



## Centre for Homelessness Impact

### Learning from LEAF's Festival of Feedback

#### Introduction

The 'LEAF Festival of Feedback' was designed by members of the LEAF (Lived Experience Advisory Forum) in Oxford with the support of the Centre for Homelessness Impact (CHI). The purpose of the Festival was to gather feedback from people experiencing homelessness and people working in frontline roles within local homelessness services. LEAF members felt that there was a need to gather feedback on the working of the local homelessness system *as a whole* to build understanding of how where the system was succeeding and failing. Equally, the members felt that people within the system should be presented with a range of choices about how to provide their feedback in a trauma-informed environment. This was in recognition of the fact that some people do not engage in conventional feedback loops because the structures are insufficiently flexible.

LEAF members spent a considerable amount of time thinking about what questions should be asked within the Festival and the different choices attendees could be offered to convey their responses. They also gave consideration as to how attendees could be made to feel comfortable at the event and how to incentivise participation as opposed to attendance.

#### Methodology

The festival included five activities:

1. A 'What helps, what hinders?' activity. People experiencing homelessness were asked 'What helps you move forwards and what gets in your way?'. Practitioners working in frontline roles were asked 'What helps you achieve the most in your work and what gets in your way?'
2. A 'solutions and aspirations station' where people could make constructive suggestions to make the system work better or convey personal goals and aspirations.
3. Service specific post boxes for feedback to Alliance services. Before the festival, Alliance organisations were invited to submit one question to be put to people experiencing homelessness/housing insecurity and one question to be put to frontline staff. These questions were attached to the front of post boxes and attendees invited to post their responses.
4. Filming and recording opportunities. Attendees who wanted to give their feedback in a more free-flowing way, were given the opportunity to have a recorded conversation with a LEAF member.





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5. Non-recorded conversations with LEAF members and volunteers. These took place throughout the festival and a reflective discussion capturing some of the common themes of conversations was held with LEAF members and volunteers at the end of each day.

The festival took place over two days on the 11th and 12th July. People experiencing homelessness were invited to attend on the first day and frontline practitioners were invited to attend on the second day.

### Attendance

Over the course of the festival, 28 people experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity and 16 frontline practitioners attended the festival and participated in some or all of the feedback activities described above.

### Recommendations

The feedback gathered through all the activities was analysed by members of the CHI staff team. This analysis revealed a desire amongst both people experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity and frontline staff to see:

- Open and accountable services
- Streamlined processes
- Support the whole person
- Support the whole journey
- Working together to achieve the best outcomes.

More detail about the comments and suggestions that brought out these themes is detailed below.

### Open and Accountable Services

**Recommendation 1: Action is needed to raise awareness of what services are available and who can access them.**





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Specific suggestions in relation to this were:

- Create more access and information points, including a space at the Council offices to access advice and support with avoiding homelessness.
- Services should visit other services to speak to their service users about what they can offer. This should include visiting services not directly dealing with homelessness, such as Turning Point.
- Services should give consideration to how they make themselves 'visible' to those who might need them, including how they make the best use of online platforms.
- A simple sheet of helpful services should be created and made widely available.

**Recommendation 2: All services should be open to feedback from those who use them and respond effectively to feedback provided.**

Specific suggestions in relation to this were:

- Services should ensure they have open channels of communication with their service-users/clients.
- Services should make close engagement with their service-users/clients a priority.
- Services should ensure that their staff members are all comfortable receiving and responding to feedback from service-users/clients.
- The Housing Directors Group should have more contact with people who are using services or be advised by a panel of people with lived experience of homelessness.

**Recommendation 3: There should be safe ways for staff and service-users to call-out/report negative practice and behaviour within services.**

Specific examples of perceived negative behaviour include:

- Staff members discussing service-users with other service-users.
- Donated items not being given to service-users.
- Cherry-picking of service-users. There was a suggestion that names should be removed from referral documents to prevent this.





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**Recommendation 4: Recruiting the right staff and ensuring that they receive the right training is crucial to ensuring openness within services.**

Specific suggestions in relation to this include:

- Opening up more pathways for people with lived experience to train as support workers and recruiting more workers with lived experience of homelessness.
- Involving service-users in recruitment decisions.
- More training for staff on trauma-informed practices and more awareness sessions on service-user perspectives.

### Streamlined Services

**Recommendation 5: There are some specific barriers which services should seek to remove to make it easier for people to access the services they need.**

Specific barriers identified include:

- Service-users not having mobile phones and therefore struggling to maintain contact with services.
- People sleeping rough needing to be verified twice before being able to access services.
- A shortage of accommodation where you're allowed to have a pet.
- Having to repeatedly tell one's story in order to access services.

**Recommendation 6: Streamlined processes should be created to ensure services are accessible and guard against re-traumatisation.**

Specific suggestions in relation to this included:





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- Controlled information sharing between services.
- A consistent approach to assessment across key services.
- Support to get service-users mobile phones.

### Support the whole person

**Recommendation 7: People affected by homelessness are rarely affected by this issue alone. There is a need for readily accessible support with co-existing difficulties to be integrated into homelessness pathways.**

Specific issues with which people often require assistance include:

- Substance dependency
- Mental health and psychological wellbeing
- Family issues
- Isolation
- Accessing benefits
- Physical health issues
- Life skills (e.g. cooking, budgeting, making and keeping appointments)
- Other factors contributing to social exclusion, such as difficulty speaking and understanding English
- Learning difficulties.

Specific suggestions in relation to holistic support included:

- More workers trained to support people around mental health and substance abuse simultaneously
- Support with smoking cessation and weight loss
- More support to apply for PIP
- More outreach medical support
- Gym, fitness and leisure centre passes
- Support to learn how to swim and ride a bike
- More courses and activities
- Women only activities
- Support for parents who have had a child removed from their care
- Access to green spaces, such as university gardens
- More support to train as a support worker for people with lived experience of homelessness.





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Overall, there was a consensus that people experiencing or recovering from homelessness should receive person-centred support to achieve their goals and aspirations without assumptions or 'should' statements about what these goals and aspirations might be. Many attendees commented on the importance of having opportunities to build durable social networks, underlining that friendships and communities are often as important as services in helping individuals navigate challenges and difficulties in the long term.

### Support for the whole journey

**Recommendation 8: Supporting people with their recovery from homelessness is vital, both from the perspective of supporting individuals to thrive and from the perspective of preventing recurrent homelessness.**

Specific suggestions for recovery support included:

- Assessment of, and support with, the issues that contributed to an individual's homelessness in the first place
- Support to maximise income through helping individuals to get all the benefits they're entitled to
- Finding suitable Landlords for individuals moving on from homelessness
- Recognition that having a home means more than a roof over your head; there is a need for support with the skills which underpin tenancy sustainment
- Enabling access to activities, support groups, networking opportunities and progression pathways. This should outlast periods of residency in temporary accommodation.

**Recommendation 9: 'Upstream' intervention is needed if people at risk of homelessness are to be reached before their homelessness is imminent.**

Suggestions relating to this included:

- Effective mental health services which recognise that mental health issues are a significant risk factor for homelessness
- Clear communication from prevention services encouraging early access
- Walk-in, self-referral prevention support which is easy to find
- Education for young people on what to do and where to seek help if they are concerned they are at risk of homelessness.







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Working together to achieve the best outcomes

**Recommendation 10: Joined-up working both amongst homelessness services, and between homelessness services and services addressing related issues, is vital if the local system is to operate optimally.**

Specific suggestions in relation to this included:

- Workers from homelessness services to visit relevant services, such as drug and alcohol recovery services
- Consent-based sharing of information between services
- A joint approach to recruitment across key services
- A consistent approach to assessing clients across key services
- Establishing access and referral pathways to activities, courses and communities that can help sustain and support recovery from homelessness.

**Recommendation 11: Strong lines of communication between managers and frontline staff are needed to keep services impactful and responsive.**

Specific suggestions made in relation to this included:

- Develop mechanisms by which people working on the frontline can inform decisions
- Take the threat of staff burnout seriously and introduce preventative measures
- Take a measured approach to positive risk-taking so that there is willingness to try new approaches.

**Recommendation 12: Working collaboratively with people with lived experience (LE) of homelessness, and embedding individuals with LE into delivery teams, is essential to ensuring services operate in a way which is relevant, focused and trauma-informed.**

Specific suggestions in relation to this included:

- Supported training pathways for individuals with LE to become support workers





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- Establish targeted support for workers with LE to ensure help them navigate the specific challenges of working in connection with an issue that has affected you personally
- Panel of people with LE should be convened to advise on/oversee key strategic decisions.
- Giving priority to recruiting more workers with LE
- Develop an approach to co-production which supports people using services and people with LE to be able to lead projects and discussions.

### Conclusions and Observations

#### Methodology

As a means of collecting feedback from people with recent and current experience of using homelessness services, there is a good case for saying that the festival was efficient. Both the number of people from this demographic who participated in the festival, and the level of engagement from participants, was in line with the organisers' hopes. This was largely due to the actions of LEAF members who took a proactive approach to encouraging people experiencing homelessness to attend the event and supporting participation in the activities once attendees had walked through the door. This encouragement went above and beyond what you might expect from organisers of this kind of event; for example, LEAF members approached people they knew to be sleeping rough in Oxford while the event was in progress to invite them in. With the support of volunteers from the New Road Baptist Church congregation, the members also went out of their way to make attendees feel welcome and convey that their input was valuable.

Although the different activities available to attendees at the festival had different formats, it has been possible to draw key messages from across the breadth of the evidence generated. Grouping specific recommendations and comments around emerging themes seemed a sensible way to analyse the results as not all participants participated in every activity and there was significant variation in the way questions and prompts were interpreted by participants. While this would have been problematic if collating the feedback activity by activity, it didn't create problems when drawing out key insights. In fact, it brought out a rich variety of insights which added depth to the key messages identified. Being inclusive of people with different ways of thinking, processing and conveying information was one of the standout elements of the festival. This was largely due to the insight of LEAF members into what would and wouldn't be likely to engage people experiencing homelessness/housing precarity.

Attendance and engagement from frontline professionals on the second day of the festival was slightly lower than the organisers had hoped for. Nevertheless, the engagement from the professionals who did attend was positive, with most participating in a variety of feedback activities. This suggests that the event would work, and generate a higher volume of evidence, if it was delivered again with a greater number of attendees. It would be interesting to see whether participation increased if it was delivered in







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a different space (e.g. within relevant workplaces), if participation from professionals was incentivised in some way or if key employers were more involved in designing and/or promoting the event. Interestingly, a high proportion of the professionals who attended the festival had personal experience of homelessness. This creates an interesting opportunity to explore whether the festival format could be used for a focus group for this demographic or whether professionals with lived experience of homelessness could play a more active role in delivering feedback activities for their colleagues at a future event.

### Evidence Generated

None of the 12 recommendations highlighted in this report are likely to come as a surprise to homelessness service providers in Oxfordshire. However, there is value in understanding that these have been highlighted as priorities through the kind of open participation channel offered by the Festival of Feedback. The broad scope of the recommendations means that they are probably most useful as a starting point for discussion rather than an end point. They provide a different perspective on the 'big picture' question of what is and isn't working in the local homelessness system which can potentially be used alongside other relevant evidence and data. Perhaps a logical next step would be to create shared spaces where service managers, frontline workers and people with lived experience of homelessness/housing precarity can engage in some system-wide, solution-focused thinking around the themes emerging from this report and other evidence and data available.

