that they had been able to increase staffing and specialisation since the introduction of the HRA. The design of some services also changed to accommodate the changes brought in by the act, whilst others are still in the process of changing their services based on the first few years of delivery. Through the staff interviews we could see the value of having a setup that truly facilitated delivery of the new requirements. Broadly, where this redesign had taken place, staff were more likely to feel more positively about the HRA and feel more confident about their service delivery – and speak about their service users in more positive ways. Services that redesigned themselves earlier seemed to have a slicker process, and their delivery seemed more in line with the intentions of the HRA, as the working structure surrounding housing officers seemed better suited to their new role.

"People want social housing, there's no social housing. But like we said previously, someone will say 'well I know my friend, she got a four bedroom council property, so you can't tell me there's no properties… they always know someone who's got social housing. So then it looks like you, you're lying to them, so they hold out for that social housing. There's nothing out there for them, even if they find alternative accommodation, it's not good enough for them. You refer them to the B&B intervention team to help them with the months deposit and the months' rent, they don't want that… There is always a problem. You can't please them, some people are very understanding and they will go out there and look for their own accommodation and they're happy to do so, but the majority is sitting there waiting on the council to find them social housing and when you don't find it, then they start the legal challenges, they go to the solicitor because they're not working, they can afford to go the solicitors and then the solicitors go along with it, and it's just ridiculous. Sometimes it's a waste of time." (Frontline)

Having a structure that is able to keep individual caseloads low – or managed effectively so that officers have the capacity to complete statutory paperwork and provide support – is key to making the most of the extra time and broader eligibility criteria brought in by the act. Though there are still issues with this (see next section) it is clear that good progress has been made at moving the cultures of services and those of housing officers away from gatekeeping towards supportiveness. Staff for the most part wanted to find solutions for their clients despite some of the structural barriers that make this difficult. Those services that have not

yet or are in the process of redesigning are taking longer to also have the culture change that the spirit of the act intended.

A final set of improvements under the HRA can be attributed not to the legislation itself but to the unusual context of the pandemic. The incredible circumstances and efforts of frontline workers at this time created services that focused more on need rather than was required by the HRA legislation. However, it is possible that without the HRA, it would have been much more challenging to respond to the pandemic, with less people being likely to approach Housing Options.

Everyone In and the inability to discharge cases or allow people to remain sofa surfing led to people being accommodated when previously this would not have been possible. Staff highlighted that evicting people from TA was not an option as they would then need to work with them again, and so tried to find a longer-term solution earlier. This led to the creation of new albeit temporary accommodation options that worked to the needs of the people living there. This was no easy task and required better, more joined up working between council services, and the increased availability of accommodation options. Through this approach many more rough sleepers were supported into accommodation and went on to sustain housing than would be possible during 'normal' circumstances. Having this experience through Everyone in has led to some improved cross-council working and new forms of accommodation to be opened that aim to better support cases with the greatest need. These new services would not have been possible without Housing Options losing the ability to make decisions or discharge their duties, and therefore having to look for alternative approaches to achieve outcomes and discharge duties. These new accommodation options

and approaches could allow services to build on the outcomes achieved during Everyone In.

5.2 What isn't working, and why?

Despite the improvements highlighted above, this research shows many aspects of the homelessness system that are not working well under the HRA, leading many people to remain homeless or in poor accommodation where their risk of returning to homelessness can be increased. Whilst some of these relate to external factors, others relate either to the nature of the legislation or to how it has been implemented.

Levels of support are inconsistent, often not meeting people's needs, and becoming more generic as the HRA has bedded in. Seventeen per cent received no support at all. Therefore, participants were leaving support without securing improved housing or with a housing outcome that was not suitable or secure. The main barriers to effective support are: a lack of joined up services able to cover a wide range of needs; a lack of affordable options, which reduce the effectiveness of the reasonable steps to accommodate at the prevention and relief stage; and the limited affordable options being protected behind a wall of priority and eligibility, the administration of which takes up a large proportion of officer time. For outcomes to improve, the availability of support must increase, and the barriers highlighted above reduced.

Participants with more support needs have poorer experiences and outcomes, that tend to get worse the more support needs someone has. Our research shows that those with multiple support needs had worse experiences during assessments with

PHPs and having their needs met by the support available. This suggests the support available is not able to cover the range of needs that people facing homelessness have. Better joined up services are needed to combine wider forms of support with a client's housing issue. This will help to reduce the impact of issues such as health problems, addiction and domestic abuse, that have either caused or exacerbated a client's housing situation, therefore opening a wider range of accommodation options for them.[45] This is particularly important at the prevention and relief stage where the PRS is the main option available to housing officers.

The support provided during the pandemic for people with multiple support needs helped to create more accommodation options, with many services developing new approaches based on successful models used during the crisis. The main barrier to these new approaches succeeding in the longer term, however, is the lack of suitable move on accommodation. This means specialised options will quickly fill up and become less effective at delivering sustainable support. This move towards specialised services shows the value of a Housing First approach, which looks to accommodate first and provide the support needed to remain there. The fact that this was the chosen approach during a national emergency demonstrates its effectiveness when there are no other options or opportunities to discharge duties. The poor experiences of people with complex health needs also reinforces the importance of Housing Options staff receiving appropriate training into how to deliver support in a psychologically and trauma informed way.

The new system was designed to help more people, which it has certainly achieved, but for outcomes to improve we need to look at the role played

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45   See Kerslake commission for findings that note how this was one of the improvements seen in homelessness services during the pandemic.

by housing officers. Staff felt it was a contradiction to be both a support worker to clients and decision maker over what support is available to them. Despite the broader eligibility criteria brought in by the HRA the role of housing officers is still primarily that of a decision maker, demonstrated in staff interviews where some felt clients could be confused about housing officers' roles because of the new support duties. Staff highlighted that much of their time is used to gather evidence, especially when work was delivered remotely, and it was harder to build up a full picture of a person's eligibility based on a face to face assessment. Participants often found it difficult to provide the information that was needed and reported that requests for evidence had increased over the course of the research. When evidence is lacking, housing officers suggested they will ask for more, putting added pressure onto clients and using up the limited time they have to help them. This links with findings from Crisis' interim report that showed some staff felt 56 days was too long to make a decision and that they could make one much sooner. This goes against the intentions of the act and misunderstands the purpose of the 56-day timeframe, which aimed to increase the contact and support that people could receive from services. As long as housing officers have to prioritise decision making there is going to be a certain amount of gatekeeping taking place, especially when mixed with the lack of accessible accommodation options.

The structure of gatekeeping that existed pre HRA, highlighted in Crisis' *Turned Away* research was one of the main drivers that led to the creation of the legislation. The positive correlation between provision of support and positive housing outcomes shows why it is so important that gatekeeping is truly removed. Eligibility criteria such as priority need, intentionality and local connection all mean that people who need help may not get it.

The main rationale for keeping these criteria is a lack of housing supply. But the original rationale to have barriers to ensure people did not take advantage of the limited support being provided, the result of a debate that led to the introduction of homelessness legislation in the 1970s. This culture of concern around people gaming the system persists, and over-protects services from an issue that has little impact compared to the very real devastation caused by homelessness. This approach makes it difficult to deliver a person-centred service for some of the most vulnerable people in society. The pandemic shows what is possible when these barriers are removed: services respond with innovation, looking at the needs of those they work with, and creating the options and support that clients need.

Too many research participants did not have the supportive response from housing officers they should have received. From interviews it is clear some staff feel frustrated by the actions of people that they work with and see them as not putting in enough effort to find accommodation by themselves. There is also a perception that some people have 'unrealistic' expectations and 'only' want access to social housing. The lack of available options and the continued requirement of staff to make eligibility decisions is a real barrier to them being able to provide the support that is needed.

Housing officers are under a lot of pressure and are very regularly left to deal with complex issues alone due to a lack of connection with other services that can help deliver holistic support. Whilst housing officers are still primarily focused on gathering information and without access to much needed support services and affordable accommodation, there will be a limit to the number of people who can be supported into suitable and stable accommodation. For those who do get priority, the lack of suitable social and supported housing

and wraparound support means that even those who are seen as being in the most need will struggle to secure a home. The culture of a service is a product of the structure of that service, the relationship that service has to the wider council and the accommodation options it has available. For culture to change to one underpinned by person-centred and trauma-informed support, the ability to discharge duties of support need to be removed so that there is not an option to not support someone in need.

Staff interviews and focus groups across the three waves of the research indicated that the new burdens funding did not cover the full costs of implementing the HRA. Staff felt it was not enough to cover the core cost of delivery, with this being supplemented by other sources. Some services therefore felt they didn't have enough time with their clients. Since the implementation of the Act a number of short term funding pots have been released primarily to address rough sleeping and emergency accommodation needed during the pandemic. Short term approaches to funding impact the ability of services to plan ahead and develop solutions for the needs of their communities. It limits their recruitment due to the short-term nature of contracts on offer. The funding provided to the local authority is often divided between different services.

> "I think the new burdens funding in itself isn't enough to do what we need so very much some of the flexible homelessness support grant was used for funding staff to do core activities. I think the constraints really, the, those two pots of funding that have now turned into the prevention grant where all our, a lot of our prevention activities are funded from. And we pay, and our TA costs and the use of TA is prohibitive."
> (Manager)

> "Not knowing that information until late in the day and it often only being only one year funding makes planning and commissioning services really, really difficult and it's just not effective use of funding levels to be allocating them on such short notice and for only one year."
> (Manager)

Whilst the recent round of RSI funding has been directed more at longer term investment, this is still narrowly focused on rough sleeping and emergency provision rather than interventions that stop people experiencing homeless in the first place. TA use and spend has exponentially grown over the last ten years, and this has been exacerbated by the pandemic. The HRA was intended to shift provision to be more prevention focused but this is very challenging when the external environment is restricting access to stable accommodation. Some – though not all – of the local authorities participating in the research also commented on the formula used to identify need does not reflect current homelessness levels in their area.

The main other source of funding comes from bids or for specialist streams of work. This pushes local authorities in strategically different directions depending on the pots available. This again takes away from the service's ability to plan their delivery strategically and to the needs of their areas. It also pulls services in different strategic directions with new priorities taking precedence regularly. The clear lack of coordination on the funding and strategy for support services to end homelessness can wastes time and resources and fails to achieve what is needed to stop people becoming or staying homeless. Managers felt that the policies that dictate their work are fragmented and that this has a very real impact.

"So when we had post HRA initiatives to bring intervention into the private rented sector the timescales for that funding were very short to work up a plan and to basically cover an intervention in the private rented sector for one year was unfeasible" (Manager)

"If you're serious about ending rough sleeping and tackling homelessness then give us the long term commitment" (Manager)

"It's really difficult to take a long strategic view or make sure that you engage everybody when you've got maybe, I don't know, we've had maybe five or six different bits of bids, or maybe even more if you include the stuff that goes through public health that relates to our clients, really difficult to be strategic, really difficult to make sure everything's aligned and everyone's consulted." (Manager)

"To me, the policy's mixed, the policy's messy, it's fragmented, there's not a coherent vision within central government for homelessness and homelessness reduction. It's, this week it's about getting rough sleepers of the street, next week it's about we must not let anybody leave the prisons, next week it's about hospitals. We then end up taking a huge amount of time and resource away from delivering the service, to bidding for and project managing and all of the legal stuff that comes with that, all of these different pots of money." (Manager)

The HRA was never designed to increase housing supply but the lack of housing options available in every area we researched is one of the largest barriers to achieving the outcomes people need. A lack of housing as highlighted above impacts on options available to staff, creating a culture of decision making and changing the relationship between client and staff: it turns someone whose most suitable option is social housing into a client with 'unrealistic' expectations. People are therefore being placed in unsuitable situations in the PRS where they need to choose between eating and heating which greatly increases the likelihood that they will experience the same issues again in the future. Or, that they spend long periods in unsuitable temporary and emergency accommodation, where they remain effectively homeless whilst they wait for move on accommodation.

"So the issue with the HRA for me isn't simply use your local resources to resolve your local problems, one of the issues is that we're not as a local authority to subsidise private landlord's rents and that in some ways is a really big challenge because people [are] subsidising their own rent through benefit money intended for those individuals to live on, pay their bills on, and pay their food on, you could easily return to the shall I heat or shall I eat argument that a lot of people face." (Manager)

Many staff highlighted that they believed it is a better system for working with people. But to be a success and to not redevelop the gatekeeping practice that the HRA was brought in to remove it needs to be part of a housing-led system that prioritises prevention. Without an increase in supply and loosening of eligibility criteria, a high proportion of those who approaching Housing Options will either approach again or have their housing situation get worse.

When asked what they would change, the majority of staff highlighted the need for additional social, supported, temporary and affordable PRS accommodation. Social housing is not the only option for those who are threatened or experiencing homelessness but the model does provide the level of tenancy security that many need when experiencing financial, emotional or physical instability. The PRS is the most realistic option for most who approach Housing Options. Many staff have, however, highlighted multiple barriers to this, ranging from a lack of a strong PRS offer in-house, high local rents, and low levels of availability. Due to the lack of social housing, one staff member highlighted described how "like most local authorities, [we] are using [the PRS] as pseudo social housing and it isn't appropriate to have people that need longer term stability in tenancies that are 6 or 12 months long", and that the local authority needed to subsidise this to make it accessible.

The lack of available accommodation even for those in priority need makes achieving outcomes at the prevention and relief stage difficult and leads to an increased use of TA. This requires local authorities to make large outlays of funding and traps them in a cycle of paying for the lack of housing options in their area, rather then being able to invest that money into more sustainable and long term solutions. This vicious cycle has an impact on housing availability, staff delivering services and most importantly people who may have experienced great trauma or hardship. Without a clearer direction from central government on how to deal with the ongoing sharp end of the housing crisis, Housing Options services, in whatever form they take, will struggle to accommodate all those who need a home, incurring great cost that could be better spent.

5.3 Recommendations

1. Despite the widening of legal duties under the HRA there are still significant numbers of people that are not getting the help they need to address and end their homelessness. One in six people we surveyed got no help at all and even with more emergency provision in place in wave 3 there was still a third of people who did not get access to accommodation after seeking help from Housing Options. Steps should be taken to build on the intent of the HRA, but the legal protections must go further to provide help to everyone who needs it. This should be based on the following principles:
   - **Everyone facing homelessness should be able to access help wherever and whenever they need it**
   - **Local authorities and other public bodies should have robust duties to prevent homelessness**
   - **There should be clear regulatory oversight of how they discharge their duties under the legislation**

2. There was insufficient access to and supply of suitable and affordable housing which is stopping the HRA working as effectively as it could do. When asked how they felt about their living situation after using Housing Options, half (50%) did not think it was secure for at least 6 months, more than half (58%) did not think it was suitable for their needs, and less than a third (30%) felt it was both secure and suitable. Over consecutive decades there has been significant reductions in the number of homes for social rent, making it harder for local authorities to house homeless households. The Westminster Government should set an annual target of delivering an additional 90,000 social homes each year for the next 15 years and invest in substantial increases in the

delivery of social rented housing. In the short to medium term there needs to be equitable provision of PRS access schemes across every local authority to support people at risk of and experiencing homelessness into the PRS. These should be linked to tenancy sustainment support to prevent the PRS causing as well as alleviating homelessness.

3. Practice and culture varied considerably by area and housing officer, which affected the quality of support and whether people had their needs addressed. The research highlighted there were particular issues for people with complex needs and people who approached for assistance when they were rough sleeping - only 29% of people with complex needs and people rough sleeping felt their needs were being met by Housing options compared to 47% of people with no support needs:
   - **A statutory code of practice should be introduced to raise the standards of local authority homelessness services across the country**. This is separate from the Homelessness Code of Guidance and should aim to provide a clear and enforceable set of standards for local authorities that will help them to implement the new duties introduced by the Act more effectively and link these to the outcomes achieved through the HRA.

- **The delivery and design of services supporting the HRA needs to be improved and funded over the long-term**. Homelessness services in every local authority area must be designed based on an individual needs assessment to provide more tailored support especially for people with complex needs. This must include the commissioning and integration of housing-led models including Housing First, Critical Time Intervention, and tenancy sustainment support with appropriate caseloads. This should include training and support for staff to embed and deliver the specialist support required.

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Crisis

Together
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