



Glasgow Homelessness Partnership

The Glasgow Hostel Closure and Re-provisioning Programme: Interim Findings from a Longitudinal Evaluation

Executive Summary

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Key Points

This Executive Summary presents the key interim findings of a longitudinal evaluation of the outcomes for residents resettled from two of Glasgow's large-scale, council-run male hostels: Peter McCann House and James Duncan House. Based on interviews with 89 ex-hostel residents, on average 19 months after they left the hostel, the key points were as follows:

- Ex-residents of these hostels were an extremely socially and economically disadvantaged group, the majority of whom had long-term experience of living in hostels and other forms of homelessness. Ex-residents under the age of 50 had particularly troubled personal histories.
- The most common reason for homelessness reported by ex-residents was relationship breakdown with a partner; the other substantial reasons were eviction/threatened eviction, bereavement, and relationship breakdown with a parent/step-parent.
- The great majority (82 per cent) of ex-residents were happy with the accommodation that was arranged for them on leaving the hostel.
- Most ex-residents felt well supported through the hostel closure process, but this was less true for some of the younger ex-residents under 50.
- A majority (61 per cent) of ex-residents said that they were managing better financially than they had been when living in the hostel, and only 14 per cent said that their financial position had deteriorated.
- Ex-residents were far more likely to report improvements than deteriorations in their general and mental health since leaving the hostel.
- Overall levels of both drinking and drug use were reported to have fallen significantly since ex-residents left the hostel.
- Substantial improvements were reported in ex-residents' access to social support since leaving the hostel.
- There was very little engagement in paid work amongst ex-residents, and a large minority (40 per cent) engaged in no regular activities of any kind.
- Around half of all ex-residents reported current loneliness (48 per cent) and boredom (56 per cent), but there were (marginal) net improvements on both measures as compared with when they were living in the hostel.
- An overwhelming majority (83 per cent) of hostel residents said that their life was 'much better' or 'better' than it had been when they were living in the hostel; only 6 per cent thought that it was worse.

Introduction

- 1 Peter McCann House and James Duncan House were closed down in July 2006 and March 2008 respectively, representing the final stages of a 'Hostel Closure and Re-provisioning Programme' which has been progressed by the Glasgow Homelessness Partnership since 2003, supported by a Hostel Decommissioning Grant from the Scottish Executive (now Scottish Government). The main aim of the evaluation study is to assess the resettlement outcomes for ex-residents of these two hostels.
- 2 The study commenced in July 2007 and is due for completion in December 2009. It has two elements:
 - qualitative interviews with service providers; and
 - a longitudinal survey of ex-residents, comprising two main waves of fieldwork. This survey is based largely on structured questionnaire interviews, but with a significant number of open questions to generate more qualitative data. Supplementary, in-depth qualitative interviews will also be conducted with a purposively selected sub-sample of ex-residents.
- 3 All of the interviews with service providers had been completed at the point that the Interim Report was written (22 in total), as had the first wave of structured interviews with ex-residents (total sample size, 89). At the point of this first interview, ex-residents had, on average, left the hostel from which they were resettled 19 months earlier: 26 months for those resettled from Peter McCann House, and 14 months for those from James Duncan House. This means that these interim findings are mainly based on outcomes for ex-residents one-to-two years after they left the relevant hostel.

The Profile of Ex-Residents and Their Reasons for Homelessness

- 4 The ex-residents who participated in the study were quite evenly split between those aged over and under 50 years old (46 per cent and 54 per cent respectively), and the great majority (74 per cent) were originally from Glasgow.
- 5 The longitudinal survey confirmed what was already known about the extreme disadvantage of residents of the large-scale hostels in Glasgow. The ex-residents interviewed were characterised by unemployment, long term-sickness/disability, benefit dependency, low educational attainment, poor health, high levels of drug and alcohol problems, and extensive experience of hostel living and other forms of homelessness.
- 6 There were, however, significant differences based on age, with the personal histories of younger ex-residents reported to be particularly troubled. Thus large proportions of ex-residents aged under 50 years old reported experience

of prison/young offenders institute, local authority care, severely disrupted education, rough sleeping, and drug problems. Ex-residents over 50 were much more likely to have been in steady work for most of their adult lives than those under this age, and to have been married, but they were also much more likely to have had alcohol problems than younger ex-residents.

- 7 The most common reason ex-residents gave for becoming homeless and moving into a hostel was relationship breakdown with a partner (affecting 34 per cent of all ex-residents). The next most important reasons were eviction/threatened with eviction (20 per cent); bereavement (16 per cent); and relationship breakdown with a parent/step-parent (12 per cent). All other reasons for homelessness – including alcohol, drug or mental health problems – were reported by fewer than 10 per cent of all ex-residents.

The Experience of the Resettlement Process

- 8 The ex-residents interviewed were generally happy with the accommodation that had been arranged for them on moving out of James Duncan House/Peter McCann House (82 per cent), and three-quarters (72 per cent) were still living in this accommodation at point of interview. Most of those who had moved on from the accommodation that they had originally moved in to had either arranged this accommodation for themselves or had been explicitly moved into initial short-term arrangements. Very few interviewees had slept rough since leaving the hostel, and there was generally little evidence of ex-residents of these two hostels returning to homelessness.
- 9 Findings were mixed on the level of information that ex-residents received during the resettlement process, with interviewees quite evenly split on whether they felt that they had (44 per cent) or had not (40 per cent) received enough information about what was going to happen to them when the hostels closed. They were generally more positive about the support they had received during the resettlement process (63 per cent 'always' or 'usually' felt supported), especially those aged over 50, but there was a substantial minority who had felt neglected or had mixed feelings.

Interim Outcomes on Housing and Access to Professional Support

- 10 Most ex-residents liked the accommodation that they were living in at point of interview, felt safe in it, and were satisfied with the facilities, neighbourhood, space standards, and furnishings. Those in supported accommodation found the staff helpful, and generally did not have a problem with the other residents. Many service providers had highlighted concerns about ex-residents coping with the practicalities of running their own homes, but most of those in permanent housing felt that they were managing fine, though problems were reported by some, especially with financial management. The main negative findings on housing were associated with high levels of disrepair and dirtiness of properties when those in permanent housing first arrived.

- 11 The great majority (86 per cent) of all ex-residents saw at least one professional worker regularly. The workers most commonly seen were housing support workers (seen by 69 per cent of ex-residents), but there were also substantial proportions who saw social workers (28 per cent) and drugs workers (21 per cent). Most ex-residents (75 per cent) said that all of their support needs were currently met, but one quarter (25 per cent) reported that they had some form of current unmet need. The nature of these self-identified unmet needs varied widely, but they related mainly to practical issues (such as help with managing money and debt).

Interim Outcomes on Access to Social Support and Social Networks

- 12 Ex-residents reported substantial (net) increases in their access to 'emotional support' (someone to listen when you need to talk), 'practical support' (someone to count on in a crisis), and 'informational support' (someone to ask when you are not sure what to do) since leaving the hostel. In all, 48 per cent of ex-residents reported access to at least one form of social support that they had not had in the hostel. There were particularly large increases in those who reported workers as a source of social support (especially amongst older ex-residents), but both friends and wider family were also now more likely to provide social support to ex-residents than they had been when the ex-resident was living in a hostel (this was especially so for younger ex-residents). Half (51 per cent) of all ex-residents reported that they saw more of friends and family than they did when living in the hostel, and only 16 per cent saw family and friends less.

Interim Outcomes on Health, Alcohol and Drugs

- 13 There were also very positive findings on self-reported changes in ex-residents' health since leaving the hostel. Thus half of ex-residents (49 per cent) reported that their general health was better than in the hostel, and only 22 per cent said that it was worse. Likewise, while the majority of ex-residents (58 per cent) reported no change in their mental health since leaving the hostel, for the remainder change was far more likely to be positive (33 per cent of all ex-residents) than negative (only 9 per cent of ex-residents).
- 14 The findings on patterns of self-reported changes in alcohol and drug use were similarly positive. Half of all ex-residents reported that they now drank less than in the hostel (41 per cent) or had stopped drinking entirely since leaving the hostel (10 per cent), with only 10 per cent reporting that they now drank more. Drug use was almost entirely confined to ex-residents under 50s, and the overwhelming majority of those who had been drug users in the hostel said that their drug use had declined since leaving the hostel. There was also a shift in the type of drugs used by ex-residents, with less use of heroin reported, and more use of methadone and cannabis. Injecting drug use was reported to have declined. All of these findings pointed to less serious and more managed drug use than in the hostel.

Interim Outcomes on Financial Well-being, Employment and Other Activities

- 15 One particularly encouraging set of findings related to ex-residents' perceptions of changes in their financial well-being since leaving the hostel. Strikingly, 61 per cent of all ex-residents said that they were now coping better financially than they had done when living in the hostel, and only 14 per cent said that they were coping less well financially.
- 16 Less positively, very few ex-residents of working age (3 per cent) were in paid work at point of interview, with the great majority either long-term sick/disabled or unemployed. Only relatively low proportions of all ex-residents engaged in structured activities other than paid work, such as voluntary work, work preparation courses, arts or sports-based activities. Half (55 per cent) reported that they engaged in 'other' activities, but these were mainly not 'structured' activities, but rather meeting friends, walking, reading, watching football, films etc. In total, 40 per cent of all ex-residents reported no engagement in regular activities of any kind.

Interim Outcomes on Overall Quality of Life

- 17 Perhaps the most important finding of this evaluation study is that the great majority of all ex-residents (83 per cent) felt that, overall, life was 'much better' (61 per cent) or 'better' (22 per cent) than it had been when they were living in the hostel. Only one in ten (11 per cent) thought that it was about the same, and 6 per cent thought that it was worse.
- 18 Many service providers expressed concerns that loneliness and boredom may be key challenges faced by ex-residents once they were living in the community. The research found that loneliness and boredom were indeed major problems for many ex-residents – reported by 48 per cent and 55 per cent respectively. However, it should also be noted that there were (marginal) net improvements on both of these measures as compared with when interviewees were living in the hostel.
- 19 One third (32 per cent) of all ex-residents said that there was something that they missed about the hostel (this was most commonly the camaraderie with other residents). But almost all ex-residents (90 per cent) said that there was at least one thing better about their lives than when they were living in the hostel (this often related to having their own place).

The Views of Service Providers on Hostel Closure and Re-provisioning

- 20 No service providers interviewed were in any doubt that closing the hostels was the right thing to do, and most felt that the closure process had been well resourced and successfully implemented with respect to James Duncan House and Peter McCann House. However, concerns were raised with regard to ex-

residents' access to mainstream services in certain parts of the city, and a number of interviewees felt that the referral criteria for some of the commissioned supported accommodation projects were too strict. The key gap in services highlighted by service providers was supported accommodation for active drug users, though it was also acknowledged that there were legal and other difficulties in establishing specialist provision for this group. With respect to service providers' overall criteria for 'successful resettlement' – improvements in general quality of life – there is a clear finding from the study that this has been realised for the vast majority of ex-residents interviewed.

Next Stages in the Study

- 21 The next stages of the research will involve a further wave of structured interviews with all 89 ex-hostel residents in the sample, and 20 in-depth, qualitative interviews with a purposively selected sub-sample. All of this fieldwork will be conducted over the summer of 2009. The analysis and writing up of the final report will take place in autumn 2009, with publication of the final report scheduled for early 2010. The final report on this longitudinal evaluation will identify policy and practice lessons for future hostel closures in Glasgow and elsewhere.

For further information

Both this summary, and the full report, *The Glasgow Hostel Closure and Re-provisioning Programme: Interim Findings from a Longitudinal Evaluation*, are available to download free of charge via the Centre for Housing Policy website at <http://www.york.ac.uk/chp/index.html>

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