

Learning Evaluation: The Single Homelessness Prevention Service

Report for Bridges Outcomes Partnerships

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Jeremy Swain, Homeless Link Associate

Helen Lewis, Homeless Link Associate

Sophie Price, Consultancy Manager

sophie.price@homelesslink.org.uk



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This report is dedicated to our associate and friend Jeremy Swain, a principled and principal figure in addressing homelessness for many decades both as an outstanding charity leader and as a specialist adviser to Government. Jeremy's honesty and integrity was instrumental in developing this work. He is greatly missed and our tribute to his memory is to seek to learn lessons and make homelessness and prevention services as successful as possible.

Acknowledgments

Central to this learning evaluation report were interviews with key stakeholders, all of whom in different contexts have a close working relationship with the Single Homelessness Prevention Service (SHPS) or, in the case of the tenants we spoke with, have directly experienced the impact of the service. Every single local authority receiving a service through the SHPS willingly gave us time through their key representatives who spoke at length about the service, and we are extremely grateful to the 19 local authority people who found a space in their very busy working lives. Thank you also to the representatives of the five different delivery partner organisations whose views were so crucial in helping us understand how the SHPS operates and who linked us with people they were supporting so that we could get a first-hand view of what is like to directly receive a service from the SHPS.

We had enlightening conversations with representatives from two of the lettings agents whose contribution to helping procure suitable property for the SHPS is so important, and we were able to speak to colleagues at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to get a valuable overview of how the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) is operating across England. Additionally, we had some very informative and uplifting conversations with people who have received the SHPS service. Finally, we were well served by key contacts at Bridges Outcomes Partnerships, Amarjit Bains, Amanda King, and Conor Sullivan, were always able to respond promptly and openly to the questions we raised and provided us with the papers and data we needed whenever it was requested. In short, we couldn't have asked for more from the many people who willingly set aside time for us, and we are deeply grateful to each and every one of them.

Executive Summary

The Single Homelessness Prevention Service (SHPS) is a distinctive and highly effective service which enables people at risk of homelessness to access accommodation and make progress in their lives to sustain this accommodation and avoid future homelessness.

This learning evaluation provides important evidence from local authority representatives, letting agents, and SHPS service delivery partners in London and Norfolk that SHPS's approach, based around payment for outcomes, which improves outcomes for people at risk of homelessness, whilst also driving innovation in service design and delivery, empowering service users and staff, and increasing accountability within the contract process. As described by one commissioner, SHPS represents a 'unique selling proposition'.

"SHPS provides an enhanced service for single people...we get an enhanced service we couldn't otherwise have. More prevention and relief, more outcomes".

– Local Authority Representative

"Payment by outcomes has got to be the way forward. We don't work with another service like SHPS. We get good results. We have referrals queuing up".

– Local Authority Representative

The findings of the evaluation indicate that SHPS is well-placed to extend its reach into other local authority areas and to work with non-local authority commissioners and funders in future.

Key learning from the evaluation includes:

- SHPS's payment for outcomes contract model is more effective than conventional commissioning. Its intrinsic target focus drives partnership development and an assertive approach by staff to maintaining engagement and encouraging progress with service users. Both of these lead to better client outcomes.

"My line managers feel it gives such value. We are more reactive and responsive and line managers are amazed".

– Delivery Manager

- SHPS's clear performance management and reporting framework reduces the administrative burden associated with output-focused contracts. The quality, transparency, and accessibility of SHPS outcomes data enables local authorities to understand and easily measure contract delivery and this increases accountability.

"We had been used to giving a whole chunk of money to providers, then trying to monitor how they were spending it. And it was a revelation because we only paid for positive outcomes".

– Senior Local Authority Officer

- SHPS promotes a flexible service delivery approach which makes it more responsive to local authorities' operating context and enables frontline services to tailor responses to meet changing needs. This is supported by Bridges Outcomes Partnerships' independent project management, which promotes dialogue between SHPS delivery partners, a problem-solving approach and innovative service responses.

"I'm struggling to think of any negative, I've enjoyed this contract so much. Before....there was less of an appetite to manage sub-contractors. Our delivery partner felt a bit out on a limb. They were not getting enough support from SHPS. Now [the Director] manages every aspect of it".

– Senior Local Authority Manager

- SHPS frees up capacity for local authority staff to focus on family and other homelessness, thus achieving savings for housing and adult social care services.
- Relationships with landlords and letting agents are nurtured and maintained, are distinctive and a key success of the service.

"They are good. Much better than working with [local authorities] who just sign people off. A vital service going over and above".

– Lettings Agent Representative

- The support offered to landlords, including protection insurance and tenancy support, has encouraged their initial engagement with SHPS, enhances the service's ability to procure sufficient accommodation, and incentivises landlords to accept tenants who may present risks. SHPS's flexible use of additional funding, such as Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) and rent deposits/rent in advance also speed up rehousing for SHPS clients.
- The eight months' tenancy support offered by SHPS is instrumental in significantly reducing repeat homelessness – giving tenants sufficient time to build formal and informal support networks and develop self-sufficiency. The holistic and traumainformed nature of support enhances its impact. SHPS's strong focus on employment support improves opportunities to access and sustain accommodation in the private rented sector.

"The eight months support is vital. The HMOs...those landlords now come straight to us. Even [estate agents are] now working with us. Flats are only [advertised] for 24 hours, and we have to be quick to get customers to view".

– Delivery Partner Manager

- Payment by outcomes contracts require staff with a particular motivation and mindset. SHPS's recruitment focus on skills and aptitude helps attract committed staff and its value is enhanced when combined with on the job learning to develop specialist skills, such as managing procurement and partnership arrangements.

Introduction

Bridges Outcomes Partnerships

Bridges Outcomes Partnerships is a not-for-profit social enterprise which works with the government, community groups, and specialist partners to help radically change human services and environmental initiatives in order to improve outcomes. It is created by Bridges Fund Management – a specialist impact investment manager which for over more than 20 years has successfully raised social investment capital to support a range of services, programmes, and initiatives with a social purpose.¹

Bridges Outcomes Partnerships has a particular focus on projects which, unlike most conventionally commissioned services, are not delivered according to a set specification. Instead, the commissioner commits to paying for the achievement of agreed delivery milestones or outcomes linked to measurable improvements in people's lives. The intention is for the focus to be not on how services are delivered but on the outcomes that arise – structured around collaborative design, flexible delivery, and clear accountability. Bridges Outcomes Partnerships believes data-driven decision making is an essential part of service development. To date, Bridges Outcomes Partnerships has supported over 60 partnership projects, which has created over £130m worth of outcomes for over 39,000 people. Additionally, ATQ Consultants found that outcomes from social outcome contracts generated £1.4bn of public value – resulting in every £1 spent by commissioners on social outcomes contracts generating £10.20 of additional public value.²

Bridges Outcomes Partnerships has engaged in a wide range of social policy areas including youth education and employment, adoption and fostering, social prescribing, youth homelessness, rough sleeping, and with respect to the Single Homelessness Prevention Service, homelessness intervention. A full picture of the range of outcome

¹ Lukic, M., Levitt, A. (2021) Social Impact Bonds 2.0?: Outcomes Partnerships Offer Rare Combination of Three Blessings. Available [here](#).

² Big Society Capital (2022) Outcomes For All: 10 Years of Social Outcomes Contracts. Available [here](#).

partnerships with which Bridges Outcomes Partnerships is engaged can be found on their website.³

The Evaluation Brief

Primary Purpose of the Learning Evaluation

The primary purpose of the evaluation is to evidence the distinctiveness of the Single Homelessness Prevention Service (SHPs) model of delivery and, specifically, to understand which elements of the SHPs approach make it effective in helping people who have experienced homelessness sustain their accommodation and make progress in their lives. Bridges Outcomes Partnerships (BOP) is committed to continuous improvement, and this evaluation explores how the SHPs can improve its service, deliver more outcomes, and take up more opportunities to develop and grow – working in partnership with local authorities, central government, service delivery partners, landlords and lettings agents, and people facing homelessness who receive a service from the SHPs.

This evaluation is a learning evaluation rather than one that seeks to assess the value for-money benefits of the SHPs and focuses primarily on evidencing the distinctiveness and effectiveness of the service. It therefore does not include a rigorous cost benefit assessment of the SHPs and does not seek to systematically measure and assess whether the SHPs model is enabling local authorities that commission the SHPs to assist more people than local authorities which do not currently commission the SHPs. However, when measuring impact, the cost of a service is relevant and important to commissioning bodies and issues of cost naturally arose in the interviews which are central to this evaluation. These are addressed in this report and financial factors are also covered in later chapters of this report which consider challenges and development opportunities facing the SHPs.

Distinctiveness of the SHPs Model

The evaluation focuses on seeking answers to the following questions:

- Is the SHPs model distinctive and, if it is, what differentiates it from other services and programmes doing similar work?
- Which components of the SHPs delivery model make the biggest impact in achieving sustainable outcomes to help people escape and avoid experiencing homelessness?
- Which elements of the SHPs approach are most valued by the different stakeholders that the SHPs engages with?

³ Bridges Outcomes Partnerships (2023) Home. Available [here](#).

- Are there particular people in the context of an equality, diversity, and inclusion perspective for whom the SHPS is especially effective or ineffective?
- In facilitating or hindering successful accommodation outcomes which factors are key?
- What could be done to strengthen the delivery model to achieve improved outcomes?
- Are there other quantifiable outcomes, for example in the areas of social care, health, criminal justice, and employment, that the SHPS achieves which are valued by partners and make its approach distinctive?

Stakeholder Engagement

Central to this learning evaluation report is the assessment of the effectiveness and impact of the SHPS provided by key stakeholders whose close engagement with the service enabled them to speak about the service with authority and credibility. These stakeholders included:

- Local authority representatives with direct knowledge of how the SHPS operates and performs from a commissioning and delivery perspective.
- Delivery partners tasked with providing services to SHPS participants and responsible to Bridges Outcomes Partnerships in its role as partnership coordinator.
- Lettings agents engaged by the SHPS to procure accommodation for SHPS participants in the private rented sector (PRS).
- Representatives from central government with knowledge of the SHPS and expert knowledge of the central, regional, and local government operating landscape.
- People who have received a service from the SHPS.

In total, 38 people were interviewed as part of the evaluation – collectively providing a comprehensive and candid analysis of the SHPS based on their particular experiences. All quotations used in this evaluation report are derived from these interviews and anonymised, except where the contributor has specifically requested otherwise.

The Development of the Single Homelessness Prevention Service

The development of the SHPS since inception in 2017 has taken place during a period of considerable change and upheaval with some very significant changes taking place in the way homelessness has been addressed and tackled at national, regional, and local levels. As such, the SHPS model has needed to flex and adapt in response to this turbulent operating environment.

The Impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act

The inception of the SHPS should be considered in the context of one of the most significant changes in the response to homelessness in recent years; the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) which became operational in April 2018. In England, the HRA placed additional duties on local authorities to intervene at an earlier stage to prevent homelessness in their areas.

The HRA also required housing authorities to provide homelessness services to everyone affected, not just those for whom there was a main homelessness duty because they were in “priority need” (housing authorities are required to ensure accommodation is available for people experiencing homelessness in priority need). Priority needs groups include pregnant women, households with dependents, women threatened with domestic violence, care leavers aged 18-20, people who can prove vulnerability as a result of (for example) old age, mental ill health, a physical disability or a learning disability, and people experiencing homelessness as a result of an emergency such as a flood or fire.

Specifically, the HRA includes:

- An enhanced prevention duty extending the period a household is threatened with homelessness from 28 days to 56 days, meaning that housing authorities are required to work with people to prevent homelessness at an earlier stage.
- A duty to those who are already experiencing homelessness, so that housing authorities will support households for 56 days to relieve their homelessness by helping them to secure accommodation.

It was clear that one of the biggest changes the HRA would initiate was an increase in the number of single people without dependents a local authorities should be required to assist. Until the commencement of the HRA, single people were far less likely than households with dependents to be owed a main duty through being in priority need.

The anticipated consequences of the new legislation were articulated by a senior local authority contributor to the evaluation in the following terms.

"We knew that with the introduction of the HRA there would be an influx that we were not best placed to deal with. Family homelessness dominated and in many ways families are straightforward. With singles...it looked as if there were going to be more complex cases. And people eligible for help with low vulnerability and for who there would be no section 188 main duties"⁴.

– Senior Local Authority Representative

Central Government Funding Initiatives

Trailblazer Funding and Life Chances Funding

Mindful of the likely impact of the HRA, particularly with regards to the introduction of new prevention duties, the then Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government established a £20 million 'Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer Areas' programme. Launched in 2017, prior to the introduction of the HRA, the aim was to help local authorities and their partners develop and implement innovative approaches to addressing homelessness prevention – in total, 30 areas received two years of funding. In collaboration with the London Borough of Brent, Bridges Fund Management was successful in bidding for a £1.8 million of grants over two years from the Trailblazer fund (£0.9 million from Brent, and £0.9 million from TB over four years) to establish the first SHPS programme based on a payment for outcomes funding framework. The grant funding provided was match-funded by the local authority, and SHPS was the only 'Trailblazer' to have their service continued, expanded, and majority funded by local authorities once the original Trailblazer funding came to an end.

The outcomes-based approach entailed financial risk share between the local authority and Bridges Outcomes Partnerships, the partnership co-ordinator and contract holder, overseeing the work of voluntary sector delivery organisations. Should housing prevention and relief outcomes not be achieved, then the local authority was not required to make a payment. This model was very different to the conventional contractual arrangement based on performance indicators linked to process information such as the number of people worked with, number of visits undertaken, and the quantifying of different forms of support provided. An intended consequence of an outcomes-based approach was to give front-line delivery teams much more flexibility to adapt and personalise the service they delivered and to ensure clarity around accountability for delivering successful outcomes.

Over a two-year period, the Brent SHPS achieved impressive outcomes. In February

⁴ Under Section 188 of the 1996 Housing Act a local authority must ensure accommodation is available for an applicant (and their household) if they have reason to believe that they are experiencing homelessness and in priority need.

2020, a report from the London Borough of Brent's Strategic Director of Community Wellbeing to the Community and Well-Being Scrutiny Committee noted that 2,102 people had been referred to the service, with the main outcomes being 1,818 PHPS, 884 positive housing outcomes, and 599 people sustaining accommodation for the eight-month period required under the outcomes-based contract.

As funding via the Trailblazer programme came to an end, Bridges Fund Management was successful in a collaborative bid for £4.2m of central government funding from the Life Chances Fund (LCF) to extend the service into other London boroughs over a five-year time frame. The LCF represented 35% of the overall funding for the service, resulting in local authorities contributing more than in the original services, with Bridges Outcomes Partnerships securing social investment from social investors including Better Society Capital, Trust for London, and Guys and St. Thomas' Charity – contributing £2.1 million of social investment finance as part of the overall funding package. Commencing with Islington and Ealing in 2019, and followed by Hackney, Waltham Forest, Enfield, and a recommissioning from Brent the following year, resulting in the SHPS became a pan-London service.

Extension of Service to Norfolk

In 2020 the SHPS service was extended to Norfolk, becoming operational in six out of seven councils within the county. These were:

- King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council.
- Great Yarmouth District Council.
- South Norfolk Borough Council.
- Broadland District Council.
- North Norfolk District Council.
- Breckland District Council.

Note that South Norfolk and Broadland are in the process of formally merging as a single council and so the SHPS service is now delivered within five local authority areas in the county. Norfolk has two tiers of local government which, in the context of the SHPS, makes arrangements significantly different to those that pertain within the six London boroughs where it operates. In Norfolk, the commissioning is undertaken at county level rather than at borough level, as is the case in London.

Additionally, the SHPS service in Norfolk was distinctive from the London service in that the profile of people being supported through the SHPS included not only single people, but households with dependents. In Norfolk, the need was for the SHPS to work not just with single people but also with families who could be in priority need. The focus was therefore not only on people for whom there was a prevention and relief duty, which characterised the approach of all six local authorities in London. To reflect

this in Norfolk, whilst the SHPS acronym remained, the limiting word “single” was dispensed with and the full title became the Sustainable Housing Partnership Service.

The SHPS model

People in housing need present to their local authority. After this, a referral is made to SHPS. The service supports those capable of managing a tenancy in the private rented sector. The Personal Housing Plan (PHP) is completed adopting a strength-based approach. SHPS maps out coaching and knowledge needs to empower individuals and stop the risk of revolving door homelessness. SHPS resolves the threat of homelessness by either preventing the risk of being evicted or finding a new home – most commonly in the private rented sector.

Suitable accommodation is sourced via a network of landlords, agents, and developers. The service is tailored to treat landlords as customers. Landlords are paid rent in advance and/or deposits, rather than incentives. Once homelessness is prevented or relieved, SHPS staff do monthly check-ins with the individual and provide additional help where needed, to ensure that accommodation is sustained. This continues for an eight-month period.

As of May 2024, SHPS has achieved 7,025 housing outcomes across seven local authorities, with a sustainment rate of 83%.

Consistent Elements of the SHPS Model

A positive attribute of a delivery model based on an outcome approach is its adaptability to different operating environments and changing need – and the shaping of the service in Norfolk to meet the different local challenges was a necessary and sensible response. Over time, the SHPS has continued to adapt as will be illustrated in other parts of this report. However, key elements of the SHPS model are consistent across the London boroughs and councils in Norfolk where it is operational. These are:

- A model based on payment for outcomes.
- A three-stage payments arrangement with payments received in three stages:
 - When a Personal Housing Plan (PHP) has been completed with the participant.
 - When accommodation has been sourced or they are able to stay in their existing tenancy and the risk of homelessness has been removed.
 - When the participant has sustained their accommodation for eight months, with support, and this accommodation is suitable and there is no threat of homelessness.
- A focus on procuring private rented sector accommodation.

Additionally, in all areas with the exception of Great Yarmouth, the SHPS model operates with voluntary sector delivery partners undertaking the direct engagement

with participants. In London, the delivery partners are Crisis, Single Homeless Project (SHP), and Hestia, and in Norfolk the delivery partners are the Benjamin Foundation and Evolve.

These are the consistent elements of the SHPS delivery approach. There are other characteristics that have been described as making the SHPS approach distinctive and effective, and these are investigated in depth in the next chapter of the report.

The SHPS Model: Is It Distinctive and Effective?

As part of the process of planning the evaluation, the following set of perceived characteristics were drawn up with senior staff from Bridges Outcomes Partnerships to test with key stakeholders – local authority representatives and commissioners, delivery partners, central government representatives, and people receiving the SHPS service.

Table 1: Distinctiveness Characteristics Table

1.	A contractual model based on payment for outcomes with financial risk-share, rather than the standard, output-focused delivery model.
2.	A flexibility of approach that enables teams to be extremely responsive, reshape according to need, and introduce service innovations.
3.	Earlier, more targeted, prevention engagement with people at risk of homelessness than that provided under most other models.
4.	Speed in helping people move quickly from point of referral through to being rehoused in appropriate accommodation.
5.	A commitment to achieving sustained outcomes through providing up to eight months of support.
6.	An ability to provide notably effective services to people in the context of an equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) framework.
7.	An ability to hold the delivery partners to account to achieve outcome targets and resolve issues affecting performance.
8.	The sharing of financial risk by the SHPS as payments are dependent on the achievement of outcomes.
9.	The capacity and willingness to introduce services innovations.
10.	A distinctive approach to recruiting and training staff prioritising skills above experience at point of recruitment.
11.	Flexibility in the way that funding can be used to facilitate a successful rehousing.
12.	An approach which leads to particularly effective collaborations with other services such as local tenancy support teams.

Ascertaining that the SHPS is distinctive would be of little benefit if it was not accompanied by evidence that the model is effective in achieving sustainable housing outcomes for the people receiving its service. The stakeholder interviews that are central to this evaluation focused on both distinctiveness and effectiveness. To assess effectiveness, contributors were asked to comment on whether they considered each of the SHPS distinctiveness characteristics as being:

- Crucial to its effectiveness.
- Not essential but an important contributor.
- Useful, but standard.
- Something detracting from its effectiveness.

The next part of this report explores, primarily through stakeholder interviews, the areas of perceived distinctiveness combined with an assessment of effectiveness linked to each of the aforementioned characteristics.

A contractual model based on payments for outcomes with financial riskshare, rather than a conventional, outcome-focused delivery model.

The payment for outcomes approach is at the centre of the SHPS delivery model. Earlier in this report the pivotal role that Bridges Outcomes Partnerships has played in the development of an outcomes-based approach in the United Kingdom is briefly covered. In the area of housing and homelessness, payments for outcomes have a relatively recent, and still limited, track record. Social Impact Bond (SIB) initiatives focusing on people experiencing sleeping rough have been delivered, including a SIB for entrenched people experiencing rough sleeping in Manchester with Bridges Outcomes Partnerships as one of the partners. One of the earliest SIBs delivered in London by Thames Reach and St. Mungo's was comprehensively evaluated using a carefully selected comparator group to measure its success.⁵ Despite the evaluation evidencing that the outcome-based SIB model "significantly reduced rough sleeping over a two-year period" and that the SIB group was "more likely than the comparison group to completely desist from sleeping rough", homelessness SIBs and other forms of payment by outcomes models remain scarce.

For most, though not all, local authority contributors interviewed for this evaluation, the payment by outcomes approach was both incontrovertibly distinctive and usually considered to be the main factor contributing to the SHPS delivery model being impressively effective. Some contributors were candid about their (former) lack of experience of an outcome-based model.

⁵ Department of Communities and Local Government (2017) The impact evaluation of the London Homelessness Social Impact Bond. Available [here](#).

“To be honest, payment by outcomes was a complete revelation. I hadn’t heard of it.”

– Senior Local Authority Officer

From interviews it was clear that it was not only senior council officers, but also elected members, who found the payment for outcomes approach novel and saw it as bringing risks and dilemmas. One commissioner noted that some members were uncomfortable about payment for outcomes driving behaviour, seeing this as akin to “monetarising social value”.

Council papers on the SHPS procurement option provided for members indicate that the payment for outcomes approach was unambiguously laid out, but that other considerations were also important. For example, in a London Borough of Islington ‘Corporate Director of Housing Report to Members’ from April 4th 2019, it was noted that:

“It is anticipated that the replication of this service in Islington would release staff time in completing Personalised Housing Plans and free up staffing resources to prevent family homelessness and reduce placements into temporary accommodation...as well as improving prospects for many single/childless couples, the service is likely to deliver an overall cost saving not only for Housing Options but for other council services, e.g., Adult Social Care”.

These two anticipated consequences of introducing the SHPS, that is, freeing up the time of the in-house teams focusing on main duty housing responsibilities and achieving savings, were shared by other local authorities at the point when the SHPS was introduced and are returned to later in this chapter.

For local authority contributors new to the concept of a payment for outcomes approach, it appears that the advantages soon became apparent, not least in being able to easily monitor the progress of the contract.

“Up to this point we had been used to giving a whole chunk of money to providers, then trying to monitor how they were spending it. And it was a revelation because we only paid for positive outcomes. It was a case of the service being commissioned to achieve outcomes – just do it. You don’t need to put in line by line how it gets done.

– Local Authority Officer

A local authority commissioner with many years of service noted:

“I was sceptical about contracting out. My experience is the promise is better than the actual delivery. They [SHPS] have more than delivered in this respect. This experience of performance management and reporting has given me insight. I have regular

contacts with [senior Bridges Outcomes Partnerships staff]. Very positive. Not trying to hide anything”.

– Local Authority Commissioner

Another commissioner noted the benefits of the data produced by the SHPS being in a form that provides strong accountability.

“The SHPS is very checkable. I can look at a 10% sample – e.g., a few PHPs (Personal Housing Plans) or successful outcomes. Where they are claiming success, I can check to confirm the person is still there”.

– Local Authority Commissioner

The contention made to justify the distinctiveness and effectiveness of the payment by outcomes approach also rests on how it leads to different behaviour from the staff delivering the service directly to participants. Notably, it leads to a more focused, action orientated approach leading to better outcomes for people receiving the service. This purposeful attitude was clearly an expectation from senior staff from Bridges Outcomes Partnerships, summed up succinctly by the Programme Manager for the Norfolk SHPS:

“Every contact must be meaningful”.

– Norfolk Programme Manager

Overall, interviews illustrated that the focus brought by the need to achieve clear outcomes in terms of the completion of the PHP, accessing of accommodation, and completion of eight months of sustaining accommodation was embraced by the delivery teams in London and Norfolk. There was general agreement that helping people find and sustain accommodation were strongly aligned with the key priorities and values of their organisations. One manager from a delivery team articulated their version of how an outcomes approach affected behaviour in the following way:

“The targets make us more reactive and robust, and we have to be organised...encourage engagement from day one and have to keep up the engagement”.

– Delivery Team Manager

One delivery manager compared their team’s approach favourably with what they regarded as the more orthodox forms of engagement and delivery they experienced elsewhere in their organisation. There was acknowledgement of this from their organisation’s senior management, for which they were grateful.

“My line managers feel it gives such value. We are more reactive and responsive and line managers are amazed”.

– Delivery Team Manager

Occasionally, it emerged that this purposeful approach driven by an outcome framework was embraced by the managers of the delivery team but less so by some frontline staff members who were sometimes uncomfortable about being perceived to be influenced by financial targets.

“I think the question as to whether payments by outcome drives behaviour depends on perspective. For some caseworkers it’s the same [as any contract]. It drives the managers as they have to meet the targets. Everyone is used to it”.

– Delivery Partner Manager

Some teams noted, and endorsed, a competitive element that was created by an outcomes-based approach.

“We get better results by outcomes. Three members of the team are driven by it. We are competitive in the team. One of newest members came from a housing officer role. [They are] very pushed by the targets”.

– Delivery Partner Manager

In considering the advantages and disadvantages of the payment by outcomes model, it is useful to reflect on the different commissioning and delivery structures and approaches in London and Norfolk. In London, the local authorities receiving the SHPS service are also the commissioners of the service. In Norfolk, where a two-tier structure is in place, Norfolk County Council commissions the SHPS and the service is managed at a local authority and district council level. The financial risk share benefits that London Councils and Norfolk County Council receive through a payment by outcomes approach will therefore not have the same direct impact for council leads in the Norfolk boroughs.

Nonetheless, the majority of Norfolk local authority contributors also noted the advantages of an outcome driven model with reference to the behaviour of the delivery partners. One manager from a Norfolk borough spoke enthusiastically about the approach whilst also musing over a possible downside of payment for outcomes that had, so far, not materialised.

“Payment by outcomes has got to be the way forward. We don’t work with another service like SHPS. We get good results. We have referrals queuing up. We keep an eye out in case it impacts on who they put forward...are they thinking no tricky ones so that they get more outcomes?”

In one Norfolk borough, Great Yarmouth, the SHPS service is delivered by an in-house team rather than the service being contracted out to a voluntary sector provider. Though, here too, the payment for outcomes approach was viewed favourably. The challenging targets around procuring units of accommodation had led to some good progress in terms of developing productive relationships with landlords with a strong partnership being built up between the SHPS service and a separately funded Landlord Liaison Officer.

For two local authorities, the distinctiveness of a payment for outcomes approach was accepted but was not seen as being as significant as it was by the majority of local authorities. In North Norfolk, contributors considered the local authority priority to be prevention outcomes, however achieved. A desire to see earlier interventions in advance of a person in an unsettled housing situation needing to present to the council as being in housing need was a dominant theme. An in-house service not driven by a payment for outcomes approach was seen as desirable.

In the case of the London Borough of Islington, the decision has been taken to bring the SHPS service to an end. Here too, a payment for outcomes approach was not considered as beneficial as it was by most other local authorities. Islington representatives were extremely happy with the service provided by the SHPS and praised the delivery partner, Single Homeless Project (SHP). However, local authority representatives were not convinced that the direct cost benefits of the service would be sustained following the ending of the Life Chances funding. The programme is due to complete in March 2025, and it has contributed 35% of the costs of the SHPS. During the period when the evaluation interviews were taking place, the process was underway to bring the contract to an end in Islington and for the delivery of elements of the service to be undertaken henceforth through the in-house teams.

A flexible approach that enables teams to be extremely responsive, reshape according to need, and introduce services innovations.

One of the defining characteristics of the SHPS approach according to Bridges Outcomes Partnerships is the capacity and willingness to reshape the service in response to changing needs and the requirements of commissioners. Additionally, the payment for outcomes model is considered to offer greater flexibility than more conventional commissioning structures, stimulating service innovation and imaginative responses to overcome problems and increase efficiency.

Already it has been noted how the SHPS approach has adapted to deliver services in varying ways. In the case of the SHPS in Great Yarmouth, this extends to the service

being provided as an in-house service. More generally in Norfolk, the SHPS service also accepts people, often households with dependents, who are in priority need and owed a main housing duty. In the Norfolk SHPS performance report for May 2023 for example, the numbers of households in local authority areas with more than one person being supported ranged from 10% to 43%. This included households with over six family members.

Providing services to people in housing need is undertaken in the context of an often very volatile operating environment affected not only by legislative changes like those outlined in the Renters Reform Bill which will probably become law during the second half of 2024 and bring some challenges to the SHPS, but also unexpected events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This particularly difficult period was referenced in the interviews as a period of uncertainty faced collectively and largely successfully by the SHPS, delivery partners, and local authorities.

Those who took part in the evaluation were, in the most part, highly complementary about the adaptability and responsiveness of the SHPS service and selected it as a crucially distinctive characteristic. One area frequently referenced as a pertinent example of adaptability was with respect to the adjustment of referral processes. Some commissioners wanted the SHPS to accept people with a higher level of need than initially envisaged at the time of project inception.

There was usually more than one reason for wanting a change. This included a need to relieve beleaguered in-house teams juggling large caseloads of priority need referrals. Another reason was to increase referrals to the SHPS where there was capacity for the delivery team to take more referrals or a belief that the delivery team had the skills and capability to work with people exhibiting a higher level of need than the relatively low support needs people being referred. Sometimes the request for changes in the referral approach arose through a combination of all these things. That is, the 'level of need' ceiling was raised in order to increase the number of referrals in the knowledge that the delivery partner would be able to respond effectively. One local authority contributor described the challenge in the following way:

"We were not meeting targets for referrals of non-priority people. SHPS listened and agreed to look at it case-by-case and take higher needs. More people came through and they took more referrals. They said, if the person can manage PRS – refer to us. This is them trying to work with us".

– Local Authority Representative

In this case and with examples given by other local authorities, the key defining requirement was less whether somebody was categorised as in priority need or not, but whether they could cope in private accommodation where, typically, the rents are

higher than in social housing, the size of the accommodation smaller, and there is less tenancy security.

The problem of not receiving enough referrals to the SHPS via the in-house local authority teams, understandably focusing on people for whom there is a main housing duty responsibility, was also addressed through the SHPS strengthening the triaging process within local authorities. This meant offering staff support from the delivery partners to engage with the in-house teams and to directly assist in assessing cases so that the flow of people to the SHPS delivery team increased and prevention work increased through reducing the amount of time people were delayed in council processes while their situation deteriorated. This was referenced appreciatively by a number of local authorities as an impressive example of responsiveness.

“There were times when we had staff shortages and had difficulties making referrals. SHPS are flexible. They introduced a triage officer. They just got them through...and also where people are borderline, they take them.”

– Local Authority Housing Manager

In Norfolk, where the definition of a SHPS participant for most local authorities was already looser than in London, the SHPS response had to be even more multifarious.

“At the start, we were expecting to refer singles non-priorities. But we were shortstaffed. There should have been nine staff but in fact there were two. They [SHPS] weren’t getting ones through. It had to change. We dabbled with giving them some families. And they took people where we hadn’t decided if they were priority need or not. We put those their way carrying a low enough risk as we needed to see if they [delivery partner] could support them. We came to a collective agreement. Any queries speak directly to us without rejecting. [The support worker] grew in confidence. Now they work with whoever comes over including families and are achieving outcomes”.

– Local Authority Housing Manager

Delivery partners as well as local authorities were appreciative of the responsive, problem-solving approach that they viewed as epitomising the SHPS. In the London Borough of Brent, the delivery partner Crisis supported by the local authority, was successful following the initial phase of the contract in extending the referral routes into the service to external bodies outside the council.

“Originally all referrals were from the Brent Homeless Team but there was sometimes inconsistency in the number of referrals, and it was hard to meet outcomes. We got them to agree for us to take direct referrals - not through the Brent team only. Crisis staff could refer, and we also trained job centres as the service was all about

prevention. And also, we could take referrals from community hubs in Brent. This is how we got around long waiting times”.

– Crisis SHPS Manager

Flexibility of response also requires an approach tailored to meet different needs and perspectives. One local authority viewed the offer of strengthening the triage process differently and took the view that it was encroaching into an area where the in-house team was already doing a good job. In this case the local authority contributor considered that, “it felt like being told how to suck eggs”.

While views were largely positive concerning the SHPS response to issues raised by local authority managers, there were some criticisms including from a Norfolk local authority contributor who noted that initially most of the housing outcomes were achieved in social housing and SHPS took a while to understand that this was not the outcome sought in this local authority area.

“The majority of outcomes were in social housing. We [the in-house teams] could have done that. The PRS is the result we wanted, or back with family and friends”.

– Local Authority Representative

Whilst a responsive and flexible approach can be a distinctive quality of any service, there does appear to be a strong link between the SHPS payments for outcomes approach and these characteristics, with the essential need to achieve outcomes payments in order to fund the programme encouraging the active exploration of solutions to problems such as delays in receiving referrals from in-house housing options teams. This is certainly the view of most local authority contributors as well as the delivery organisations and was seen as distinctively different to the approach of other contracted services. One local authority contributor enthusiastically expressed this in the following terms.

“This is the first time in my career that the provider is pushing me for work – ‘where are the referrals?’”

– Senior Local Authority Manager

The ability to hold delivery partners to account to achieve outcome targets and resolve issues affecting performance.

With the exception of Great Yarmouth, the SHPS delivers the direct service to participants through voluntary sector organisations. These delivery partners have a contractual relationship with Bridges Outcomes Partnerships via a subsidiary. In Broadlands and South Norfolk there are two delivery partners, Benjamin Foundation

and Evolve. Evolve is engaged as an additional service in response to the local authority's wish for a delivery partner to specifically focus on people with complex needs – a cohort regularly being referred by them to the SHPS. Broadlands and South Norfolk Council has a favourable experience of receiving a service from Evolve over a number of years. The organisation has provided an effective service at the council's 'Help Hub', where people can receive housing assistance and other support at an early stage to avoid situations deteriorating. In the other four Norfolk local authority areas, the Benjamin Foundation is the sole delivery partner. In London, Hestia is the delivery partner in Ealing, Crisis in Brent, and SHP in Islington, Enfield, Hackney, and Waltham Forest.

The financial risk share arrangement does not directly impact on these delivery partners. If they fail to achieve outcomes and therefore the financial outcome cannot be claimed, there is no financial repercussions for the individual agencies. Bridges Outcomes Partnerships has the responsibility, and the authority, to respond to underperformance and do so by providing direct and regular support, guidance, and direction to them. Bridges Outcomes Partnerships can, and has, issue a formal performance improvement notice and ultimately will, if necessary, replace a delivery partner – a step which would always be taken jointly with the local authority where the delivery partner is operating.

Bridges Outcomes Partnerships considers this project management structure to be beneficial to all partners and part of the combination of distinctive attributes which provides an effective service. Contributors to the evaluation largely agreed that this was a valued and distinctive feature and the two examples of introducing a triage service and adjusting the referral criteria where it was needed were cited as examples of the SHPS directly engaging with delivery partners to introduce new approaches.

There were a few examples where it was felt that more could have been done to address issues, and from some local authority contributors a feeling that there had been positive developments over recent months in London, referenced in relation to progress since the SHPS Programme Director in London took up post.

"I'm struggling to think of any negative, I've enjoyed this contract so much. Before [the Director] there was less of an appetite to manage sub-contractors. Our delivery partner felt a bit out on a limb. Maybe wondering whether they were being managed by SHPS or the council. They were not getting enough support from SHPS. Now [the Director] manages every aspect of it".

– Senior Local Authority Manager

The particular styles and priorities of both the Programme Director and the Programme Manager for the Norfolk SHPS were praised. These two lead individuals

were seen as problem solvers who were prepared to tackle issues head-on and to provide support.

“When there are staffing issues, I feel able to raise them with [the delivery partner manager at the Benjamin Foundation] and with [the programme manager]. Sometimes there is debate. There is always resolution”.

– Senior Local Authority Manager

It was evident that the central role of the SHPS staff was recognised and appreciated by the delivery partners too. In London, all the delivery partners meet together with the Programme Director to share performance data and other information, consider emerging issues, and jointly seek solutions to mutual problems. Similarly, in Norfolk the Programme Manager meets with delivery leads and, as in London, a monthly performance report is shared covering all the Norfolk local authority areas. The amount of data and linked information available in the reports is impressive and illustrates a high degree of transparency around performance.

The bringing together of the delivery teams on a regular basis was felt, by delivery partners, to be essential and beneficial.

“All the SHPS managers get together every three months. Together we can see gaps. There was a local authority not making referrals and this led to triage posts funded by Bridges to support the councils and speed up referrals”.

– Delivery Partner Manager

More generally, the relationship between the Bridges Outcomes Partnerships Leads and the delivery partners was thought to be respectful and motivating. One delivery partner manager was impressively reflective when considering an intervention when their team was addressing performance issues.

“When we had under-performance, it was a pressure, but it led to us getting more members on the team. Bridge’s involvement was positive. In my experience they are unique. I haven’t worked this closely with a commissioning body”.

– Delivery Partner Manager

In Norfolk, a delivery partner manager explained:

“With [the Programme Manager], I’ve a good working relationship. Sometimes I show frustration which [they aren’t] fazed by. We work well together”.

– Delivery Partner Manager

One local authority lead spoke about the role the SHPS played in replacing an underperforming delivery organisation. They felt the performance management process was clear and the outcome achieved in a way that meant the delivery partner could end the contract feeling its reputation was intact.

In Norfolk, a local authority representative was complimentary about the openness of the Bridges Outcomes Partnerships to new ideas.

“[The Programme Manager] is always open to ideas. For example, being willing to take Ukrainians. They are very flexible and open to our needs”.

– Local Authority Representative

There was some criticism from two local authorities where it was felt that Bridges Outcome Partnerships could have been more responsive. One local authority representative felt that in the early days they were slow in agreeing to take people with support needs that were anything more than minimal – though they also commented that they had become more flexible over time. They had also experienced the line management arrangements as being sometimes cumbersome and described it as “not the cleanest structure”.

One Norfolk local authority representative felt that it had taken longer than they would have hoped for a performance issue with the delivery organisation to be resolved and that, additionally, Bridges Outcomes Partnerships had been slow to address a concern that the focus on prevention outcomes needed to be greater.

However, most contributors from both local authorities and delivery organisations felt the direct engagement of Bridges Outcomes Partnerships in overseeing and managing service delivery was beneficial and effective. Some local authority contributors were frank in noting that they could avoid the headache of directly managing organisations and occasionally needing to deal directly with staff issues through Bridges Outcomes Partnerships taking on the management and co-ordination role.

Is the service distinctive and effective in achieving early engagement, rapid rehousing, eight-months of sustainment support, and successful completion?

So far, the evaluation has tested the contention that a payment for outcomes model based on financial risk share brings a strong focus to delivering against key targets, stimulating a responsive service underpinned by an assertive approach to contract management. Focusing on the three stages of intervention that link with the contractual outcome payments, Bridges Outcomes Partnerships believes the payment for outcomes focus leads to:

- A more efficient delivery model which excels in achieving earlier, more targeted interventions.
- Where the person is experiencing homelessness, a speedy rehousing process relative to other forms of engagement by comparable services.
- A housing sustainment approach that, over an eight-month period, enables the person to successfully settle in their accommodation.
- Successful completion, when engagement with the SHPS can be ended through the tenant having achieved a level of self-sufficiency and with ongoing support in place to avoid repeat homelessness.

Data

At this point it is useful to reference, and reflect on, the use of data by the SHPS. No service will be able to achieve a 100% success rate and the SHPS is not making this claim. In order to judge whether the SHPS is delivering against its performance targets, strong data is a prerequisite. SHPS has an enviable reputation for collecting, collating, disseminating, and responding to performance data. As noted earlier, data is considered collectively by SHPS delivery partners on a regular basis.

Local authority contributors were complimentary about the quality of the data that was available for them to interrogate, which they did regularly to satisfy themselves that the headline performance information was valid. Both the amount of data and its accessibility were viewed positively and the focus on outcome data, rather than the output information more commonly used as a means of managing contract performance and delivery, was approved of by all but one of the local authority partners.

“I don’t have to contract manage against the usual KPIs which are nebulous. Providers can always give you a good story. It’s difficult to dig into the details [of a conventional contract], like the number of outreach shifts”.

– Local Authority Manager

It is important to distinguish between the necessarily limited high level performance outcomes information that is essential in order to trigger an outcomes payment and other data and associated information made available by Bridges Outcomes Partnerships to local authorities and delivery partners on a regular basis. This is the information that is interrogated and discussed to help understand what is happening at a local level in order, for example, to improve performance, overcome obstacles preventing progress, or introduce new ways of working in response to changing needs.

A London Borough of Ealing SHPS performance report from April 2023 included data not only on the key outcome measures, that is, PHPs completed, housing secured, and housing sustained, but additionally on, for example, the following:

- Number of referrals made.
- Reasons for referrals being rejected by the SHPS.
- Demographics of people receiving the service (age, gender, ethnicity).
- Housing situation at point of referral.
- Breakdown between prevention and relief duties.
- Type of housing secured.
- Average length of time to secure housing.
- Reasons for case closures.
- Caseloads of individual support staff.
- Complaints, compliments and incidents reports.

This data can be cross-referenced, additional questions raised, and further data supplied and interrogated, as required. For example, the data on service user demographics can be analysed to see whether particular cohorts are more, or less, successful as they progress through the different stages on the journey to a sustained housing outcome.

Early Engagement and Pace of Delivery

There were mixed views from local authorities on the question of whether the SHPS service was distinctive in terms of early engagement. This is because a number of local authorities noted that to achieve early engagement it requires the local authority inhouse teams to make referrals in a timely and regular fashion. The necessary precedence given to people in priority need meant that for some local authority teams the referral of people to the SHPS for whom there was not likely to be a main duty was slower than they would ideally like.

Earlier in this report, it was explained that the SHPS addressed this challenge within some local authorities by introducing additional resource to support the triaging of people to quicken the pace of referral. This was an innovation welcomed by most local authorities. For most SHPS delivery partners, the pragmatic response was to encourage local authorities to send on referrals, even in circumstances where the SHPS service may not be required.

“We say – just send them through when they first present. They are so busy with the priority needs cases they don’t refer on. It is improving. SHPS is not in their minds all the time”.

– Delivery Partner Manager

Additionally, it was noted by almost every local authority representative who took part in this evaluation that people seeking support from them contacted the housing options and homelessness services much later than was ideal. In practical terms, this meant that for some people at risk of homelessness, the opportunity of an early intervention to prevent their homelessness was lost, as by the time they engaged with the housing options services they were days away from losing their accommodation and often too close to being evicted for their housing crisis to be resolved. In short, there were numerous mentions of how delayed contact frequently leads to the need for a relief response and the sourcing of temporary accommodation, rather than a prevention response in the form of support to retain accommodation.

Some delivery partners believed that the local authority in-house teams could be more efficient in referring people before they had reached the trigger point of being threatened with homelessness within 56 days and owed a prevention duty. One delivery partner contributor expressed concern that in meetings with participants referred to their team, it became evident that they had initially presented to the local authority when given a formal eviction notice and been advised to speak to the landlord and to get legal advice but not formally registered as being at risk of homelessness as they were not at the 56 days point when a statutory duty was owed. They hadn't spoken to the landlord or sought legal advice and by the time they represented to the local authority the eviction notice had expired and with it the chances of a prevention outcome had considerably diminished.

There was a commendable aspiration raised by a number of local authority contributors in interviews that links very directly with the 56 days trigger for a prevention duty to become active. This was to find a mechanism to anticipate and head off homelessness presentations through interventions that could resolve the housing problem and associated issues before a statutory prevention or relief duty was owed. One local authority contributor expressed this powerfully as an ambition, over time, to reduce the number of housing officers engaged with statutory housing duties because "intervention" staff, as they termed them, were successfully dealing with housing instability issues "upstream" to avoid the need for presentations to the council teams. This challenge will be returned to in a later chapter which considers where the SHPS may wish to develop and expand over the next few years.

Rapid Rehousing

The ability of the SHPS to procure accommodation in the private rented sector was consistently noted by contributors as one of the most important elements of the service and where this was occasionally not a focus, a matter for disappointment.

The SHPS both in London and Norfolk has painstakingly built up a portfolio of landlords either directly or as is the case in London in particular, through lettings agents with whom they have developed close working relationships. For people facing homelessness in London who are not in priority need, a private tenancy is likely to be the only option and often people will be placed in houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) shared accommodation. Although in Norfolk some of the people referred to the SHPS could access social housing, the private rented sector was here also in great demand and the SHPS ability to find it greatly valued.

Building up a portfolio of landlords was seen by local authorities, lettings agencies, landlords, delivery partners, and Bridges Outcomes Partnerships as requiring strong, mutually beneficial arrangements with landlords and pragmatic advocacy on behalf of participants.

“The biggest shortest is PRS. This is where Bridges have had to shape. Like estate agents – selling a client to a landlord. Bridges comes between the council and landlord. They’re the intermediary. Before landlords wouldn’t touch people on benefits. I’m not sure they [Bridges] thought they would be here, but they are and are good at flexing”.

– Norfolk Local Authority Representative

One contributor from a Norfolk council noted their disappointment that in the early days of receiving the SHPS service the member of staff from the delivery organisation was supporting people to access local authority social housing stock primarily, rather than the private rented sector.

“At the beginning they didn’t fully understand. They were going for social housing. We wanted access to PRS as basically we can get the social housing anyway”.

– Norfolk Local Authority Representative

The willingness of the SHPS to understand the challenges facing lettings agencies and landlords was referenced by representatives of the two lettings agents interviewed for this evaluation and noted as a quality that was by no means universal.

“They are good. Much better than working with [local authorities] who just sign people off. A vital service going over and above”.

– Lettings Agent Representative

To emphasise the importance of representing the participant to the landlord, another local authority contributor noted the crucial role of delivery partner staff when attending a visit to the accommodation alongside the prospective tenant:

“It reassures the social landlord who may be concerned by what [the profile information] they’ve seen on the housing register”.

– Local Authority Manager

The London lettings agents’ representatives believed the tone was set by the Programme Director who was seen as being even-handed in supporting the needs of tenants and understanding the challenges facing the landlord and clear about the type of units needed.

“[The Programme Director] doesn’t beat around the bush. [They] support the tenant and landlord. [They] wanted studios, so we talk to developers and investors and got [their] studios”.

– Lettings Agent Representative

In interviews for the evaluation, delivery partners also spoke powerfully about the need to present tenants well to prospective landlords and believed a key part of their job was to “educate” people to be responsible tenants.

“We try not to be just the client’s advocate. We need to be there for both sides. It’s the strongest tool in the current climate with rents through the roof. Relationships are the key. Not ignoring lettings agents - being in contact”.

– Delivery Partner Manager

A recurring theme with delivery partner contributors was that finding ways of assisting landlords when tenancies became problematic paid dividends in the long-term.

“Whether it’s lettings agents or landlords it’s about a lot of negotiation and slowly building relationships. The eight months support is vital. The HMOs...those landlords now come straight to us. Even William H Brown [estate agents] is now working with us. Flats are only [advertised] for 24 hours and we have to be quick to get customers to view. LHA rate is a problem. We try and get them back to work. We offer advice around signing off and refer them to a job coach within Benjamin Foundation”.

– Norfolk Delivery Partner Manager

The local housing allowance (LHA)⁶ challenge mentioned was another recurring issue, particularly with regards to how it reduced options – especially for people under 35, the

⁶ The LHA sets the maximum amount of rent that can be paid through housing benefit and universal credit for tenants renting from private landlords. The rate depends on the location of the property and the number of bedrooms.

great majority of whom were limited to the LHA shared accommodation rate (SAR)⁷. This influenced which lettings agencies were prioritised.

“We encourage staff to build up relationships with [lettings agents] prepared to take people working part-time and on [universal credit]. We meet together regularly with procurement. We challenge where landlords are charging for a small room with a sink...always trying to build up relationships. And we let them know from the off about the eight months support”.

– London Delivery Partner

The lettings agents confirmed the assertion that the delivery partners were able to both represent tenants and consider the challenges facing lettings agents and landlords and one contributor in particular was positively evangelical about the need for new forms of partnership.

“Do delivery organisations get the balance right? Yes, they do. We [lettings agents] also need to show we can deliver a good service. There’s lots of stigma that is not helpful. We need to push past. We have to put old things to the side – it’s not money versus compassion. We need to work together”.

– Lettings Agent Representative

Flexible Use of Funding to Facilitate Successful Rehousing

Another area where the SHPS approach is profiled as being distinctive and effective is in the flexible and responsive use of money to facilitate successful rehousing and to enable the tenant to sustain their accommodation. Some local authority representatives were well aware of this aspect of the service, and in praise of it. A few knew funds were available but were either not sure how often they were accessed or felt that their own resources, particularly discretionary housing payments (DHPs)⁸ were more often used. Delivery partners were more likely to be aware of this resource and most found it very beneficial as a means to progress a rehousing outcome.

The SHPS is able to offer a landlords’ protection insurance to landlords and lettings agents linked to a property, and therefore not requiring references for tenants. For the first 12 months the package is free of charge to the landlord and at the end of the period the landlord can choose to extend the policy at their own cost. The landlords’

⁷ Most single people under 35 in private sector accommodation are limited to claiming benefits to cover the rent on a single room in a shared house in their local area, regardless of whether they are living alone or in shared housing.

⁸ Discretionary housing payments are managed by local authorities and provide financial support to deal with rent and housing costs. Examples include covering a rent shortfall, a rent deposit, or rent in advance.

protection insurance was seen as a very useful tool for encouraging initial landlord engagement.

The SHPS will also make payments to pay rent in advance, rental deposits, furniture and other items necessary to make the home habitable at the stage of moving in. Sometimes these payments will be reimbursed by a local authority through, for example, a DHP claim.

“They are very flexible and supportive when there is a need for extra funds to get someone in. It could be for rent above the LHA. Bridges will pay top-up. Or emergency grants for pots and pans”.

– Delivery Partner Manager

Sustainment, Support, and Completion

Every local authority contributor to the evaluation, when asked directly about whether tenants receive eight months of support, confirmed that they did. The eight months of support was considered crucial and something that could not usually be offered by the in-house local authority teams to people where there was not a main housing duty. The reason for this was consistently given as the pressures in-house teams are under and the need to prioritise main duty, priority need cases.

The eight months was considered significant because most tenancies were granted as six-month assured shorthold tenancies (ASTs). This invariably meant that the tenant had either been supported to have the tenancy extended or to find alternative accommodation. In this respect, the eight-month period was viewed favourably as offering a sustainment challenge to the SHPS.

“The eight months of support – I definitely agree this is a unique aspect. Our internal teams can't provide this. There's not the same statutory requirement. It adds value and the fact that it's not just six months is good”.

– Local Authority Representative

The achievement of the sustainment outcome was seen as instrumental in significantly reducing the chances of people re-presenting as experiencing homelessness.

“It stops the revolving door of people who come back around. Non-priorities need the extra help. Help with bank accounts, speaking to landlords. In the past they would have gone back to sofa surfing. We [the in-house teams] have more chaotic cases. I don't know how we would cope with the non-priorities [without the SHPS]. In the past, we lost landlords as we couldn't give the support”.

– Local Authority Manager

Having a completion deadline when support from the SHPS service comes to an end was considered to be both necessary and, in most cases, beneficial. The SHPS certainly sees it in these terms, based on an ethos of creating independence through empowering people to build their confidence, skills, knowledge, employability, and support networks. This approach was largely endorsed by both local authority and delivery partner contributors.

“The [support role undertaken by the delivery partners] is to empower people. Training people to be good tenants. Helping tenants to understand their responsibilities and the importance of being in work”.

– Local Authority Manager

“Customers need a kick up the backside and offered a change of mindset. People have lived with trauma which we fully understand, but we are not there to make everything better. It is our job to help people see how it can be”.

– Delivery Partner Manager

With some of the delivery partner contributors, there was a degree of equivocation around the ending of support, though the sentiment of needing to not create dependency prevailed.

“At eight months we do leave the door open. But we do need to end and make people not reliant on us. We try and move people from relying on foodbank vouchers and find ways to make them more self-sufficient – or get someone a volunteer who can befriend them”.

– Delivery Partner Manager

Some local authorities expressed a strong wish for the SHPS to take on people with a higher level of need. This is a request which is given regular consideration by the SHPS and earlier in this report it was noted how, in response to local authority appeals, the delivery partners agreed to accept more people with higher support needs. In London it is a particular challenge, as the SHPS model is based on referrals to private rented accommodation including shared accommodation in HMOs. Invariably this type of accommodation is more difficult to manage than social housing where tenancy support such as floating support or even housing first is more likely to be available.

In one local authority area, Broadland South Norfolk, a need was expressed for the SHPS support to accommodate a group of people who it was felt needed a more intensive form of assistance and for longer than was typically part of the SHPS package. As a result of this, in Broadland South Norfolk the participant support is delivered by the Benjamin Foundation, as it is in other Norfolk districts, and

additionally by Evolve, with the latter providing the more intensive support requested to people with complex needs. The Evolve manager explained that, although there is no typical Evolve participant, the range is likely to include women with substance use issues who have experienced domestic abuse and older men with some degree of autism and health conditions who have had difficulties engaging with services. They thought that the usual eight months of support was appropriate for most people using the SHPS service, but for the specific group that Evolve was tasked with supporting, longer is needed. They gave an example of the time needed to help a person get a Care Act assessment and access the support in place following the assessment.

The inclusion of a service supporting people with more complex needs illustrates the flexibility and responsiveness of the SHPS, confirming this to be a trademark quality. However, it brings to the fore the dilemma, considered earlier in the report, of how far the SHPS model can, and should, flex without it losing its distinctiveness. In some housing contexts such as with reference to housing first, this is expressed in terms of the fidelity of the model and there is much debate about how far the fidelity can reduce before the approach can no longer be called, in this example, housing first. What is retained in Broadland South Norfolk is the undeviating SHPS focus on payment for outcomes, though it is the county, not the local authority, which holds the pursestrings and commissions the service. The responsiveness of the service remains a distinctive characteristic, as does the ability to hold delivery partners to account and the preparedness to innovate. What is at risk in terms of absolute fidelity is the virtue of not creating a participant dependency by 'over-provision' of support. However, it would seem unhelpfully doctrinaire and counterproductive to propose that this measured, evidence-driven adaptation of the delivery approach is undermining the fidelity of the SHPS model.

Is the approach to staff recruitment focusing on skills above experience distinctive, and does the SHPS excel particularly at supporting people from a diverse range of EDI backgrounds?

Bridges Outcomes Partnerships considers the SHPS approach to staff recruitment to be notably distinctive and contributes to an effective service because selection decisions prioritise skills above experience. This has been achieved, according to the presentational material used by Bridges, through a redesign of the recruitment process from advertisement to induction. Senior staff from Bridges Outcomes Partnerships are involved in the recruitment of delivery partner managers alongside representatives from the delivery partner organisations. They can also advise on the recruitment of front-line staff and be directly involved in these interviews, if required. In Norfolk, a local authority contributor explained that interviewing for SHPS staff was

a collaborative exercise jointly involving the delivery organisation and the local authority.

Local authority contributors to the evaluation were asked directly about this perceived distinctive characteristic and delivery partner contributors spoke about the skills mix needed to carry out their role effectively. What emerged from responses is a shared view that a particular motivation and mindset is required to deliver a social outcomes contract. There is, for example, a need for a level of urgency in taking on cases and procuring accommodation, working with a range of key partners such as landlords and lettings agencies, and a willingness to explore different approaches to resolving problems. Generally, local authorities were very satisfied with the staff from the delivery organisations working directly with people and there were examples provided of good outcomes achieved. There are, of course, going to be exceptions and one local authority contributor noted that a delivery partner staff member had, disappointingly, turned out not to be of the quality hoped for. They added that the local authority had been directly involved in the recruitment and accepted this as a shared error.

Most local authority contributors however did not regard recruitment focusing on selection based on skills rather than experience as especially distinctive. They considered that this may once have been unusual but now saw it as standard practice in their own local authorities, and this view was shared by the delivery organisations too. Certainly, recruitment processes seeking to select based on skills and attitude rather than, primarily, experience is widespread within the homelessness sector.

This may be a presentational issue. The SHPS delivery staff are selected because of the special qualities needed for a payment by outcomes contract and their training, learning, and subsequent development when in post strengthens this further and is a clear expectation. For example, the training programme developed on landlord engagement was mentioned as being particularly constructive and filling a niche. A local authority manager in Norfolk expressed regret that her in-house teams were not able to access this training as she saw it as something that could be more widely beneficial and not available as to local authority staff through their own training programme. Recognising the particular skills of the SHPS staff and the specialist training provided was seen as being more distinctive than a particular approach to recruitment and induction.

Local authority contributors were also asked about whether the SHPS was, as is claimed, particularly effective at working with people from a diverse range of backgrounds in the context of equality, diversity, and inclusion. The extremely consistent response was that local authority contributors were very impressed with the commitment of the delivery partner teams to take whoever was referred to them and confident of their ability and willingness to build trusting relationships which were

tailored to the specific needs of the participant. However, most noted that they would expect the same of their own in-house teams as well as organisations commissioned under contracts without an outcome payments element. This is an area where it feels entirely appropriate for the SHPS to emphasise a strong track record of working with (to take one example from many) young people in part-time work, but this did not emerge from the interviews with contributors as being notably distinctive.

Summary of the Distinctiveness and Effectiveness of SHPS

This is the main, overarching question which the evaluation seeks to explore and answer, and this chapter seeks to:

1. Crystalise the elements of the model, as defined by Bridges Outcomes Partnerships, which contributors viewed as distinctive and effective.
2. Propose other components and characteristics of the SHPS approach which should be seen as distinctive and effective.

What Elements of the SHPS Approach Are Most Valued?

The Payment for Outcomes Approach

Unquestionably, most, though not all, contributors to the evaluation considered the payment for outcomes model to be both distinctive and more effective than conventional commissioning models. A senior local authority contributor described this as the SHPS' unique selling proposition (USP) and it is reasonable to conclude that this observation is shared by the majority of contributors.

The financial risk share inherent in the payment for outcomes model was regarded by local authority contributors as important and appealing to local authority elected members as well as officers.

Specifically, the payment for outcomes approach was considered to deliver:

- A speedy response to helping people resolve their experience of homelessness, with people moving comparatively quickly through the stages of:
 - Contact and the creation of a personal housing plan.
 - Accessing accommodation.
 - The ending of engagement after the completion of eight months sustaining a tenancy with support.
- A delivery approach that enabled Bridges Outcomes Partnerships, working with delivery partners, to flexibly respond to challenges through the regular review of data and innovations to improve outcomes.
- Benefits for local authority commissioners through Bridges Outcomes Partnerships taking a lead co-ordinating role in overseeing the delivery of the SHPS, resolving

issues with delivery partners, and ensuring that the focus on achieving outcomes was maintained.

- Benefits to delivery partner staff through the additional support provided by Bridges Outcomes Partnerships and the opportunity to regularly meet, exchange information, and discuss areas of mutual interest and concern with colleagues from other organisations.
- Advantages to local authorities derived through having clear and measurable ways of confirming whether the contract is being successfully delivered because of the transparency and accessibility of outcome data.

Ability to Procure Private Rented Sector Accommodation

Whilst the profile of local housing stock is different when comparing London and Norfolk, and within Norfolk County is variable, there was a consistent view that procuring private rented units including HMO accommodation was a major benefit provided by the SHPS. The combination of qualities and interventions that were recognised as being key in providing this service included:

- Strong relationships with lettings agents which experienced Bridges Outcomes Partnerships and delivery partners as being receptive to the challenges facing lettings agents and landlords, and willing to engage directly with tenants to resolve issues putting the tenancy at risk.
- Funding and landlords' protection insurance to enable a rehousing to be achieved speedily and sustainably through providing, for example, rent in advance and rent deposits. Bridges are considering offering rental top-up where LHA is inadequate to cover rent and basic items of furniture for tenants commencing a tenancy.

Capability to Provide Support for Eight Months

The eight months of support, which all contributors acknowledged was routinely provided, was highly valued. Most local authority contributors regarded this as something that they would ideally like their in-house teams to be able to offer, but other priorities and capacity issues made this aspiration mostly unachievable. For lettings agents and landlords, this as much as the financial support and landlords' protection insurance, provided the incentive and reassurance to accept tenants perceived as carrying a degree of risk.

Willingness to Flex the SHPS Model in Response to Changing Priorities

There were compelling examples of how the SHPS had adjusted its approach at the request of local authorities, in response to local need and preferences. Occasionally, contributors complained that, early on in its development, SHPS had been slow to adapt but overall, the assessment was that the SHPS showed commendable flexibility. Examples provided by contributors included adapting to take people needing more than a low level of support, agreeing to the SHPS staff member being employed within

an in-house team, and accepting referrals of families, including those being assisted through Ukrainian resettlement programmes.⁹

What Elements of the SHPS Approach are Less Valued?

Some aspects of the SHPS service were regarded by contributors to the evaluation as not distinctive and therefore not an essential part of a SHPS model which distinguishes it from other types of service interventions. The critical consideration here is which elements make the SHPS distinctive – some of the aspects of the SHPS approach were seen as essential and impressive, but without them being distinctive.

Personal Housing Plans (PHPs)

Whilst the speedy completion of the PHP was seen as being both important and distinctive, the completion of a PHP is a standard part of the work undertaken by housing options teams when a person seeks help to resolve their experience of homelessness. Whilst Bridges Outcomes Partnerships emphasises the completion of the PHP in its presentational material as being a key element of the delivery model using a strength-based approach, this was not regarded by contributors as being particularly distinctive.

Bridges has received feedback that the quality of their PHPs are better than standard – covering employment and wellbeing, as well as housing – and previously delivered training to housing options teams on PHP completion. However, “strength-based” along with “trauma-informed” are terms routinely used by many homelessness organisations in their presentational material and this creates some difficulties in establishing distinctiveness.

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Perspective

Local authority contributors observed that the SHPS is not in a position to specialise in working with particular sub-sets of people presenting to the local authority, nor have they requested to do so. Local authority representatives were very complimentary about the SHPS skills and capacity through its delivery teams to work with whoever was referred to them, including people from new migrant and refugee groups. However, this was expected of in-house teams and of other not-for-profit organisations contracted to work with local authorities.

Selection and Induction of Staff Based on Skills and Attitude

Similarly, contributors were mostly very satisfied with the quality of staff within the delivery teams and, with a few exceptions, the willingness and capability of the SHPS to

⁹ For further examples of how outcomes based contracts can flex in response to changing circumstances, please refer to: Bridges Outcomes Partnerships (2020) Beyond Crisis Management: Innovating to improve lives in a post-Covid world. Available [here](#).

resolve any staffing issues quickly. However, most contributors noted that the move away from focusing on experience in favour of skills and attitude at recruitment, supplemented by a strong induction, is a journey taken by many local authority and homelessness sector employers. What is valued are, for example, the skills, knowledge, and aptitude of the delivery teams in specific areas such as landlord engagement. This may therefore be largely an issue of how to articulate the particular skills set and outlook of the SHPS delivery staff and the recruitment, induction, and training approach of Bridges Outcomes Partnerships.

Effective Collaboration with Other Services

Whilst the delivery partners' role in helping tenants to link with additional support both formal (tenancy support teams, local services) and informal (friendship networks, families) was commended, it was not seen as something that separated the SHPS from other services commissioned by the local authorities. The exception was the relationships that the SHPS has nurtured, developed, and maintained with lettings agents which, as already noted, was seen by contributors as being special.

Other Distinctive and Effective Areas of the SHPS

Ability to Attract Income from Central Government

The inception of SHPS followed from Bridges Fund Management successfully bidding for funding from the national government's Trailblazer Programme and, later, from the Life Chances Fund. The ability of the SHPS to engage productively with central government, often in collaboration with other organisations both commercial and nonprofit, was fully recognised and appreciated by contributors. It was seen as a desirable SHPS characteristic offering them partnership opportunity and a way in to securing resources in new areas. The funding was seen as innovative, experimental, and potentially ground-breaking, and the engagement with Bridges demanding but worthwhile.

This beneficial characteristic is well illustrated by the comments of a local authority contributor who first engaged with Bridges through involvement with a social impact bond (SIB) for care leavers. They valued the experience:

"I came across Bridges through the carers SIB. I found the whole intellectual process around outcomes measurement exciting. Thinking-wise it was a very good experience. I became very interested in their aggressive approach to data. They left a good impression".

– Local Authority Representative

Supporting People to Find Employment

In the interviews with contributors there were frequent references to the challenges and opportunities facing people who are either not working or, if they are working, would usually like to be working more hours and receiving more pay. The SHPS was regarded by a number of local authority contributors as being one of the main services they could rely on to help people find and retain a job. Additionally, a number of delivery partner contributors felt that the strong focus on employment set the SHPS apart from the work of other teams within their organisation – where the focus on employment was less and the job outcomes fewer.

The view held by most contributors was that opportunities to access and sustain accommodation in the private rented sector increase when people find work and job security improves. However, one delivery partner felt that the complexities of universal credit created more insecurity for people working in part-time jobs or on zero-hour contracts than they would face if unemployed. Getting a job seems, therefore, to be inextricably connected to an efficient rapid rehousing model and the employment focus of the SHPS, already a distinctive attribute, has the potential to become even more so if the employment focus of the service is enhanced further. This area will be addressed in a later chapter which considers development opportunities.

Risks and Challenges

This chapter considers risks and challenges facing the SHPS and explores opportunities for development and growth.

Given the largely positive response to the SHPS and recognition of its distinctive and effectiveness, the question is raised on how can the SHPS extend its reach across more local authority areas and attract commissioners and funders from other sectors, beyond local government? Local authority representatives who contributed to the evaluation were usually directly involved in some way in the commissioning decisions within their local authorities or, where not directly involved, able to influence the commissioning process. Typically, their role places them in a position where they advise on commissioning options or make recommendations on whether a service should be commissioned, re-commissioned, or de-commissioned, as well as on the service model, the outcomes required, and the cost.

There are a number of challenges facing the SHPS which emerged from these interviews, and these are addressed below – there is linkage between a number of them. In the next chapter, some solutions are proposed in terms of development opportunities and presentational options.

The Ending of the Life Chances Funding Contribution

The first of these challenges is that the SHPS has benefited from central government funding, initially via Trailblazer Funding and later through Life Chances funding. These funding opportunities were covered in a previous chapter. In its early period and at a point when SHPS had still to show its worth, the financial contribution was significant and certainly played a role in the decision of local authorities to part-fund the service.

In the London Borough of Brent, the first local authority to commission the SHPS, the initial subsidy of £900k provided through the Trailblazer grant represented half of the value of the contract. In February 2018, the council needed to take a decision whether to continue with the SHPS over the period 2020-24 (the initial contract was due to end in September 2020), with Life Chances funding contributing 35% of towards the contract value – a reduction from the existing 50% subsidy. The recommendation in the report provided by the Head of Housing Needs for the Strategic Director of Community Well Being was to continue funding SHPS on this basis. By this stage, the council was in possession of some outcome data and the report notes that “since the inception of the SHPS service in September 2017, the Council has referred 2,112 applicants at an average cost of £852 per client”.

The central government subsidy clearly did play a part in the decision of local authorities to commission SHPS, and the Life Chances funding is coming to an end at the end of September 2024. Five local authorities have recommissioned or extended on a fully outcomes basis.

In the case of the London Borough of Islington, a decision was made some time ago that the SHPS contract would come to an end and the services provided brought inhouse. Contributors from Islington were at pains to point out that they were extremely happy with their delivery partner SHP and that the taking back contracts in-house was a common approach within the borough. Nonetheless, it was apparent that officers at Islington were less persuaded than those at other councils about the advantages of a payment for outcomes approach.

Some local authority contributors were more closely engaged with commissioning decisions than others, so awareness of how far commissioning decisions had progressed and what options were being considered varied. Most were hopeful that a payment for outcomes contract supporting people presenting to the council as experiencing homelessness, or at risk of experiencing homelessness, would be recommissioned. In these circumstances, of course, the SHPS would compete for the contract through a competitive commissioning process. In Norfolk, as has been noted, the commissioning is undertaken at county level. There too, commissioning options were in the process of being reviewed.

In the London Borough of Ealing, the pre-procurement notice and soft market testing stages of the commissioning process were underway, and at the time of the evaluation and interviews, market engagement had taken place with potential bidders. In the London Borough of Brent, recommissioning had moved forward at pace and at the time of the evaluation the bid specification had been released. The specification is broadly similar to the one that defines the current contract – it is a payment for outcomes specification focusing on people with a low to medium level of need to whom the council has prevention and relief duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act. Clearly Brent have become convinced of the benefits of a payment for outcomes contract and is committed to its continuation. The new contract commenced from November 1st, 2023 until 2027.

As of June 2024, new four-year contracts have also been secured in LB Ealing and LB Hackney, with a two-year extension made to LB Waltham Forest's contract.

A Service That Is Desirable, But Not Always Essential

The early focus of the SHPS in London was on people who were not in priority need and for whom there was not therefore a main housing duty. The level of need of this non-priority group was seen as low to medium, and the private rented sector considered as the main option for most of the people being supported by SHPS. Over time, as this report has illustrated, the SHPS has taken on people with a higher level of need as well as families, particularly in Norfolk. However, in London boroughs, the division of responsibility remains largely that the in-house teams work with main duty referrals and those likely to not be found as being in priority need are referred to the SHPS.

This brings a risk to the recommissioning of a SHPS payment for outcomes contract because for some local authorities, especially at a time when they are required to make difficult decisions to reduce costs, there is a danger of a service offering eight months of support to people with a relatively low level of need as being seen as desirable, but not essential. Benefits of the SHPS were often articulated by contributors in terms of the relief it provided for the in-house teams focusing on the main duty, priority need participants.

“For singles, we get an enhanced service we couldn’t otherwise have. More prevention and relief, more outcomes”.

– Local Authority Representative

“We have a good trusting relationship [with SHPS]. It means [the in-house teams] can concentrate on the more complex cases”.

– Local Authority Representative

One local authority contributor in a Norfolk council, without commissioning powers, was especially candid:

“Eight months support? We can’t offer it. Without SHPS we would carry on as normal”.

– Local Authority Representative

In the context of this comment, “normal” means how it was before the SHPS was introduced when accommodation would be procured to fulfil a relief duty but where there would be limited support provided to the tenant.

The challenge for SHPS is to be seen as a service that, whilst it may once have been regarded as a “desirable-but-not-essential” service, is now indispensable. The interviews indicated that the SHPS has champions within local authorities who have become convinced that this is the case.

“If we lose [SHPS] there would be a burden on the [in-house] service and we would have to employ in-house staff which would be more expensive”.

– Local Authority Representative

“SHPS is not expensive. We’ve done an analysis of what it would cost if it was being done internally. It would cost us more and this contract is more under our control than a normal KPI contract”.

– Local Authority Manager

Bringing a Service In-House

For some local authorities, the benefits of the SHPS arise, in part, from it being a contracted-out service. For example, a number of local authority contributors found the role that Bridges Outcomes Partnerships played in terms of directing the work of the delivery partners, resolving operational issues, and finding innovative solutions of great value. For other contributors, there was some ambivalence concerning whether the service could operate just as well if it was an in-house service.

“Could we do it ourselves in house? Yes, I’m a control freak. Working relationships would be different. But there are advantages in doing it out of council”.

– Norfolk District Council Representative

It has been noted that Great Yarmouth do deliver the SHPS service through staff employed by the local authority – but while the service is ‘in-house’, it operates differently to other council services. For example, Bridges quickly increased the team size in response to demand, with the extra outcomes funding the role. For Great Yarmouth, the benefits were seen to be around being able to have more control and to

bring better integration with other Great Yarmouth internal staff, such as housing advisers.

The Great Yarmouth homelessness services funded under the rough sleeping initiative (RSI) are also delivered in-house after initially being contracted out. Aspects of the SHPS model can be retained where a service is delivered in-house, but if most SHPS services are moved to being in-house it is difficult not to conclude that the SHPS model would be significantly different because of the distinctive role of Bridges Outcomes Partnerships as the co-ordinating body and intermediary between the delivery organisations and the local authorities would be seriously diluted.

Though this chapter is focusing on challenges and threats to the SHPS, it is worth reflecting that as is invariably, and understandably, the case during periods of uncertainty and turbulence, local authorities, delivery organisations, and other stakeholders are in looking both directions. They are contemplating the challenges of services retracting as well as considering how services can grow, adapt, and improve, even should more resources not become available. A number of contributors had ambitious plans concerning the future development of the SHPS.

“How should SHPS change? We want to make more referrals...and also more around employment. With this core group with low needs there could be more work done with DWP to look at work initiatives. It’s not just housing”.

Costing the SHPS

This learning evaluation of the SHPS was unable to specifically include a cost benefit dimension due to the budget and scope of the project. Nonetheless, issues of cost needed to be explored with contributors and an understanding reached concerning the significance of cost in determining the recommissioning of the SHPS, and how financial savings achieved by the SHPS might influence the future development of the service. Additionally, local authority contributors were asked about whether wider savings derived from the outcomes the SHPS achieved in other areas, such as health and criminal justice, had been assessed and, if so, whether this was significant information when deciding whether to commission or recommission a service.

Commissioning papers indicate that savings derived through the SHPS were of relevance when the service was first commissioned, and comparable intervention costs were included in reports. The London Borough of Islington contract award papers from April 2019 include the information that a SHPS positive outcome would cost £734. The cost of interventions from three other comparable services were also included. The SHPS was the second cheapest with the report noting that the service with the lowest cost had a much narrower focus in terms of the participant profile.

A number of commissioners expressed a view that the SHPS was cheaper than delivering the service in-house, and that this information would be included in any commissioning recommendation. One commissioner had concluded that the SHPS service was not as cheap as delivering a similar service through an internal team. Where cost assessments were mentioned, these were usually provided in terms of the cost of a single housing outcome, with the cost of a SHPS intervention set against the cost of undertaking the work in-house.

Bridges Outcomes Partnerships summarises how to think about value for money when it comes to outcomes-based contracts¹⁰:

“If innovations exist that can disproportionately improve long-term outcomes and reduce pressure on future budgets (like investments into better quality up-front matching for foster care), an approach that implements and refines these is clearly the best value for public money over the life of the project”.

Analysis of cost in interviews was rudimentary and, on the whole, very broad-brush. Local authority managers not in a specialist financial role cannot be expected to have detailed knowledge of cost implications – though some contributors, particularly at a senior level with direct commissioning responsibilities, did have a very good understanding of contract cost. This creates risks for the SHPS in terms of perception. For example, sometimes there was a view that the SHPS was expensive, but the measure (usually a comparison) was unconvincing. The following example was from a contributor largely supportive of the SHPS:

“We are restricted by the number of referrals [that can be made to the SHPS]. I have a similar person who is an RSI person doing floating support. She’s doing more than SHPS”.

– Local Authority Representative

The problem is that the very different roles undertaken by a SHPS delivery partner, and an RSI floating support worker makes any cost comparison extremely difficult.

The issue of wider cost savings is, very appropriately, central to the Bridges Outcomes Partnerships approach to delivering services with a social value. Brent Council had included data on predicted wider savings in a 2020 report on the SHPS to the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee citing the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) New Economy Unit costs database which covered costs across a range of areas including criminal justice, education and skills, employment, health, housing, and social services. Figures from the database were combined with

¹⁰ Bridges Outcomes Partnerships (2023) People-Powered Partnerships. Available [here](#).

actual outcomes achieved and cohort data from the SHPS from its first two years of operation, and the analysis concluded that having commissioned the SHPS service and delivered it through a payment for outcomes approach – £1.8m of costs in terms of accommodation and staffing were believed to have been avoided.

The responses from local authority contributors when asked about establishing if the SHPS delivered wider cost savings were remarkably similar. Nearly all considered that an exercise to establish cost benefits would be of value but, to be meaningful, the view was that it would require a great deal of planning and likely entail considerable additional costs. Two commissioners noted that at the inception of SHPS in their local authority area, part of the motivation was to achieve savings for Adult Social Care in particular, and they regretted that whether this was the case or not couldn't be evidenced. There was also scepticism around attribution and therefore the credibility of figures. That is, how far the intervention could be linked to the wider cost saving and finally a view that, even if plausible figures could be produced, they would not carry the same weight as a cost saving that could be seen to have an impact on a budget over which the council had direct control. The strong view was that nothing was more compelling than to be able to evidence an actual avoided cost rather than a notional avoidable cost.

“Wider savings? I couldn’t put a figure on it. We don’t get as many duty to refers¹¹ from the hospital but I can’t say if that means they are getting fewer people who are [experiencing homelessness] at discharge. We could drop a housing options adviser if we were at the figures of two years ago. But the cost-of-living crisis means we can’t do this”.

– Local Authority Manager

“We know [SHPS] are getting there before deterioration of mental health and rough sleeping. It must knock on to Social Care, etc. But cost benefits estimates – no. Finger in the air. There’s more interest from health since Everyone In, but savings? We can’t prove it”.

– Local Authority Manager

Local authorities have responsibilities to provide data on housing applications to central government using Homelessness Case Level Information Collection (H-CLIC) which was introduced with the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act. H-CLIC collects more detailed data than previously possible on people presenting as experiencing homelessness, the activities offered to assist them, and their outcomes.

¹¹ The Homelessness Reduction Act places a duty on specified public authorities to refer people who they think may be experiencing homelessness or threatened with experiencing homelessness to local authority housing options teams.

H-CLIC data has become more useful over time as the returns from local authorities have improved. Via the statutory homelessness data dashboard,¹² an astonishing amount of information can now be accessed for each local authority covering prevention, relief, and main housing duties, and providing detailed data on such things as number of presentations, housing situation at time of presentation, profile of applicants including support needs, and how the housing duty was discharged.

It might be expected that H-CLIC data could provide a strong base from which to measure the performance of local authorities against each other and figures from which to project financial costs and projected savings achieved through a prevention or relief outcome. However, as this report has evidenced, there are many factors that can have an impact on the number of prevention and relief outcomes achieved that a service such as the SHPS is unable to influence or to have only a marginal impact on.

For example, the profile and therefore the support needs of people presenting to local authorities will not be consistent across local authorities. Additionally, there are significant disparities in the amount of access to different forms of temporary accommodation across local authorities as well as divergences in approach to accepting and discharging a prevention or relief duty. Indeed, a level of discretion is built into the Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities¹³ which states under section 14:18:

"Housing authorities should not have a blanket policy of ending the prevention and relief duties after 56 days where they have the discretion to continue it; instead, they should in each case take the applicant's circumstances into account".

Therefore, even when seeking to measure performance between two adjacent boroughs, it is not a case of being able to measure 'like with like'.

The risks arising because of difficulties in costing the SHPS in a convincing way against other forms of service delivery and in being able to show avoidable costs achieved also opens up opportunities. Some local authority contributors had an appetite for finding ways of achieving savings through the SHPS developing in new areas where its interventions could be convincingly evidenced as actual avoided costs. These will be considered in the next chapter.

¹² Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2023) Dashboards on homelessness. Available [here](#).

¹³ Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2023) Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities. Available [here](#).

Development Opportunities

This learning evaluation demonstrates the high regard the SHPS is held in by the majority of the contributors. There are a number of development routes that SHPS may wish to pursue. These are described below and are heavily influenced by the contributors. While the SHPS is not currently operating in large numbers of local authority areas, there is considerable interest in the SHPS model and for most of the local authority contributors – an appetite for SHPS to do more.

Bridges Outcomes Partnerships is, of course, regularly exploring new opportunities and some of the proposals covered in this chapter are already being investigated and shaped.

Employment

The strong link between a sustainable housing outcome and being in work is well understood by SHPS. Research by Bridges Outcomes Partnerships (2023) found that:

“...an individual’s success in gaining employment appeared – surprisingly – to have an inverse correlation with their likelihood of securing a new tenancy. Further exploration revealed that private landlords were worried by low-income work (particularly for those working irregular hours) and feared tenants would struggle to pay the rent; they preferred the stability of housing benefit payments (in particular disability benefits). Armed with this insight, delivery partners were able to put in place dedicated strategies to help people with irregular wages to secure tenancies”.

However, the likelihood of a person returning to experiencing homelessness once they are in regular employment reduces considerably and, in most cases, housing options increase once a person is in work. Helping people get a job is a strength admired by contributors and many wanted to see the SHPS develop a stronger vocational focus.

“I’m in this place which will do for now, but the main thing for me is to get back to work. I’m a carpenter by trade and I’ve also done a course to be a locksmith. I haven’t had a drink now for five years. That’s me. Ready to go”.

– Tenant Supported by the SHPS

There are employment-related funding opportunities that Bridges Outcomes Partnerships is aware of and already exploring. The Labour Markets Evaluation and Pilots Fund being overseen by the Treasury is one such example. For most of the delivery partner contributors, strengthening this element of the SHPS offer was seen as an obvious and necessary step. The links between work and homelessness are fully accepted by central government too, in fact rough sleeping social impact bond programmes have typically included employment outcomes. Nonetheless, central

government departments also need encouragement to tackle problems jointly. In the case of beefing up the SHPS model to achieve more employment outcomes, making representation to key officials at both Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) should be done through a presentation to officials from both departments jointly.

The challenge will be for the SHPS to ensure that the payment for outcomes approach remains simple, straightforward, and deliverable. The crystal-clear three stage payment by outcomes structure has been key to the success of the SHPS. The employment-related work is a major contributor to achieving these outcomes but helping a person find a job is not a funded outcome. Should the SHPS be successful in securing funding from a programme which seeks to delivery labour market participation outcomes as its primary objective, then this could complicate the SHPS outcomes model if this work is incorporated into existing delivery partner services.

This dilemma was noted succinctly by a delivery partner contributor who was sceptical about such a development.

"The focus on the three housing outcomes is great. You don't get side-tracked. Hence my hesitation about work [being given a higher priority]".

– Delivery Partner

Another option would be to create a specialist team focusing on employment outcomes, replicating the SHPS housing outcomes in their simplicity, which could legitimately be working with people also being supported by the SHPS housing focused service as well as people with whom that team is not engaged. The employment SHPS would include education, training, and employment (ETE) coaches focusing on helping people develop skills, undertake training, and find and secure employment. In line with the SHPS model, the SHPS employment team would develop strong relationships with employment agencies as well as employers directly, replicating the very successful model of working with lettings agents as a conduit for achieving outcomes. Again, building on the existing SHPS model, the employment work could be supported through the establishment of a flexible fund which could be used, for example, to provide payments to people needing work clothes and tools to start work or a loan/grant to bridge the transitioning period when moving off of benefits.

In summary, there was a belief that the SHPS could do more to help people into work and that this was an area where, already, the SHPS is offering value to commissioners.

There was reasonable caution from some contributors concerning the dilution of the highly focused approach on clear, simple outcomes which drove performance. There is a danger that the payment for outcomes model becomes muddled through too many

outcomes and confusion over which are the most important and, additionally, a danger that the SHPS model regresses into collecting outputs rather than measuring outcomes. For example, securing a vocational qualification or successfully completing a training programme may be desirable but isn't of itself the outcome which must be getting a job and sustaining employment. Indeed, as research undertaken by the Centre for Homelessness Impact has evidenced, the most successful employment programmes measured through people disadvantaged in the labour market getting a job, are those where people are placed in work and supported (individual placement and support [IPS]), rather than through the more traditional 'train and place' approaches that required qualifications and the completion of training prior to progression into paid employment.¹⁴

Earlier Intervention

When a local authority contributor to the evaluation bluntly said, meant as an entirely complimentary statement:

"I see the SHPS as a prevention tool".

– Local Authority Representative

The primacy of a successful prevention outcomes for a local authority is obvious. Enabling a person to resolve a housing issue and avoid homelessness and the suffering and indignity it frequently brings is, in human terms, self-evidently beneficial. And having to undertake a relief duty, invariably involving the need to source emergency or temporary accommodation, brings a significant financial cost.

The problems inherent in trying to achieve a prevention outcome have already been well documented in this report. Most local authority contributors reflected on how people presented as being at risk of experiencing homelessness when they were a few days away from losing their accommodation, even though the Housing Reduction Act requires local authorities to address homelessness from 56 days before the person is due to experience homelessness. This meant a prevention outcome was hard to achieve and a relief duty often required instead.

"The negotiation service [for tenants and landlords] is excellent but we don't use them enough as the timescales are two months too late".

– Delivery Partner Manager

Local authorities also acknowledged that there were of ways of making the approach of frequently over-stretched housing options services more efficient, and most embraced the offer of additional resources from the SHPS to improve their triaging processes. In

¹⁴ Hurst, G. (2022) At-a-glance evidence of what works to end homelessness. Available [here](#).

Norfolk, the split between priority need, main duty homelessness cases, and prevention and relief cases are more blurred with some main duty cases being referred to the SHPS. However, in Norfolk the needs were the same as in London – prevention of homelessness was the priority.

An issue that emerged in interviews with three of the Norfolk local authorities was the frustration felt due to the volume of people and a belief that more could have been done earlier avoid a prevention duty being triggered.

“I would like to have intervention officers rather than housing officers. I’ve got a family intervention person now. There’s far more we can do about this. Like look at the housing register and find the people who we know are coming through and take them on before the 56 days”.

– Local Authority Representative

Another Norfolk local authority contributor observed that:

“We’re getting more new people who need a light touch because their needs are low and more people with a high level of need. We have to identify the first lot earlier”.

– Local Authority Representative

Interventions prior to the 56 days statutory duty being triggered in order to head off homelessness presentations would require additional funding and not every local authority representative believed this would be beneficial. One contributor stated that the last thing their local authority needed at present was more people getting a service, especially one which the local authority had no obligation to provide and therefore would not receive central government funding to deliver.

Yet the vision of reaching people earlier and the belief that there are means of identifying and reaching people at risk is a powerful one and an impressive aspiration well, articulated by a number of local authority contributors.

There are examples where exercises of this type have been successful. For example, in 2021 the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham interrogated council tax payment data to identify a group of financially vulnerable residents with council tax arrears so that they could be contacted and offered person-centred support. The results from this intervention to a selected group were compared to the outcomes from a group of residents similar in profile in terms of their council tax arrears situation that the council did not attempt to contact. The exercise showed that the residents that were called were 50% more likely to have made a payment or set up a payment plan than residents that did not. This meant that fewer residents went to court or were referred to bailiffs.

One of the recurring themes from this evaluation is the challenge facing the SHPS to show actual, rather than predicted or notional, savings or avoided costs arising through the SHPS intervention that would impact on the budget of the local authority and preferably, in terms of direct cost benefits, the housing department where the housing options service is based. A pre-homelessness presentation intervention project would lend itself well to the type of randomised control trial (RCT) approach of the type undertaken through the Barking and Dagenham council tax project. For example, it would be feasible to select a trial group of people who had approached a local authority prior to having a prevention or relief duty owed which received a SHPS intervention tracked alongside a group which didn't. The objective would be to see whether the SHPS intervention led to fewer people at a later stage presenting and being accepted for assistance under the Homelessness Reduction Act. A financial value could be placed on outcomes that avoided a statutory prevention or relief intervention needing to be made. This is the type of project that would be attractive to a collaborative partner like the Centre for Homelessness Impact and certainly worth exploring with them.

The SHPS payment for outcomes model is also transferable to other situations and involving different partners and funders. Housing associations, some with thousands of units of accommodation, would also find the financial risk share element of the model attractive. The cost of dealing with a lengthy eviction of a tenant involving court costs on top of non-payment of rent over a lengthy period is considerable, quite apart from the housing association not fulfilling its mission to help people live contentedly in good quality housing. Again, the direct cost savings could be transparently and convincingly calculated and, assuming the programme is successful, the SHPS able to clearly evidence its cost benefits.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The evaluation provides clear evidence that SHPS is both distinctive and effective in achieving its aims of supporting people experiencing homelessness to access and sustain accommodation and progress towards self-sufficiency.

A number of elements of SHPS are highly valued by local authorities and contribute to improving outcomes for people using the service. These include the payment for outcomes contract model and associated targets, a clear performance framework, collaborative and supportive working with landlords and letting agents, and the eight months support provided to tenants. Strong independent project management support, comprehensive and good quality data reporting, effective recruitment and training and the flexible use of additional funding underpin this success.

There is considerable interest in the SHPS model and an appetite for SHPS to do more. The evaluation indicates SHPS can promote targeted prevention engagement with people at risk of homelessness and that this can be enhanced through interventions such as triage. Local authorities differ in their willingness and capacity to reach out to people in housing difficulty before the 56-day Homelessness Reduction Act duty is triggered, and it is still the case that many people in housing need do not approach their local authority until they are at, or near crisis point.

We therefore recommend that that Bridges Outcomes Partnerships explores with local authorities how to develop a service that can identify and engage with people in housing difficulty prior to the 56-day statutory duty being triggered, following the example of the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham's recent pilot around council tax payment data.

SHPS is clearly highly valued by local authorities. However, in the current tight funding climate, it may be challenging to secure funding for non-statutory services. SHPS's distinctiveness makes it difficult to make accurate cost comparisons and estimate benefits, including around broader outcomes. Contributor feedback indicates that it is very unlikely that local authorities would have capacity to carry out this work themselves.

We therefore recommend that:

- Bridges Outcomes Partnerships seeks to develop the network of champions for SHPS within local authorities.
- Explore the methodology utilised by the London Borough of Brent to provide a way forward in terms of estimating SHPS savings around accommodation and staffing.
- Explore the possibility of utilising a randomised control trial (RCT) approach, to attach financial value to outcomes which avoid the need for a statutory prevention or relieve intervention.

The evaluation indicates that contributors would welcome SHPS developing a stronger vocational focus. This finding reinforces the value of work that Bridges Outcomes Partnerships is already undertaking to explore additional funding streams.

We recommend that Bridges Outcomes seeks to hold joint meetings with DLUHC and DWP officials to explore potential additional funding to SHPS to support this area of work.

Appendix 1: References

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About Homeless Link

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for organisations working with people experiencing or at risk of homelessness in England. We aim to develop, inspire, support, and sustain a movement of organisations working together to achieve positive futures for people who are homeless or vulnerably housed.

Representing over 900 organisations across England, we are in a unique position to see both the scale and nature of the tragedy of homelessness. We see the data gaps; the national policy barriers; the constraints of both funding and expertise; the system blocks and attitudinal obstacles. But crucially, we also see – and are instrumental in developing – the positive practice and ‘what works’ solutions.

As an organisation we believe that things can and should be better: not because we are naïve or cut off from reality, but because we have seen and experienced radical positive change in the way systems and services are delivered – and that gives us hope for a different future.

We support our members through research, guidance, and learning, and to promote policy change that will ensure everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.

What We Do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for frontline homelessness services. We work to improve services through research, guidance and learning, and campaign for policy change that will ensure everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.

Homeless Link

Minories House

2-5 Minories

London EC3N

1BJ

www.homeless.org.uk

@HomelessLink

Let's End Homelessness Together

