



ALL IN FOR CHANGE

Prevention Commission: Meetings 6 & 7
August & September 2020

WHO IS THE PREVENTION COMMISSION?

The Prevention Commission is a group of people with lived and frontline experiences of homelessness who, as members of the Change Team, are motivated to drive forward the change needed to make real and lasting on-the-ground progress.

As well as people with current and recent experience of homelessness, the Prevention Commission is made up of people with frontline responsibilities in Local Authorities, Housing Associations and third sector support providers.

During the coronavirus pandemic the Commission has been meeting virtually, and over meetings 6 and 7 we were joined by Helen Murdoch from Salvation Army, Ruth Whatling from the Scottish Government, Susanne Millar from Glasgow City HSCP, and Jeremy Hewer from SFHA who all added great value to our discussions about how best we can prevent homelessness when people are facing other challenges such as mental ill health, addictions, experience of trauma.

WHAT DID WE COVER?

The Commission focused their discussions on two key areas:

1. Preventing homelessness when people are experiencing severe and multiple disadvantage (SMD)
2. How we approach the question of ensuring people give informed consent for a referral or follow up action to be progressed.



Some members of the Prevention Commission at the meeting are (clockwise) Claire, Davy, Judith, Sabrina, Helen, Ruth and Beth.

PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS FOR PEOPLE EXPERIENCING SEVERE AND MULTIPLE DISADVANTAGE

The Commission began its consideration of preventing homelessness for people experiencing severe and multiple disadvantage (SMD) through a Q&A with Helen Murdoch, Housing First Operations and Implementation Manager (Scotland) at Salvation Army to make sure we learn from her expertise. Through this discussion we considered the importance of a series of points that will be crucial to the successful implementation of new duties:

Rebuilding trust

People experiencing SMD have often lost trust in the system, services and staff having too often been excluded from what they need by people in positions of power. The delivery of Housing First has started to redress this lack of belief in the system for some by delivering on promises made to people and this is something that needs to be built on.

In the experience of Commission members, the power dynamics that have contributed to the broken trust still exist today and real effort will be needed to challenge this for future duties to be successful.

A feeling of safety

The feeling of safety is personal to everyone, and it is every individual's own feeling of safety that we must strive for. Achieving this cannot be rushed – you don't overcome 20 years of trauma in 12 months – and the perspective of staff on whether something constitutes an offer of safety cannot be substituted for whether someone feels it to be true. Without this feeling of safety little progress can be made.

For members of the Prevention Commission, there is still too much of a focus on getting people to a particular place (e.g. into accommodation, linked into social work services, registered with a GP) rather than understanding whether people feel safe.

Building faith in the future

A long history of challenges has left people with little faith in the future or reason to believe things can be better. Preventing another experience of homelessness requires a core focus on positive relationships and taking the time to understand what makes people happy and prioritising fun where we can! This requires an active effort to continually raise people's expectations and continually meet them.

Commission members are keen to see more of a focus on strength-based approaches that can help build this faith in the future.

The importance of support staff

All of the issues raised require the best support staff, using their skills, knowledge, and experience to work alongside people rather than placing conditions on them and making decisions for them. This requires us to think very carefully about the training, support and salary we offer staff to enable them to deliver this crucial role.

In the experience of members of the Prevention Commission, it remains relatively unusual for staff to have access to regular facilitated reflective practice to support their development, and salaries remain at too low a level to reflect the positive contribution they can make to people's lives.

The question of consent

Questions of supporting people to give their informed consent to referrals being made or actions to be taken under potential new duties was a challenging discussion. While members of the Commission did not want to put forward definitive conclusions, people were clear that the place we want to reach is where we trust frontline staff to use their judgement in individual situations. And to achieve this we need to ensure staff are fully trained, beyond a day of training on trauma, to allow them to identify the root causes of people's experiences.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE PREVENTION DUTY REVIEW GROUP

The Prevention Commission would like to see further consideration of:

1. The importance of ensuring ALL housing options are considered for people experiencing severe and multiple disadvantage, avoiding options being ruled out because of someone's history or assumptions about their future.
2. Safe, secure homes as the best base for recovery for people experiencing severe and multiple disadvantage and to make it sustainable in the longer term it is useful to consider opportunities to take some time out of their tenancy when things get tough without putting it at risk or returning to homelessness. This could take the form of providing short-term accommodation that people can take advantage of, and can include cross local authority placements to allow people to spend a bit of time in a different part of the country for a change of scenery, returning home when they are ready.
3. How risk aversion is avoided, making sure any new duties aren't too conditional, placing too many limits on people and leading to a lack of trust.
4. What package of training, support and salary is needed for frontline support staff to equip them for potential future duties.
5. Learning from the Housing First Scotland Pathfinder in relation to the funding for decorating and furnishing someone's home before they move in. This has been a particularly positive experience for people housed through the Pathfinder and extending to others can play an important role in homelessness prevention.

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