Hosting Her
Research exploring host housing options for women

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Housing Solutions to Social Injustice

Contents

About Commonweal Housing

Established in 2006, **Commonweal Housing** is an independent award-winning charity working to investigate, pilot and champion housing-based solutions to social injustice. By using charitable resources Commonweal Housing provide experts and partner organisations the opportunity to trial and test new approaches designed to enhance housing equality and justice. Commonweal Housing has worked with partners such as Housing for Women, Praxis Community Projects, Thames Reach, St Mungo's and Stonewall Housing.

About the researchers

Lisa Young has over fourteen years' experience across research, project management, training and front-line service delivery with an interest in social research methods, gender and crime. Lisa holds an MSc in Criminology and Social Research Methods (dist.) from London South Bank University. As a consultant Lisa conducts mixed methods research and evaluation across the VAWG and Social Care sectors to enhance the quality of service delivery and help organisations make strategic decisions.

Tessa Horvath is an experienced consultant researcher specialising in gender and ending violence against women and girls (VAWG). Since working freelance, Tessa has conducted a range of research and evaluation projects, and has a Master's degree in Woman and Child Abuse Studies Unit (CWASU - distinction) where she focused on sexual exploitation.

Acknowledgments

Foreword

Amy Doyle, Deputy Chief Executive, Commonweal Housing

A home with an abusive partner. A terrifying night on the street. A male-dominated hostel where drug use is rife and the threat of violence is everywhere. The most vulnerable women of society are facing impossible choices, as the housing crisis deepens, and specialist services are few and far between.

At Commonweal Housing, our concern is for those at the sharpest end of the social injustice: those who are falling through the cracks of the system. But we are also, crucially, interested in the solutions that housing can provide to ensure the most marginalised can get the support they need.

Since our inception in 2006, we have been particularly concerned about the social injustices facing women. From women leaving prison and their children, to women facing sexual exploitation, to women with no recourse to public funds, our innovative projects have worked with specialist women's organisations to seek the solutions to the most intractable challenges women face.

That's why we were so interested to find out more about this growing sector that is increasingly home to women facing homelessness: host housing.

What this research shows us is that, if implemented well, host housing could be the right support a woman needs at the right stage in her journey. Some participants in the research highlighted that the home environment could be particularly positive for young women, for example.

But the report also warns that these schemes must not be used to plug a gap in support that national and local government should be providing.

What it comes down to is choice, rather than necessity. Host housing schemes should be an option for women from a range of housing support, rather than the only option they are stuck with.

Whilst there is a growing number of women needing to access hosting schemes, it's clear that not all the precautions around women's safety are currently being addressed. This report makes the case for schemes that are dedicated to supporting women that operate in a gender and trauma informed way, to keep these women safe and enable them to move on in their pathway to independence.

We are pleased to have supported Lisa Young and Tessa Horvath to carry out this vital research, and look forward to seeing the impact it has on future host housing provision for women.

Executive Summary

Introduction

In the context of a homelessness crisis and cuts to welfare and public services, more women are experiencing homelessness and find it increasingly challenging to access appropriate housing. Without adequate funding or an effective government response, it is uncertain when the situation may improve.

At the same time, host housing schemes have grown and developed for different groups including young people, those with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) and adults with care and support needs. To assess the value in developing women specific host housing for women this research explores the risks, challenges, successes and potential opportunities of host housing for women.

Delivery of host housing

Hosting operates through a variety of models developed for different groups such as asylum seekers, refugees and migrants with NRPF, young people and care leavers as well as adults with care and support needs. Each model shares the principle of an individual or a family offering a spare room in their house to someone in need. Hosting models are either delivered informally, or through small grass roots voluntary schemes as well as through more formal schemes led by larger organisations.

Findings

This research has uncovered wide variations in the design, set up and delivery of hosting schemes as others have documented (DCLG, 2008; NACCOM, 2017; Shelter, 2018). A clear distinction can be made between guests who have recourse to public funds and those that do not, which influences the funding streams, the support pathways and the types of additional services that are required. These variances have important implications for the consideration and development of women specific hosting.

Benefits of host housing for women

This research found that when delivered well, hosting could be beneficial in the following ways:

- Hosting can expand the options available to women to access temporary accommodation in a supportive environment whilst longer term suitable housing options are found. For women with NRPF, it is often the only option that prevents them from destitution.
- For some women, an informal, empathic home environment coupled with committed and trained hosts can be extremely valuable and complementary to women's recovery journeys.
- Guests stated that when it went well, living with a host enabled them to build positive, trusting relationships with people, which helped to build their confidence.
- Informal, practical help offered by hosts can be effective in supporting women to develop life skills, build their confidence and community connections, and improve support networks.

Challenges of host housing for women

As well as the benefits noted above, challenges were identified regarding host housing for women that would need careful consideration if developing women specific hosting. These include:

- The availability of options for women with NRPF may shrink if hosting is widened out further for all women.
- Widening out voluntary hosting schemes risks letting the Government and Local Authorities 'off the hook' from providing sustainable and appropriate housing solutions for all women.
- Potential abusers may also be drawn to volunteering as hosts. Women and hosts may be at risk from violent perpetrators. In some cases, it might be challenging to maintain appropriate boundaries particularly when hosts lack training, and where there is insufficient additional support for hosts and guests resulting in hosts becoming over involved in guest circumstances.
- Hosting remains a temporary option and securing appropriate move on options is a significant challenge when hosting comes to an end.

Who might hosting be suitable for and in what circumstances?

21 out of the 23 participants from across hosting and housing schemes, women's services as well as guests and hosts, were supportive of host housing as an option for some women. It must be noted, however, that although the majority supported it, some participants had mixed feelings about hosting, stating that it is not an ideal option, but a reality within the context of the current challenges women face in accessing appropriate housing. In addition, many stated that hosting should not be viewed as a replacement for other existing options, including statutory housing and specialist services.

Hosting was more often advocated as being more suitable for women with NRPF due to the difficulties and lack of alternative options they face. Benefits were also recognised for women who do have recourse to public funds including young women who face housing benefit caps which limits their statutory housing options. Hosting was deemed not suitable for women at high risk of harm from perpetrators, and not suitable for those who face significant challenges such as drug and alcohol dependency and significant mental health problems.

Integral elements to be included in women specific hosting

The following aspects were deemed crucial in the development of a good quality women specific host housing.

Developing a women-centred model through a partnership approach

Hosting schemes for women must be developed and delivered by, or in partnership with, a specialist women's service so that a woman centred approach would be inherent throughout. Specific funding for a partnership approach between a women's specialist service and an experienced hosting scheme would demonstrate a commitment to high quality provision.

Defining a target group

The most significant decision to make when developing a model is to define whether the project is designed for women with NRPF or not. This will have important implications for:

- the type of funding available
- the pathway of support for the guests and strategic partnerships
- inward and onward referrals and partner support services
- available move on options

The practical application of hosting including the style of engagement, support for hosts and guests during the stay, how hosts are recruited, and the processes used to ensure the safety of hosts and guests would be similar across projects, no matter whether guests have recourse or not.

Developing effective pathways and strategic partnerships

The way in which hosting services are situated within local support pathways is an important consideration. This will differ according to whether women accessing hosting are eligible for statutory support. It would be beneficial for hosting schemes to communicate with the local statutory and voluntary sector services in the early phase of set up to implement agreements and protocols for ensuring women who access temporary hosting have support to access appropriate support and statutory rights and entitlements (where applicable).

Delivery and processes that prioritises women's safety

Ensuring women's safety in a hosting context is paramount. Strategies to achieve this include employing a rigorous approach to recruiting, training and supporting hosts, matching and supporting guests as well as assessing the suitability of hosting for women on a case by case basis by looking at women's whole circumstances.

Conclusion

This research found that host housing options can be an appropriate option for some women including those with NRPF, at certain points in their journey on the pathway to independent accommodation. Hosting for women was not advocated as an ideal or simple solution for women, but was often noted as a reality within the context of the challenges women are currently facing in accessing suitable housing from the existing options. Where hosting is used, the priority is that it is delivered to a high standard, prioritises safety and meets women's needs. Any further development of hosting must be alongside continued campaigning and lobbying for appropriate statutory, sustainable solutions for women. Hosting should not be a replacement for access to appropriate statutory housing options and specialist support services and should not become part of the homelessness pathway to be relied upon by Local Authorities.

Recommendations

Key recommendations from this research are included here. More detail is in the full report.

Recommendations for Central Government

Central Government should address the drivers for all women's homelessness. There are a number of ways that this can be achieved. Firstly, through building more social and affordable housing and creating a benefits system that acts as an appropriate safety net for all women. Secondly, by funding specific and specialised

women only services for women experiencing violence and other social injustices that increase their risk of homelessness. Thirdly by ending the destitution of migrant women by creating a better safety net for those with NRPF.

Recommendations for Local Government

Local Authorities should address the drivers of women's homelessness in the first place, as well as:

- Ending the use of mixed-sex temporary accommodation for women and instead fund specialist women's services who are best placed to meet the needs of women who are homeless and who have experienced violence or other social injustice.
- Ending gate-keeping practices which prevent women from accessing their housing rights and entitlements.
- Work with local hosting schemes to ensure that all women accessing temporary hosting are also supported to access their housing rights as well as suitable move on options.

Recommendations for host housing services

- Offer all women access to women only host housing options.
- Prioritise the safety of women by implementing rigorous strategies and processes for recruiting, training and supporting hosts.
- Work with specialist women's services to apply for specific partnership funding and develop gender informed hosting services capable of providing wrap around support for women.
- All hosting schemes should make use of available good practice guidance information available through NACCOM membership when developing hosting for women. All structures and processes should be reviewed to meet the specific needs of women.

Recommendations for women's services

- For those services that work with or alongside hosting schemes, consider applying for specific funding to partner with a reputable hosting scheme to develop a women specific hosting with wrap-around support.
- With specific funding, develop and deliver a package of gender informed VAWG awareness training for hosts as well as confidentiality, boundaries, health and safety.

1. Introduction

In the context of a homelessness crisis and cuts to welfare and public services, more women than ever are experiencing homelessness and a lack of viable housing options. Front-line services are finding it increasingly challenging to help women access appropriate housing options. Without adequate funding or an effective government response, it is uncertain when the situation may improve.

At the same time, an interim housing option that has begun to grow in recent years is host housing schemes where volunteers offer a spare room to someone in need for a short time until more suitable options become available. Host housing schemes are most commonly associated with attempts to support young people, those with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) and adults with care and support needs.
In some cases, hosting has been shown to have value and contribute towards some positive outcomes for those who access it, but so far, the evidence is limited. To assess the value of women specific informed host housing, this research explores the benefits, challenges, and potential opportunities of host housing for women.

2. Context

2.1 A homelessness crisis

England is facing a homelessness crisis. A reduction of social housing, welfare changes, rising rents and cuts to Local Authority budgets over the last ten years, has led to a dramatic increase in homelessness (Crisis, 2019). The unprecedented cuts made to welfare and housing benefit disproportionately impact on women (Women's Budget Group, 2016) which has contributed to an increase in women's homelessness. 14% of the total number of rough sleepers in 2018 were reported to be women (Homeless Link, 2018) but this is reported to be the tip of the iceberg as women are often missing from administrative homelessness data as they try to avoid the streets in an attempt to stay safe (Bretherton and Pleace, 2018).

2.1.1. Factors that contribute to women's homelessness are increasing

- Violence against women, one of the key driving factors in why women become homeless (St Mungo's, 2013; Kelly, et al 2014; Homeless Link, 2019) has been shown to be increasing in England and Wales.

- ONS data demonstrates a 14% increase in reports of sexual violence in the last year (Rape Crisis, 2019) as well as a 24% increase in reports of domestic violence. (ONS, 2019).
- The loss of many specialist services means women are finding it increasingly difficult to access suitable housing and support to help them recover from their experiences of violence and trauma (Ava and Agenda, 2017; APPG, 2018; Homeless Link, 2019; Solace Women's Aid, 2019). The situation for women with NRPF is even worse with many women facing destitution. (Homeless Link, 2019).
- Welfare changes and the introduction of Universal Credit means more women struggle to meet the costs and demands to maintain a roof over their head (Homeless Link, 2019). Caps on housing benefit that impact unfairly on young women means they are often placed in unsuitable shared accommodation (Homeless Link, 2019).
- The Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA, 2017) has been shown to slow down statutory decision making in cases of homeless women (Solace Women's Aid, 2019). In addition, statutory services still demonstrate little understanding of the needs and circumstances of women fleeing gender-based violence (Solace Women's Aid, 2019).

As a result of these key factors, women's services are spending more of their dwindling resources advocating for women to access their housing rights and entitlements from the Local Authority. In addition, they are using their already stretched funds to support more women with NRPF for whom there are even fewer options through the statutory homelessness pathway.

2.1.2 Women are facing impossible choices

Insufficient and shrinking availability of safe housing for women, coupled with an increase in the factors that contribute towards women's homelessness, means services are turning women away with the knowledge that they have nowhere to go. Women are facing impossible choices about whether to stay with or return to abusive partners, use night buses and tubes or A&E to avoid rough sleeping, be exploited by men through the exchange sex for a bed for the night or sleep on the streets (Homeless Link, 2019; Solace Women's Aid, 2019).

With no certainty about when or if the availability and the quality of homelessness support and housing options will improve, some organisations, and community groups have begun to explore other options at the same time as campaigning for significant increases in statutory funding and support. A housing option that has been growing and expanding in recent years to work with different groups is the host housing model.

2.2 Host housing

Hosting operates through a variety of models developed for different groups such as asylum seekers, refugees and migrants with NRPF, young people and care leavers as well as adults with care and support needs. NACCOM describe hosting as:

> *"Hosting is simply where someone offers a room in their house to someone in need."*
> NACCOM, 2017

Some of the key components, variations, benefits and challenges of these hosting and shared living models are documented below.

2.2.1 Variation in the delivery of models

The host housing models each share the principle of an individual or a family offering a spare room in their house to someone in need. They differ mainly in who they are designed to support, each focusing on a specific group with differing needs and experiences. The hosting is either delivered informally or through small grass roots voluntary schemes, as well as through more formal schemes led by larger organisations. The set-up, governance, funding, practical application, support for hosts and guests, and processes for the recruitment and vetting of hosts vary from project to project (DCLG, 2008; NACCOM, 2017).

2.2.2 The benefits of hosting models

A comprehensive evidence review was beyond the scope of this feasibility study; however, a brief review of publicly available research, reports and websites demonstrates the following benefits identified from some existing host housing models:

- The Shared Lives model that supports adults with care and support needs by matching them with a Shared Lives Carer who they live with. Improvements have been documented in the health and wellbeing of participants involved in Shared Lives as well as changes in social circumstances and support networks (sharedlivesplus.org.uk).
- 89% of people in Shared Lives reported they felt involved with their community and 86% felt their Shared Lives carer's support helped them have more choice in their daily life (sharedlivesplus.org.uk).
- Evidence from the review of Supported Lodgings outcome data (2008) which reviewed services in 17 Local Authority areas demonstrates positive outcomes in relation to the 'Every Child Matters Framework', as well as education and employment outcomes (DCLG, 2008).

- The use of Supported Lodgings was reported to significantly reduce the use of temporary bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless 16- and 17-year olds in 2007-2008 (DCLG, 2008).
- Elements that encourage positive outcomes for guests and smooth delivery of hosting have been documented to include good structure, governance, experienced coordination, well thought out delivery processes, practical support for both hosts and guests, as well as good quality referral pathways and move on options (DCLG, 2008; NACCOM, 2017; Depaul.org).

2.2.3 Challenges of hosting models

The key challenges identified from the hosting and supported lodgings include:
- The structure, governance and the level of regulation and delivery processes vary significantly which makes it difficult to set standards and measure the quality of the interventions (DCLG, 2008).
- There is evidence from NACCOM (2019) that in the current climate of reducing statutory funding and public services, hosting projects are seeing an increase in demand for placements, more complex cases being referred, and challenges with move on options particularly for migrant groups with NRPF.

There are few hosting services which are designed specifically for women and little evidence about the effectiveness or suitability of these models for women. This scoping study aims to explore this further.

2.3 About this study

This research builds on existing understanding about host housing and explores the perceptions about whether host housing could be beneficial for some women and in what circumstances. Capturing data from women's sector services, voluntary and statutory housing services, hosting schemes, hosts and women guests, this research explores the key concepts in hosting, delivery practices, as well as exploring some of the challenges and the potential opportunities and benefits to women.

2.3.1 Research questions

The study aims to explore the following research questions:
- How are existing hosting schemes currently delivered and who do they support?
- Could hosting schemes be beneficial to women experiencing homeless?
- What are the challenges and risks in delivering hosting schemes for women?
- What are the benefits and opportunities of delivering hosting schemes for women?
- What strategies and mechanisms would host housing models need to incorporate to be beneficial to women?

3. Methodology

This qualitative scoping study was conducted by two independent researchers on behalf of Commonweal Housing between July and December 2019. The researchers conducted 22 in-depth semi-structured interviews with 23 participants, including strategic and operational stakeholders from organisations in the VAWG and homelessness sectors as well as individual hosts and women guests. In total, five hosting services, four VAWG organisations (including a women's centre), two Local Authorities, a housing and homelessness service, a membership service, a migrant advice service, a human rights organisation, three hosts and two guests were represented in this research. In addition, a focus group was undertaken with three stakeholders and representatives from Commonweal Housing.

The methods were designed to gather rich qualitative data to explore the delivery of existing host housing services, establish opinions as to the suitability of developing specific host housing for women experiencing homelessness and draw out integral elements that would enhance hosting for women.

A full research methodology is detailed in the appendix.

4. Research Findings

4.1. About existing host housing schemes

This section presents information about existing host housing provision. It demonstrates the groups that host housing has been developed to support and the way in which models of host housing schemes operate.

4.1.1 Groups supported by host housing

A review of relevant documents and websites conducted as part of this research demonstrated that host housing has been developed to work with the following specific groups:

Hosting for people with NRPF

The number of hosting schemes for people with NRPF has increased in recent years. Twenty-seven hosting schemes in England now belong to NACCOM which is a *"national network of organisations providing accommodation and support, primarily for destitute asylum seekers"*. Initially founded in 2006 as an informal and unfunded network, NACCOM gained funding in 2013 and charity status in 2015. It works to promote quality and good practice in the provision of accommodation to end destitution among asylum seekers. Over the last year they had 675 active hosts across the network hosting 886 people (NACCOM, 2019).

Hosting for young people

Several models of hosting have been developed to support young people. Nightstop led by Depaul has 31 services around the UK that provide emergency overnight accommodation for young people aged 16-25 who are at risk of being street homeless or who are facing unsafe situations. The scheme has been running since 1989, and in 2018, 604 volunteers provided a night's accommodation to 1224 young people (Depaul.org).

Supported Lodgings also support young people and operate either as a crisis emergency accommodation or longer term to provide stability for both care leavers and other young people aged 16-24. Under supported Lodgings, young people are provided with "*a room of their own in a private home where they are a member of the household but are not expected to become a member of the family. The householder, or host, provides a safe and supportive environment, working alongside professional services to help and support the young person in gaining skills for independent adult life."* (DCLG, 2008).

Shelter in Scotland (2018) made a business case for the expansion of the Supported Lodgings model to be made more widely in Scotland for young people in crisis.

Hosting for adults with care and support needs

The Shared Lives Plus model was developed to enable adults with care and support needs to live with an approved Shared Lives carer. Through the scheme adults with a learning disability, mental ill health, physical health needs and dementia are paired with a family or individual and move into the family home (Shared Lives Plus, 2018). There are 8,700 Shared Lives carers in England, which is an increase of 14% over five years and 11,600 people now use Shared Lives which is an increase of 30% in five years (Shared Lives Plus, 2018).

Hosting for women

This research identified very few host services that are designed and delivered specifically for women. One recent development in host housing specific for women is the partnership between Shared Lives and Safelives who in 2017 implemented a 3-year pilot hosting scheme designed for women who have experienced domestic violence to provide additional accommodation options for women (Safelives.org.uk).

In addition, they are also in the early phases of developing a pilot hosting service for victim of modern-day slavery.

4.1.2 Models of delivery

This research illustrates variations in the design, set up and delivery of hosting schemes as others have documented (DCLG, 2008; NACCOM, 2017; Shelter, 2018). Some are more relevant to designing and delivering hosting for women than others and this is indicated throughout.

Differences were identified across the models in terms of the target demographic (including whether those supported have access to recourse to public funds or not), infrastructure and governance as well as the delivery processes. Host housing operates along a continuum of formal structured, commissioned and funded services, through to informal entirely voluntary schemes and everything in between.

One clear distinction can be made is between guests who have recourse to public funds and those that do not, which influences the funding streams, the support pathways and additional services that schemes work alongside.

As well as differences also noted in the length of stay, types of accommodation, the availability of additional support available, important variances were also identified with regards to the following aspects:

- Funding
- Matching
- The role of hosts
- Recruitment and vetting processes for hosts
- Training and support for hosts
- Assessing suitability of guests

Section 4.5 of this report builds on these findings to draw out the integral design and delivery elements to be incorporated in hosting schemes to ensure that hosting is more women centred.

4.1.3 Funding

Although there is a significant voluntary element within hosting models, resources are required in many cases for the overall coordination and delivery of the service, basic living costs for the guest and, in some cases, remuneration of the hosts. Funding streams depend predominantly on whether the guest has recourse

to public funds and/or whether they have care and support needs assessed by the statutory frameworks. Our research found the following examples of funding models:

- Voluntary schemes working with refugees, asylum seekers and migrants with NRPF often rely on charitable grant funding, funding from local religious groups such as parishes or a combination of the two.
- Hosting schemes for adults with care and support needs that do have recourse to public funds, assess guests to determine if they are eligible to draw on Health and Social Care funding streams as well as housing benefit to cover rent where applicable.
- Supported Lodgings hosting schemes for young people were reported to get a mixture of funding from Local Authorities and Supporting People and where young people are in receipt of benefits these can also be used as forms of income that support the scheme. (DCLG, 2008).
- Basic living costs for guests that do have recourse to public funds can be covered by benefits if the guest is entitled to those. Some projects that support those with NRPF can secure destitution funding as described by this hosting service: *"We give them £25 a week, which is very basic, but that means they can keep their mobile phone topped up and if their host is away for the weekend, they can buy food, or if they want to get their own personal items, or any food the they are less dependent… The £25 a week is of much bigger importance to our guests than I think we have realised…they have all said it makes such a difference."* (Host service).
- In some cases, hosts are remunerated either through a small nightly expenses fund offered by the hosting service or by being paid rent through housing benefit for guests who are eligible.

4.1.4 Matching

Matching of hosts and guests is a crucial element that can impact the effectiveness and outcomes of a hosting placement and requires a good understanding of both hosts and guests (DCLG, 2008). NACCOM provide practical guidance for network members on how to introduce guests and hosts (NACCOM, 2017). Hosting schemes in this research conducted matching either virtually or through face-to face meetings and in some cases trial periods were used.

Some schemes prefer to coordinate the matching process and arrange placements themselves to have a better sense of the relationship and if it works for both host ang guest; *"we wanted to keep a handle on relationships ourselves, so we meet the guests and the hosts, and we do the matching ourselves. Some of the other schemes don't."* (Host service).

The needs and circumstances of the guests as well as the capacity of the host and the personalities of each were reported to be really important:

> *"You've got to match the personalities really well, almost like you're placing a foster child. You wouldn't place a high needs foster child with someone who isn't capable of looking after them, and the same should be said even if it's adult women who need support."*
>
> Host service

"The match would involve location, it would involve interest, it would involve suitability in terms of whether the lady can only leave the abusive situation if she can bring her dog because perpetrators have previously hurt pets or it might be that you know there is specific support needs there as well so just making sure that you have got the right match is a big part." (Host service)

A considered approach to matching guests and hosts would help women establish positive relationships with the right host and would also allow them to be honest with the service if the match was not right for them. Ensuring hosts have an awareness of VAWG and the impacts on women would also help guests to feel welcomed and accommodated by someone with an understanding of some of the things that women may experience.

4.1.5 The role of hosts

The role of hosts ranges from solely providing a spare room at one end of the spectrum to offering emotional support, practical help with life skills, through to being welcomed into a supportive family environment at the other. The differences in the role of hosts were reported to be based on a combination of aspects such as the level of support needs of the guest, the preferences and capacity of the hosts, the availability of additional specialist support for guests as well as the formal structures and stipulations of the hosting scheme.

Examples include the host providing access to the space and little else: *"basically they come to the house, they've got a room, use of the kitchen and bathroom and everything else you would expect a lodger to use. They can cook for themselves. From time to time I'll have a meal and invite them"* (Host). Others provide additional life skills support:

> *"Inevitably everyone ends up supporting to some extent. That's typically generally just life skills. Here's a bus station, here's how to catch a bus, they need a bank account, navigating the complex benefits system, support going to a doctor's appointment. We don't expect our hosts to do all of that but if they have [the]capacity and are able to, some do that."*
>
> Host service

Some help guests to build connections in the area and become part of the local community: **"***Other people like finding courses for people to do, helping them to get set up for volunteering. I have seen a lot of support being offered in that way."* (Human rights service).

4.1.6 Recruitment and Vetting processes for hosts

Variations in the use of Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks for hosts were identified with some schemes using them on all those who live in the host property, plus checks on those who visit the property regularly, whereas others do DBS checks on one host in the household only: *"interestingly only the key person in that household has to be DBS checked. They don't all have to."* (Host). One host service described how some schemes do not use DBS checks at all: *"We do DBS checks on our hosts and some schemes don't…that kind of differentiates us from some of the other schemes."* (Host service).

Some schemes include comprehensive home visits and assessments and ask for references for hosts to determine the suitability of hosts and the environment: *"the process for applying to be a host is that someone sends in an electronic application form and we get two references, a character reference and then we would visit the hosts home, do an assessment really of what the household is like. Do they have stairs? Can they take men and women or either? have they any pets?"* (Host service).

When considering some of the circumstances and experiences that homeless women may face, the recruitment and vetting processes to ensure the safety and security of women and the appropriateness of the host and the environment is vital.

4.1.7 Training for hosts

The NACCOM hosting toolkit (2017) sets out suggestions about the types of training and information that is useful for hosts and includes dealing with expectations, maintaining boundaries, avoiding burnout, confidentiality, safeguarding, communication and support and staying safe. Depaul Nightstop also advocate

that helping hosts understand the drivers for homelessness can be helpful to give context about what young people may be going through (Depaul.org).

Hosting women can involve dealing with sensitive situations which require specific knowledge and understanding about how to respond and where to seek extra support for women when they need it. Insights from this research indicate that the levels of training and support for hosts vary according to the capacity and type of hosting service. Some schemes offer basic introductions and others provide more comprehensive training which not only requires funding and resource to deliver it, but also commitment from hosts to undertake the training.

One host described that she had received training on safeguarding, boundaries and confidentiality but felt that it didn't fully meet her needs as a host as the training was not adapted to be relevant for living with a guest in your home. Instead it was geared towards professional case worker roles: *"I was quite critical because I felt that the boundaries side of it didn't take into account that it's very different for hosts than it is for case workers…"* (Host).

Few hosting projects described that they offer specific awareness training for hosts about VAWG or how women may respond to those experiences and how it may impact upon them, but one host service did: *"a normal level of training so that will be around health and safety, around supporting people, person centred approaches… but then the additional training…is a day of domestic abuse awareness…it will explain a bit about coercive control, and all the other types of abuse."* (Host service).

4.1.8 Ongoing support for hosts

Given the challenging circumstances that hosts and guests might find themselves in, ongoing support for hosts to help them navigate their role and get assistance with queries and challenges is noted as an important aspect of hosting (DCLG, 2008; NACCOM, 2017). Some hosting projects in this research use informal processes for supporting hosts such as emails and calls between coordinators and hosts to check in about how things are going. However, this was not always the case:

> *"The projects need to have more contact with the hosts…there needed to be the option for a weekly check-up perhaps, whereas because I was doing a good job I was kind of left to my own devices.*
>
> Host

Other schemes had more formal support processes in place such as supervision opportunities that offer hosts the chance to reflect on their role and hosting experience:

> *"We also now support our hosts with supervision every six weeks. There's a psychotherapist who does that without us present, so every six weeks they get that opportunity to share and learn and grow, as well as ongoing support from us."*
> Host service

This is of particular relevance where hosts may be encountering women with experiences of violence and trauma. Professional supervision can help hosts debrief, and develop positive strategies for dealing with difficult things they may hear or experience during a placement. Supervision is also helpful to equip hosts with new skills, strategies for avoiding burnout, and to help them understand how to respond appropriately to women.

4.1.9 Assessing suitability of guests

As well as assessing the suitability of hosts, the hosting schemes that took part in this research also advocated the importance of gathering information about the guests to assess their suitability and eligibility for the scheme. This process helps to find out whether the guest does want to access hosting and also acts as an initial step in ensuring the safety of the hosts and guests through conducting a risk assessment of the situation based on the information available.

Assessing whether someone is eligible for the scheme and the risk factors involved is entirely dependent upon the quality of the information available both from the guest and also the partner agencies involved. The availability of information varies depending upon the situation and whether the individual is already known to other services. On taking a referral this hosting service receives information about risk related to domestic violence from partners agencies as well as conduct their own risk assessment: *"First of all there would be a DASH risk assessment with domestic abuse services and then the [hosting scheme] would do their own risk assessment as well and part of that would involve doing safety planning…"* [Host service]

Although the thresholds and eligibility criteria differ among hosting services, most reported that they are not set up to support guests that have high level needs or those that pose a high level of risk to themselves or others: *"so, we're really looking for a risk to themselves or a risk to the household. We will take a risk assessment out after we have done the matching meeting to say you know, are their risks that the guest might self-harm, or damage somebody else or be so traumatised that they are going to disrupt the household…* (Host service)

However, when working with people who have experienced homelessness it was reported as unlikely the guests will have no support needs or risk factors at all. As situations unfold incrementally and more information becomes apparent, it can be difficult for services to stick rigidly to their parameters about who they can and cannot offer placements to. Sometimes hosts had found it challenging where guests had higher support needs than they felt equipped to cope with, especially where additional specialist support from a partner agency may not be available.

This is of specific relevance to women who may have experienced or still be facing difficult situations. Ensuring that the process for determining circumstances is sensitive and allows for women to disclose information in a way and at a pace that is comfortable to them is important. This does, however, create challenges in hosting women where risks are unknown which are therefore difficult to manage. Overall, there are broad variations in hosting schemes from how they are commissioned and funded to who they are designed for and how they operate on a day to day basis. There is little standardisation across the different models. Developing hosting for women experiencing homelessness would require a model that is best suited to the needs of women and can learn from these findings. Coupled with the valuable advice from the NACCOM toolkit (2017), these insights offer helpful guidance for those in the early stages of model design and set up or for those looking to improve their hosting practice with women. These aspects are explored further throughout this report including section 4.5 which documents the elements that are considered integral to hosting projects for women.

4.2 Benefits of host housing for women

This research identified a number of potential benefits and opportunities that host housing specifically for women may provide when delivered to a high standard by experienced organisations that provide wrap around support.

4.2.1 An expansion of options for women

As documented above, the available options to women at risk of homelessness are scarce and those that are on offer often lack the safety, security and support that many women need. This research found that hosting, where delivered well, has the potential to expand the options available to women to access temporary respite accommodation in a supportive environment, whilst longer term suitable housing options are found:

"I think in principle I think it is a really good, I think it has potential as a model. I think, the more options you have for people, the more likelihood that more people will be successful in getting themselves into housing in the long term. So, I think it has real potential."

VAWG service

As well as increasing options, findings suggest that host housing could, in some instances, provide an option that is more appropriate and suitable to women than some statutory temporary accommodation such as large hostels: "*I think for women themselves it's a space that is safe [because] it is in a home. It is not in a kind of big building with loads of other people and its maybe for some women it is a much more calming experience*" (Strategic homelessness organisation).

Stakeholders also noted that the additional option of host housing could, in some circumstances, enable women to access housing in a location that is more beneficial and appropriate for them than other temporary options, or to help them leave an area that is not safe or appropriate. It is important however, in each locality to clarify the stipulation about local connection made by Local Authorities when considering hosting placements.

4.2.2 An opportunity to shape hosting services for women through partnership working

There are opportunities for host housing projects to develop meaningful partnerships with women's sector organisations to secure specific partnership funding, share expertise and deliver good quality hosting in a way that is relevant and appropriate for women. There is existing expertise and knowledge within the host housing sector regarding the structures and delivery processes that promote effective practice for host housing, and a wealth of existing expertise in the women's sector about delivering women centred services that respond appropriately to women's circumstances. It was therefore suggested that there is no need to 'reinvent the wheel' by developing host housing for women from scratch but instead, with additional funding for partnerships, there is scope to develop initiatives using existing expertise across the sectors. Stakeholders noted the potential to offer both the intensive, tailored support that the women's sector is known for, alongside practical, well-managed hosting support identified within experienced host housing services.

4.2.3 Relational support offered within a home environment

This research suggests that, although hosting is not a suitable option for all women, for some, the style and nature of the home and family environment can offer a type of accommodation support that is particularly beneficial. Hosting organisations, hosts and guests acknowledged that receiving informal, empathic support in a comfortable home environment can be extremely valuable. In line with other research in this area (Covington and Surrey, 1997: Herman, 1992; Homeless Link, 2019) it was stated that if a guest has an ability to form positive relationships with others this can help towards women's recovery.

In some instances, especially for young women, having a sense of being a part of a family was reported to have the potential to provide a nurturing environment which may be difficult to achieve in other contexts: *"Particularly for the young woman I supported, she needed to feel loved and cared for and I don't think you get that in any other kind of project probably. Not to say that workers who support women don't have a lot of love and empathy but particularly [for] young women, I think there was something about being in a loving home environment. You know we'd cook together; we'd chat about our day. It was a pseudo family and that was what that young woman needed."* (Host)

The guests who took part in this research also felt that when things went well, they benefited from living with a family as it enabled them to build positive, trusting relationships with people, in turn helping them to build their confidence:

"They were so nice. They had all the time to talk to me and to know more about me. I feel confident to talk to them because they give me the time."

Guest

Examples in the research also demonstrate that host housing can expose women to examples of positive, healthy, family relationships which they may not have previously experienced: *"I think that there is a lot to be gained by living in a family where there are healthy relationships and people trust each other and model that kind of good relationships and what safety looks like and what care and consideration looks like, because for a lot of women they won't have experienced that before"* (Hosting organisation).

"One host described what some guests have said when staying in her home which illustrates the benefits of accessing a positive hosting environment:

> *"I think it's the safety and security and I think particularly for women that's highly valued. Quite a few people who've stayed have said to me 'I can sleep here. I've not been able to sleep where I've been before'. I'm not doing much about that, I'm just providing this place where they feel safer."*
>
> Host

4.2.4 Developing life skills, confidence and support networks in the community

This research suggests that informal, practical help offered by trained and knowledgeable hosts can be effective in supporting women to develop life skills, build their confidence and community connections. Regular contact with positive people living in the community provides a strong basis for helping guests develop support networks and links into local activities as well as basic life skills: "*They helped me with my English – teaching me how to construct English. And when it comes to maths, they helped me with how to use money and stuff. They helped me how to meet other people. They introduced me to some organisation that worked with children where I would do like peer mentoring*" (Guest)

These positive outcomes described by stakeholders and guests align with the outcomes from the Shared Lives Plus model which found that guests felt more involved in the community and built their support networks through staying with host households (see context section above).

Whilst host housing is not suitable for all women and should not replace existing housing options and professional specialist support provided by women's services, it is evident that in some instances, the support provided by the home environment with committed and empathic hosts can be complementary to women's recovery journeys.

4.3 Challenges of host housing for women

This research found that there are challenges and risks of host housing for women that would need to be carefully considered in any host housing project.

4.3.1 Risk of limiting options for those with NRPF

Host housing services have often developed to respond to people with NRPF who are not able to access housing provision through other means. Consequently, a stakeholder expressed concern that expanding host housing for people who do have access to statutory options may risk reducing the already stretched host

housing offer to those with NRPF: *"I think if you started a hosting scheme for women who are entitled to benefits and housing…then you're leaving a load of other women on the streets who have no access to that it would seem it wouldn't make sense to me"* (Network organisation)

4.3.2 Risks of alleviating statutory bodies of their responsibility

One of the key challenges identified with developing more voluntary hosting schemes instead of funding and commissioning statutory housing options is that it risks alleviating the responsibilities of the Government and Local Authorities by potentially letting the state 'off the hook' in the provision of adequate housing solutions for women: *"If you do a needs assessment and find out that a lot of hosting schemes exist then that takes away from the need to provide emergency accommodation or crisis accommodation from the Local Authority themselves."* (Community Safety Organisation). This was also a concern for women with NRPF as an increase in the availability of voluntary hosting schemes may not encourage the Government to take greater responsibility for destitute migrant women by improving the legislation to create a better safety net.

For women who are eligible to receive a a housing service from the Local Authority, concerns and queries were raised about whether accessing a voluntary hosting scheme might influence the council's response to women. This included whether women accessing hosting would be identified as homeless when approaching the council? Whether women could simultaneously be hosted and progress a homelessness application to get a place on the housing register? Whether hosting would affect their eligibility for priority need? And whether women could secure move on options through the council after hosting comes to an end? Although not all Local Authority housing teams operate in the same way, both represented in this research explained that from their perspective, temporary hosting would not necessarily negatively influence women's eligibility for a homelessness service from the council. One commented that, according to his interpretation, the Local Authority would not legally be allowed to relieve its duty to homeless women into a hosting service and this would offer women protection under the HRA (2017). It was suggested however that, due to the HRA (2017) being relatively new, the interpretation of the legislation in relation to hosting might need to be tested.

To ensure that women are not negatively impacted by accessing voluntary hosting schemes, hosting services and Local Authorities would need to communicate clearly about the eligibility requirements of each council, gain clarification on the approach for ensuring women can access their housing rights and develop strategies securing move on options that meet the needs of women in each area.

4.3.3 Ensuring women's experiences of homelessness are recognised and documented

Several stakeholders also noted how the increased use of voluntary hosting schemes operating in silos from other statutory services also risk women's experience of homelessness not being recognised in official figures. Women being missing from official homelessness figures is already considered an important challenge to overcome (Bretherton and Pleace, 2018; Homeless Link, 2019). This was another reason as to why one Local Authority advocated communication between hosting services and the council housing team, so that homeless women are counted in official statistics by registering as homeless whilst accessing a temporary hosting placement: *"I do think it is important for people with a housing need to have the opportunity to have that housing need seen by the Government otherwise the Government is never going to have an understanding of who it's homeless cohort is nationally...You wouldn't want it to be brushed under the carpet...you let councils off if you do that, you let Government off if you do that."* (Local Authority)

4.3.4 Delays in turnover in current hosting schemes

Whilst many of the organisations represented in this research consider there to be potential in offering host housing specific for women, some of the existing host housing projects reported that they are facing practical challenges in their ability to deliver host housing as effectively as in the past such as fewer hosts coming forward: *"Definitely host recruitment is a challenge, because it is not in people's minds as much as it was. We are being a lot more proactive in trying to recruit hosts."* (hosting organisation). As so many hosting schemes support refugees and asylum seekers, it is thought that this reduction in hosts is in part related to the reduced awareness of issues facing these groups in the public consciousness.

Coupled with this, Home Office decisions regarding asylum claims have reported to have slowed down which mean hosting stays for those with NRPF have been extending. This is noted in NACCOM's latest impact report (2019) and by this hosting service: *"When we started...we expected an average stay of 6-12 months, and average around 6. It is not the case now; our average is over a year. Which brings its own challenges. Sometimes that means that our waiting list doesn't move as quickly as we would like it to."* (Hosting organisation).

4.3.5 Move on options and support

Although host housing has the potential to provide an interim housing option for some women, it is a temporary solution and a challenge still exists with finding move on options, particularly for those with NRPF. A host described how challenging this can be if the person they are hosting does not have a clear move on pathway after hosting:

> *"She'd come to the end of her year with me and she then didn't have anywhere to move to and it was really hard…that's one of the most difficult things, a host knowing that it's going to end. You need some sort of exit strategy…"*
>
> Host

A particular challenge was noted for asylum seekers who do not have access to good quality legal advice for their asylum claim as well as those who appear unlikely to gain asylum as there is little prospect of statutory options becoming available to them: *"You cannot really ask a host to continue to host someone that you know has no grounds for gaining status so we were in that situation and that is really painful for a host because obviously if you have been hosting someone for so long it becomes very difficult to ask them to go so that is one of the things."* (Refugee and migrant organisation).

The guests interviewed for the research also highlighted that that it can be difficult emotionally and practically to move on from hosting and this requires specific support and resources to smooth the process to help women transition into independent living: *"I could step out the safe place that I am and think I have to buy forks, spoons, cups – it's overwhelming at the moment. I'll need to buy a bed, a mattress. It's too much. That's still going on in my head…how am I going to continue with life when it's just me."* (Guest)

4.3.6 Safety of hosts and guests

Safety was a concern raised by several stakeholders. Risks to women identified in this project include unequal power dynamic between the host and guest which could affect feelings of safety as well as perpetrators of abuse being drawn to becoming hosts as an opportunity to abuse women: *"perpetrators will be drawn to enterprises which will enable them to continue to perpetrate abuse…so I think it would attract people who might want to use it as an opportunity to continue to perpetrate abuse"* (VAWG organisation).

The aspect of safety was also raised by guests themselves, and a woman who had stayed with several hosts commented that some were better than others in recognising that it is important to try to put guests at ease by showing warmth and kindness which can help to overcome their fears or anxiety: *"Some of them [hosts] were not good. I remember when they sent me to one place…when you are in this kind of situation and you don't have a place to stay you need someone to talk to, but they just said 'I'll show you your room, I'll be inside my room', and I just stayed awake all night. I get scared – they are a stranger and you don't know that person."* (Guest)

Risks were also identified to both hosts and guests simultaneously in instances where perpetrators of violence and abuse were in the locality: *"I definitely felt fearful that what happens if this man finds out where I live. What happens if he's sitting outside in the car?"* (Host)

4.3.7 Maintaining boundaries

Maintaining appropriate boundaries between the host and guest can be difficult due to the fluid nature of the home living environment. This can be compounded where there is a lack of training for hosts in this area and insufficient additional support available for both hosts and guests. This can lead to scenarios where hosts take on too much responsibility, become over involved and provide more support to guests than they are qualified to instead of utilising the staff at the hosting services. This is a risk to the emotional capacity of a host, as well as a risk of guests being given harmful and inappropriate advice: *"The host was taking them to their MP to ask them to get an update from the Home Office about their case. I kind of wish that had been done in conjunction with us because it wasn't necessarily the first thing, we would have done to chase the Home Office response."* (Human rights organisation).

Examples were provided where hosts had identified that guests required more intense and specialised support which was not met by other services. In some cases, the role of the host blurred and hosts were providing emotional support and going beyond the role of a host to the point where they themselves had become overwhelmed and distressed by the situation: *The year that she was with me, I felt like I was fire-fighting. She was so vulnerable, I felt like I could feel the vultures circling… I felt like I almost wanted to be by her side every hour of the day and of course that wasn't possible. I went into crisis mode; I couldn't sleep and when I did sleep it was a light sleep"* (Host).

4.3.8 Risk of de-valuing professional services

Host housing schemes could risk de-valuing professional services by expanding projects that rely largely on volunteers rather than commissioning fully staffed projects: *"I think it would be at the cost of commissioning services that should be commissioned rather than relying on a local arrangement"* (VAWG service).

One stakeholder emphasised the type of specialist support required for women who have experienced violence, noting that it would not be sufficient or appropriate for this type of support to be provided through a largely voluntary service: *"I think what we find in the refuges is that women have a lot of emotional needs and it's the emotional support that makes the refuge different from a bed and breakfast or another type of accommodation – it's the dedicated staff, and I suppose it's delivering services that are trauma informed."* (VAWG service)

This finding highlights the importance of ensuring that host housing is not viewed as a replacement model to the support provided by specialist women's services:

> *"Yeah it's basically not ideal… it shouldn't be seen as a replacement to other specialist accommodation, you know, support for homeless women."*
> Community Safety Organisation

4.4 Who might hosting be suitable for and in what circumstances?

The findings regarding who hosting may be suitable for and in what circumstances vary considerably according to the context of each stakeholder and the scope of their work. Having considered both the strengths and challenges of host housing, overall, 21 out of the 23 of the participants from across the research sample were supportive of host housing as an option for women in certain circumstances. One voluntary community safety organisation was unsure, and one VAWG organisation stated they did not think it is a suitable option for women due to the potential risks (highlighted above). It must be noted, however, that although the majority supported it, some participants had mixed feelings about hosting, reporting that it is not an ideal option, but a reality within the context of the current challenges women face in accessing appropriate housing. In addition, many stated that hosting should not be viewed as a replacement for other existing options, including statutory housing and specialist services.

Those that expressed support for the development of host housing for women noted that hosting is not suitable for all women in all circumstances and should be viewed as an additional option rather than as a replacement for other existing housing options: *"hosting is an option and it shouldn't be seen as an instead of for wider longer-term services that need to be in place so that funding needs to still be in place"* (housing and homelessness service). An additional point frequently mentioned by stakeholders, was that hosting for women has to be delivered well in order to be suitable: *"We would yeah certainly we would be supportive of it… It has to be done right, that is the thing…"* (VAWG service). Giving women choice about whether they access host housing was reported to be crucial because entering someone's home to live is very much down to individual preference.

Hosting was more often advocated as being more suitable for women with NRPF due to the difficulties and lack of options they face, but it was also recognised that there are circumstances when it could also be beneficial for some women who do have recourse to public funds. Hosting was reported to be less suitable for women at high risk of harm from perpetrators and also where women experience complex challenges such as drug and alcohol dependency or significant mental health problems. Women will undoubtedly experience a range of fluctuating circumstances at any one time and so decisions about whether hosting is suitable will need to consider women's situations in their entirety.

Other key themes regarding stakeholder perceptions about when hosting may be more or less appropriate are set out in this section.

4.4.1 Women with NRPF

Women with NRPF have very few housing options and consequently services frequently reported that they face significant challenges in supporting women with NRPF. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the majority of participants advocated that hosting can be a helpful option in these circumstances. However, even though hosting provides a vital offer for many women with NRPF, there are still challenges, particularly where there are no further channels to pursue in terms of immigration with the Home Office or other statutory frameworks. As highlighted above, the length of time that women with NRPF may need to be hosted for can also be much longer and there are extra pressures on the guest and host when all options have been exhausted and there is no move on options available.

One respondent who stated that they did not think hosting for women was appropriate in any circumstances, commented that hosting is not suitable for women with NRPF because of the risks involved: *"I wouldn't want to advocate for a more-risky option for women who have less rights either. I don't want to be at risk of saying it's okay for them, that type of arrangement."* (VAWG service).

These points raise important implications for the way in which a hosting scheme for women with NRPF would need to be designed and delivered and how it would differ from a service for women who do have recourse. These aspects are explored further in section 4.5 of this report.

4.4.2 Differing levels of support needs

The majority of stakeholders agreed that hosting is probably more suitable for women who require lower levels of support and have a lower level of identified risks to themselves and others:

> *"I think it is not suited to women that... suffer from complex trauma and multiple disadvantage because...I think it would be unfair on the hosts and unfair on the woman to put them in that situation where they probably need quite intensive support in a specialist environment."*
> (VAWG service)

Most also agreed that a hosting environment is not suitable for women with severe and enduring mental health problems and those with problematic drug and alcohol use: *"I guess the other issues would be anything that's illegal, so if someone is using substances and they're still very involved in that culture and they're still using them, anything like that that would post a risk to the host due to other sort of associates or people known to the woman."* (Women's Centre)

One stakeholder, however, described that it would be valuable if a way could be found to offer hosting to women who do experience a variety of circumstances, even those with more complex situations: *"I am aware there are challenges, but in order for our women to be able to access it, there would need to be some way for the more complex women to access it."* (VAWG service). For this stakeholder, hosting was reported to have the potential to offer some women a chance to begin to engage with the range of support on offer and provide a first step to enable them to begin to manage their choices and circumstances.

4.4.3 Women experiencing domestic violence

Another area of agreement among respondents in this research is that hosting is not suitable where a high risk of harm to either the woman or the host from a perpetrator of domestic violence: *"it would be really difficult for some situations - for instance women fleeing domestic violence - who aren't ready to actually separate and they return and we can work with that but for a person to take that woman into their house would be so risky for them and really dangerous."* (Women's Centre).

Another commented: *"I wouldn't use hosting […] to host women fleeing domestic violence […] I think that is risky."* (Immigration advice and information service)

Some hosting projects do support women who have experienced domestic violence in some circumstances. One described how they use the DASH risk assessment and do not host women that are identified as high risk, instead, women will be supported by local domestic violence services. Another illustrated that there is scope for hosting to be an appropriate interim option where survivors of domestic violence have accessed a refuge, engaged with and benefited from the support on offer and are at a point where they can move on:

"it's potentially a good option for those women…as somewhere to reside whilst continued housing arrangements are being made…they have been through high levels of support in the refuge and they are not requiring such high levels of practical and emotional support as they were when they first fled the situation. (Local Authority)

4.4.4 Young women

The value of hosting schemes as an option for young women was advocated by several stakeholders, particularly due to the difficulties and lack of appropriate options in the current system: "*Also for younger women, it's those really vulnerable clients that without that sort of support, a lot of the young women that haven't got anywhere else to go and they just need something different, I think.*" (Women's centre).

As was noted in the context section, benefit caps for housing allowance have put young women in particularly difficult circumstances. A respondent from a Local Authority in London described how the high rents and benefit changes for young people has made things particularly difficult to find suitable accommodation: "*The whole difficulty is people's ability to be able to find accommodation because rents are high [and] there is a freeze on local housing allowance and it becomes more acute in the under 25 bracket because they can't be exempted from the shared room rate of local housing allowance under 25.*" (Local Authority)

Due to a lack of women only housing options, young women that do have recourse to public funds are often then placed in unsuitable mixed-sex temporary accommodation and at further risk of harm and exploitation. In these circumstances, this stakeholder suggested that hosting could be beneficial as an additional option that some young women if they wanted to choose that: "*if it is a female only hosting service then it does take away some of those risks and concerns… so I do think there is some scope for it.*" (Local Authority)

4.4.5 Considering the timeframe required for hosting

Existing host schemes vary in the length of time that guests are able to stay. This usually depends on the scope of the service, the changing circumstances of the individual guest as well as the availability of hosts. Timeframes are also influenced according to whether women have NRPF as well as the availability of housing and move on options. For these reasons a specific timeframe for hosting is difficult to determine.

A lack of consensus was identified about whether hosting is more appropriate on either a short emergency or longer-term basis, but a common acknowledgment was that an approach which flexes between longer and shorter term to accommodate women's changing needs and circumstances is more appropriate: "*there is something about having access to a flexible accommodation model that meets an immediate need and for some of our women they would be very up for it*" (VAWG service).

The suggestion was that hosting is more suitable for women at a certain point in their journey on a temporary basis whilst they are being supported to find suitable move on options to regain their independence: "*I mean I think it has to be seen in terms of a point along a journey. It can't be seen as a long-term solution.*" (Homelessness service)

Those who advocated rapid access to short term hosting suggested it could:

- **Plug short-term gaps in current provision**: *"I can see a real value in us really helping some women to get into the NRM[1],… that is supposed to be an immediate safe house provision, but we have had women where it has taken 3 days to get them into the NRM and you are like come on…"* (VAWG service).
- **Help to capitalise on women's motivation to make a change:** *"When women want to do something they want to do it now… and obviously I know it is not immediately that quick, but we can pick someone up at 9 o'clock in the morning and know they will have somewhere to sleep that night, thus extending my emergency accommodation budget."* (VAWG service).

In the case of younger women and those with NRPF, an option for longer term hosting was described as beneficial because of the lack of or challenges with other options as well as the time taken to resolve immigration issues: "*Normally the situations in which I would refer someone to hosting are not normally emergency – when they're only going to need one night. It's normally because someone has been poorly represented in the past and has had a private lawyer who wasn't really doing anything with their case and are at risk potentially of removal and detention and they're probably gonna need quite a long time in hosting…*" (Human rights service).

Hosting would not be suitable for women at high risk of harm from perpetrators and those experiencing more complex and higher risk situations. Therefore, the contextual circumstances of each woman need to be assessed carefully on a case by case basis to decide whether hosting would be a suitable temporary option. In addition, it is crucial that realistic timeframes are discussed with potential hosts so that they are fully aware of the possibilities before committing to become a host, particularly where a lengthy stay seems a possibility.

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[1] National Referral Mechanism.

4.5 Integral factors to be included in host housing projects for women

In the context of the challenges women are currently facing in accessing appropriate accommodation, the majority of respondents support women specific hosting provided it is delivered well. This section documents the most important aspects to be included in the design and delivery of women specific hosting projects. It is based on the valuable insights from participants in this research as well as existing learning (DCLG, 2008; NACCOM, 2017) about governance and structure, operation, roles and delivery processes to ensure that a host scheme for women is appropriate and meets their needs.

The design and operation of hosting schemes will vary but the most significant difference in any model is whether it is designed for women with NRPF or not. This will have important implications for:

- the type of funding available
- the pathway of support for the guests and strategic partnerships
- inward and onward referrals and partner support services
- available move on options

The practical application of hosting including the style of engagement, support for hosts and guests during the stay, how hosts are recruited, and the processes used to ensure the safety of hosts and guests would be similar across projects, no matter whether guests have recourse or not.

Where applicable, the following sections include considerations for supporting women both with and without recourse to public funds.

4.5.1 Developing a women-centred model through a partnership approach

Hosting schemes for women would benefit greatly from being developed and delivered by or in partnership with a specialist women's service so that a women centred approach would be inherent throughout:

> *"The one thing I have been really banging my drum the whole way through is to say we need to work in partnership with experts, because you just see it all the time don't you? You see somebody is handed over and there isn't that kind of expert voice throughout their planning or delivery…There will always be things that we don't see as non-experts…"* - Host service

A specifically funded partnership approach between a women's specialist service and an experienced and reputable hosting scheme that draws on the strengths and learning from each sector was advocated to be most beneficial. This approach was taken in one of the models included in this research and the design and implementation of such a partnership model had also been attempted by others: *"Well the model we were looking at was where [hosting service] would be an experienced hosts finder and [women's service] would work in partnership to recruit some hosts together and do some kind of information and training sessions and then we'd have like… a support worker who would be the link person for the host…"* (VAWG service)

Each service within the scheme would have a defined role:

- The hosting service, through the role of a coordinator, would be required to focus on all hosting related activities to maintain the smooth delivery of the service, including advertising and recruitment of hosts, vetting, matching and coordination of support for hosts as well as working with the support worker to deliver the training package to hosts.

- A specialist support worker for women from a woman's service would provide assessment of suitability for women, case coordination of women's additional support, one-to-one support for experience of violence as well as linking women in with additional support and activities available in the women's service. The support worker would also make onward referrals to partner agencies as well as legal and immigration advice. Small caseloads are advised so that the support worker can flex the level of input as women's circumstances change and be on hand if a crisis or change of circumstances emerges.

4.5.2 A commitment to high quality

Having trust in reputable and experienced providers is essential to give credibility to any model and the assurance that there would be a commitment to delivering a high-quality service. Recognising the need for a strong infrastructure and expert support for women, one host commented:

> *"If you're gonna do a supported host housing project for vulnerable women, I think it needs a lot more support than what we've seen in sort of traditional lodgings projects to date. It has to be more than just the volunteer in their home. Additional support and people who are experts is crucial. There needs to be a well thought out infrastructure in place.*
>
> Host

Another stated the importance of having a comprehensive structure with flexibility built in to truly be able to meet the needs of women with fluctuating circumstances: *"So I think there is something about an ability to be*

flexible to the presenting need, I think that, you know when an organisation can flex, you feel that there is a competence there somehow, does that make sense? Whereas if they are really rigid like 'no this is how it has to be.' You are kind of like, 'is that for you or for the women?'' (VAWG service).

These aspects would influence whether referral services feel confident to refer women into to hosting and to know that the women would receive a high-quality service.

4.5.3 Funding for hosts and guests

To develop good quality hosting in the manner described throughout this section requires adequate and sustainable funding. A key factor to consider with funding and costs is whether the project is designed for women with NRPF or not. The following suggestions were provided about planning for the costs associated with the delivery of the service:

- Establish clarity on who the hosting scheme is designed to support and whether women with/without (or a combination) recourse to public funds can access it. This will influence the funding streams for the service depending upon the immigration status, demographic and/or support needs of each woman.
- Women who are eligible may be able to claim benefits which can go towards meeting the costs, whereas for women who cannot claim benefits, the scheme will depend on the voluntary nature of the scheme and any available grant funding.
- Independent funding from Trusts and Foundations allows projects to have greater freedom within the design and delivery of the service and independent funding will help to ensure that hosting schemes do not become part of the homelessness pathway to be relied upon by Local Authorities.
- Having a destitution fund was reported as valuable for guests with NRPF. A value of between £10 to £40 a week is advocated to cover basic necessities and for guests to retain independence.
- Potentially develop a nightly based expenses budget for hosts so that they can be reimbursed for costs they might incur.
- Guests may also benefit from some funding which is designated to help them get the basics together when they have somewhere appropriate to move on to. This will help guests feel more independent and confident about the next step.

4.5.4 Develop effective pathways and strategic partnerships

The way in which hosting services are situated within local support pathways is an important consideration. This will differ according to whether women accessing hosting are eligible for statutory support. As eligibility criteria for housing and council processes differ in each Local Authority, it would be beneficial for hosting schemes to communicate with the local statutory services in the set up phase. It is important to try to

implement agreements and protocols with the Local Authority to ensure that women who access temporary hosting placements are also supported to access statutory housing services and appropriate move on options as applicable.

Any agreement should focus on ensuring that hosting does not become part of the homelessness pathway to be relied upon by the councils, nor does it hinder women from progressing a homelessness application or influence their access to statutory housing rights and that they are supported with suitable move on options by the council.

4.5.5 Inward and onward referrals

To ensure referrals to a hosting project for women are relevant and good quality, it is suggested that projects partner with a small number of trusted referrers that work closely with women such as specialist women's services, specialist immigration advocacy services and women's homelessness projects.

As well as needing somewhere temporary to stay, women will also require support with additional issues they face, some of which will undoubtedly impact on the timeframe within which women can move on from hosting. Depending upon women's eligibility for public funds will influence their pathway through services and impact on the types of specialist support that they require. Hosting services will need to establish clarity on what women need, what they are eligible to access and what is available locally so that they can make appropriate onward referrals. For example, women with NRPF often require specialist immigration legal advice and many will be required to engage with the Home Office. They may also need to engage with other voluntary sector advice, information and advocacy services for migrants and other voluntary services that provide befriending and practical help. All women may require specialist professional support for any past experiences of VAWG if these are disclosed, including help to report these experiences to the CJS.

4.5.6 Move on support

Move on options will vary considerably depending upon women's immigration status, their eligibility for public funds, whether any agreement is in place with the Local Authority as well as the availability of local housing and services. As shown above, women with NRPF will have fewer options. Consequently, planning for move on options needs to be addressed strategically and practically by hosting organisations:

"When you are planning for any scheme like this it's as important to plan for the end of it as the beginning and during of it…when it is time for them to leave the host or whatever the service is, then there's a massive risk that they could just be back to square one so that is the sort of thing that I always think needs to be looked at quite carefully." - Local Authority

To address the challenges identified with move on options, timely planning is needed to ensure that move on is as smooth as possible. Projects would benefit from working alongside local housing providers and communicating clearly with the Local Authority about what options are available for all women. In addition, where it has been identified that women with NRPF have exhausted their options with the support from legal advisors and are not able to regularise their immigration status, this will require particularly sensitive handling from the host service coordinator. Hosts should not be left to have these difficult conversations with guests alone if a woman needs to be asked to leave hosting. It is important to provide practical and emotional support to both guests and hosts to help them plan for and manage this important stage.

4.5.7 Operation of hosting

As well as suggestions about the design and strategic development of a hosting service for women, this research identified specific aspects of the delivery that stakeholders feel are important to have included when supporting all women in hosting schemes.

The assurance of women's safety is paramount and was described to be best achieved through a thorough approach to recruiting, training and supporting hosts as well as comprehensively assessing the suitability of hosting for women on a case by case basis and providing high quality wrap around support. Considering the good practice suggestions from existing information and research (DCLG, 2008; NACCOM, 2017) as well as suggestions from this research, the aspects thought to enhance a hosting model for women include:

Recruitment and vetting of hosts

Given the potential vulnerability of women guests, thorough and rigorous recruitment and vetting of hosts is essential to help ensure women's safety and prevent potential or further exploitation or abuse. Hosting services should:

- Conduct comprehensive DBS checks and vetting processes for hosts and anyone else living at the property as well as regular visitors that includes home visits from qualified professionals in the health and social care sector, as well as obtain character references for hosts.
- Implement a thorough recruitment process to determine committed and capable hosts by assessing motivations for hosting, professional skills and experience and knowledge about women's experiences, as well as their personal attributes such as empathy, understanding, compassion, emotional intelligence.
- Clarify the commitment of hosts to undertake a core training programme and ongoing development through professional supervision and skills sharing sessions.
  Stipulate the expectations and realities of hosting clearly to potential hosts so that they are aware of the circumstance's guests may have faced, the level of support needs from additional services, and

how long they might need to be hosted for. This is particularly important and can vary greatly according to whether women have recourse to public funds.

Training and support for hosts

- Implement a thorough core training programme for all hosts to include awareness training on all aspects of VAWG and the impacts of trauma, women's experiences and responses to abuse, and professional support options available for women.
- Provide training on listening skills, boundaries to the role, the importance of unconditional positive regard and how to respond to disclosures of harm or abuse.
- Include training to help hosts understand that they are not responsible for supporting women and that there is a designated support worker available within the scheme.
- Increase knowledge amongst hosts about who they can reach out to ask for help and how and when to draw on the support available from the hosting service.
- Implement regular weekly practical check-ins with hosts with the coordinator/support worker as well as more formal fortnightly professional supervision, reflection and debrief sessions with a trained counsellor.

Assessing suitability of hosting for women

Hosting projects will need to decide on parameters and thresholds to the service and assess cases on an individual basis. To determine the appropriateness of host housing for women, stakeholders advocated a comprehensive, flexible, woman centred approach which includes mechanisms to adequately identify, manage and review the fluctuation of risks and ongoing circumstances.

The factors identified as important to consider in the decision-making process include:

- Whether women have recourse to public funds
- Women's preferences
- Each woman's circumstances and risk factors to the woman and the host (consideration of all forms of VAWG)
- Women's eligibility for existing housing options
- The availability of additional specialist support in the area (VAWG, immigration, mental and physical health)
- The length of stay required and what hosts can offer including a place to stay and any additional practical help.
- The ability and capacity of host services and hosts, and partner agencies to meet women's needs.

Assessment of women's circumstances is not a single exercise. Women need time to build trust slowly with a service by creating an environment where they feel comfortable to offer more information about their circumstances at their own pace. Time to review situations must be built into this process both in the beginning and as the placement moves on so that additional support can flex accordingly. Support workers from the women's service and the hosting coordinator must work in partnership with additional services involved in the woman's circumstances to build a realistic picture of the situation that can regularly be reviewed. This will help to ensure that hosting remains an appropriate option for each woman or if alternative options are required.

Matching hosts and guests

- Offer women only hosting options to all women guests.
- Implement a thorough matching process considering the experiences and support needs of women, their preferences of location, lifestyles, existing and potential support networks, personalities of hosts and guests and the skills, capacity and availability of hosts.
- Hold matching meetings in a neutral space to allow host and guest to ask each other questions. Provide space and time for women to express to staff members in safe way how they think the match is going and if they have any concerns or requests.
- Clarify the procedure of the hosting placement for both hosts and guests including how long the placement will be for, what support is available for everyone involved, and be clear about the aims and expectations of the placement.

4.5.8 Developing and embedding an approach to learning

- As existing research into hosting is limited, particularly with regards to the evidence about hosting for women, some stakeholders acknowledged the need for a well thought out and reflective approach to learning to be imbedded within any models that are developed.
- Building in an approach to evaluation at the beginning of any project demonstrates the desire to truly learn about and build on the achievements and challenges of a project.

> *"Just knowing there is good monitoring, there is good thinking through, that case studies are being learned from. And a transparency about what works and what doesn't work."*
> VAWG service

- In addition, developing a measurement framework in the initial stages will help to define the desired outcomes of the project and align these with the activity to be provided by the service to achieve

those aims. Collecting evidence using a well thought out framework and reviewing the connections between activity and outcomes can help to identify the mechanisms of change that lead to achievements and positive outcomes for the guests, hosts and the service overall.

5. Conclusion

This research found, that in the current context where women are facing significant challenges in accessing appropriate housing solutions, host housing can be an appropriate option for some women at certain points in their journey on the pathway to independent accommodation. Although some expressed mixed feelings about hosting and stated that it is not an ideal or simple solution for women, the overwhelming majority of participants involved in this research advocate support for women specific hosting in some circumstances, provided it is delivered to a high standard, prioritises safety and meets women's needs. Developing a high-quality model requires adequate resource from independent sustainable funding that would allow specialist women's services and experienced hosting projects to develop effective partnerships.

Benefits and challenges of hosting were identified for all women and hosting was deemed not suitable for women at high risk of harm from perpetrators and those with complex drug and alcohol problems and significant mental health problems. Hosting was reported as potentially more suitable for women with NRPF due to the difficulties they face, as well as young women with lower level support needs who would benefit from a temporary safe space with practical support to help them towards independent living.

We hope that these findings are valuable for existing hosting services that wish to enhance the quality of hosting services for women as well as for those who wish to develop a future women specific hosting scheme. We believe that host housing should be an additional choice among a range of options that are tailored to women's needs and not – as is currently the case – increasingly used to replace of a lack of suitable housing options for women. Any further development of women specific hosting must be alongside continued campaigning and lobbying for specialist services and appropriate statutory, sustainable housing solutions for women.

5.1 The expansion of host housing

This research has shown that host housing projects, which have primarily been used to accommodate people with NRPF and young people, are widening in scope with new schemes being developed recently for women

experiencing domestic violence and modern-day slavery. The development of host housing is, in part, due to the positive outcomes that have been acknowledged and documented about hosting, but is also contextualised by reductions in appropriate options available to women. Undoubtedly, the cuts to welfare state and housing benefits, reduced council budgets, cuts to specialist services and stricter immigration laws are major contributors to the expansion of and increased demand for hosting services for women. As women are accessing hosting and the demand is growing, it is important to assess the appropriateness of projects and strengthen the offer to ensure they are able to meet women's needs.

5.2 Benefits and challenges of hosting

When delivered well, hosting has the potential to offer women temporary housing and the chance to build positive relationships with others, and develop practical life skills in an informal, home environment. Hosting can act as a helpful step on the way to independent living and offer women some stability from which to make positive choices about their circumstances. For many, including those with NRPF, hosting prevents women from destitution and street homelessness.

The findings also illustrate a number of challenges of host housing for women. These include that the further expansion of voluntary schemes risk alleviating Local Authorities of their responsibility to provide appropriate statutory housing options for all women. Other potential safety risks were identified for both hosts and guests from perpetrators as well as difficulties in managing boundaries and roles withing the home which require comprehensive training and support for hosts. There is also a challenge that the expansion of hosting for all women might shrink a vital and often only remaining resource for those without recourse to public funds.

5.3 Developing a model

The structure and operation of host housing schemes for women will vary depending on which demographic group they are designed to support. The most significant decision to make when developing a model is to define whether the project is designed for women with NRPF or not. This will have important implications for:

- the type of funding available
- the pathway of support for the guests and strategic partnerships
- inward and onward referrals and partner support services
- available move on options

For example, a scheme for women with NRPF would need to factor in an assessment to establish women's circumstances, immigration status what support they are eligible for and assistance to engage with immigration legal advisors, and other relevant agencies such as the Home Office, or the NRM. Hosting projects would also need to recruit hosts that can accommodate longer stays which is more likely for this group and put in place a destitution fund for guests.

In contrast, a scheme working with women with recourse to public funds may be more likely to find move on options and shorter hosting stays may be more appropriate. Projects would need to support women in determining if they are eligible to draw statutory funding from housing, welfare and social care funds. In addition, strategic communication and agreed protocols would need to be developed with the relevant Local Authority to ensure women who do access temporary hosting can receive a statutory housing service where applicable and appropriate move on options.

5.4 Integral elements required across host housing models for women

Despite the distinctions acknowledged above in the structure and strategic design of hosting projects when supporting different groups of women, there are a number of common elements that enhance the quality of hosting for women which can be applied across projects.

This research highlights the importance of securing adequate resources to develop effective host housing projects that draws on the specific experience and expertise from both the women's sector and hosting sector. With specific sustainable funding for a partnership approach between respected and experienced organisations, host housing models are more able to incorporate the elements of good practice required to support women effectively.

This includes:

- embedding a woman-centred approach which is adaptive to women's unique circumstances.
- ensuring host housing projects understand how VAWG and trauma impact on women, through comprehensive awareness training and high-quality additional support for both hosts and guests.
- ensuring that the assessments of women's circumstances, the suitability of hosting for women, the capacity and skills required from each host, the type of hosting placement and the additional wrap around support most suitable for women, is informed by women's sector expertise.

6. Recommendations

This research has identified recommendations for a range of audiences. We have made recommendations for Central and Local Government to address the drivers for the rise in the use of host housing schemes with urgency. We have also made recommendations for host housing schemes, women's services, and researchers, to ensure that host housing for women is of the highest quality, appropriate for women's needs and capable of supporting them towards independent living.

6.1 Recommendations for Central Government

Central Government should address the drivers for all women's homelessness. There are a number of ways that this can be achieved. Firstly, through building more social and affordable housing, and creating a benefits system that acts as an appropriate safety net for all women. Secondly, by funding specific and specialised women only services for women experiencing violence and other social injustices that increase their risk of homelessness. Thirdly, by ending the destitution of migrant women by creating a better safety net for those with NRPF.

6.2 Recommendations for Local Government

Local Authorities should address the drivers of women's homelessness in the first place, as well as:

- Increasing understanding among Local Authority housing teams about the drivers for women's homelessness to ensure that women can access their rights and entitlements under appropriate statutory frameworks and do not fall through the gaps.
- Ending the use of mixed-sex temporary accommodation for women and instead fund specialist women's services who are best placed to meet the needs of women who are homeless and who have experienced violence or other social injustice.
- Ending gate-keeping practices which prevent women from accessing their housing rights and entitlements.
- Addressing the delays in decision making by the introduction of the HRA on homeless women.

Local authorities should communicate with existing hosting services and work with them by:

- Acknowledging that women may access hosting as a temporary housing option and that this should not preclude those who are eligible from accessing statutory housing and move on options through the homelessness pathway.

- Working with the host housing provider when women have chosen a host placement, to ensure that the council can find appropriate and timely move on options for women after hosting placements end.
- Supporting women who are eligible for statutory support who are using a temporary hosting scheme to progress a homelessness application through the homelessness pathway and get a place on the housing register.

6.3 Recommendations for host housing services

- Work with specialist women's services to apply for specific partnership funding to enable true collaboration and the development of women-specific hosting services.
- Ensure funding is appropriate to design a high-quality project. Funding will need to cover the costs of developing a comprehensive structure, governance, coordination, processes, dedicated staff, training and expenses of the service.
- All hosting schemes should make use of available good practice information available through NACCOM membership to set up systems and structures and processes. These structures and processes should be further developed to ensure they meet the specific needs of women.
- Offer all women access to women only host housing options.
- When developing and delivering host housing services for women, work in partnership with women's services to ensure that host housing is appropriate to meet the needs of those women who choose to use it. In particular, they should:
  - o Ensure the roles of the hosting coordinator, women's support worker and host are clearly identified to ensure there is accountability for the structure and delivery of service.
  - o Assess suitability of hosting for women based on level of risk to women and hosts, the skills and capacity of hosts, housing options already available to women, women's preferences and the availability of additional wrap around specialist support.
  - o Work in partnership with specialist women's services to ensure appropriate good quality referrals are made and so women have access to specialist women centred support whilst they are accessing the host placement.
- Ensure that all women can get appropriate support to help them access all their rights and entitlements with regards to housing, immigration and welfare as well as specialist support for any additional support needs.
- As well as providing basic training for hosts about safeguarding, confidentiality, and boundaries - provide training for hosts about the drivers for women's homelessness and awareness courses about women's experiences of violence, abuse and trauma, and resulting support needs.

- Communicate with the statutory housing teams to identify their eligibility requirements and processes. Where possible develop an agreement whereby women can be supported to progress a homelessness application and gain access to appropriate move on options whilst they are in a temporary hosting scheme.
- All hosting schemes should adequately vet potential hosts and carry out DBC checks, home visits and thorough assessment to identify suitable hosts.
- Provide good quality regular check- in support for hosts as well as more formal and structured supervision and reflection opportunities with trained counsellors plus options where hosts can get together or communicate with another.

6.4 Recommendations for women's services

Not all women's services will seek to work with hosting services. Those that do should consider creating more formal partnerships with host services to enhance hosting for women by:

- Considering applying for specific funding to partner with a well-established and reputable hosting scheme to develop a women specific hosting project with wrap around support and appropriate governance, processes, training and defined roles for each service in the hosting scheme.
- Deciding on an appropriate cohort of women that could be supported through the hosting scheme, for example, whether to focus on those with/without recourse to public funds and the threshold and parameters to the service.
- Working with hosting schemes to establish suitability and eligibility of hosting placements for individual women based on a combination of the risks identified to women and hosts, the capacity and skills of the host, the housing options available for women, women's preferences and the availability of additional specialist wrap around support.
- With specific funding for a hosting partnership work, developing and delivering a package of awareness training for hosts specific to women's circumstances which addresses the drivers for women's homelessness, women's experience of trauma, violence and abuse and the impacts as well as confidentiality, boundaries, health and safety.

6.5 Recommendations for funders

- Charitable funders are advised to recognise the potential in supporting effective partnerships between women's specialist services and reputable hosting schemes in the testing and development of high-quality women specific host housing projects.

- Although hosting has a large voluntary element, costs are associated with hosting schemes. To develop an effective partnership between experienced services and create high quality provision, adequate funding and resources are required. Funds should cover the development of structures and processes, training, staff costs, a coordinator, wrap around specialist support for guests and hosts, including professional supervision and reflection. Funds should also include destitution funding for those with NRPF to offer some level of independence. Dedicated funds to also help women prepare for and achieve a positive move on which would increase their level of confidence and independence. In addition, funds for research and learning should be incorporated so that the achievements, outcomes and learning from any project can be identified and shared with the wider sector.

6.6 Recommendations for research and learning

- Conduct research with more women guests that have experienced hosting so that their views and experiences are better represented.
- Conduct further research with Local Authorities or Housing Law specialists to explore how hosting might be interpreted so that any barriers women face in accessing move on options or statutory housing services can be addressed.
- Conduct good quality independent evaluations of women specific hosting schemes that documents their delivery and outcomes and learning from their work with women.
- Ensure a measurement framework that is women focussed is included in any new model in order to track project learning and outcomes achieved and identify the mechanisms of change.
- Review relevant existing outcomes measurement frameworks to assess suitability for women specific hosting projects. Create a bespoke, women centred hosting focussed measurement framework and tools to define and test the desired outcomes that would hope to be achieved through the delivery of this type of project.

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8. Appendix

Methodology

The methods in this research were designed to gather rich qualitative data about the current availability of suitable housing options for women, explore the delivery of existing host housing services and to establish the suitability of developing specific host housing for women experiencing homelessness and draw out integral elements that would enhance hosting for women both across new and existing projects. The methods were developed in collaboration with Commonweal Housing and all activities were undertaken in line with the British Sociological Association statement of ethical protocols.

8.1 Initial scoping exercise

Initial desk research was undertaken to establish the types of organisations that currently provide host housing, who they work with and in what circumstances as well as some of the benefits and opportunities of host housing and the risks and challenges involved. This exercise allowed the researchers to establish the range and types of host housing schemes in existence and develop an initial sampling framework of organisations to contact for interview.

8.2 Document review

In addition to the initial scoping exercise, the researchers also conducted a brief review of publicly available research and information relating to women's homelessness, the availability of housing solutions for women and evidence and good practice relating to host housing schemes. Included in the document review were organisational web pages, policy documents, research reports and toolkits predominantly from the voluntary sector and where possible some evaluations of host housing schemes. This allowed the researchers to establish the key concepts in relation to the existing evidence on women's homelessness, understand the strengths and challenges of host housing schemes and use that information to design the initial stages of the data collection by ensuring that this scoping study builds on previous research and contribute meaningful insights to this area of work.

8.3 Qualitative data collection

The researchers aimed to include as many types of hosting scheme in the research as was possible to gather comprehensive information, insights and opinions about this topic from those that work with different groups of guests. A combination of purposive and snowball sampling technique was used to invite relevant

participants. Potential interviewees were contacted by the researchers using an email invite and each was provided with an information sheet and consent form. Each interviewee was asked to suggest other stakeholders or contacts that might have useful information and experience to input into this study. Semi-structured discussion guides were designed to gather rich qualitative data from different audiences, and these were used flexibly depending upon the role of the interviewee and the type and scope of the organisation. Before conducting the interviews with stakeholders and women, the researchers gained informed consent to participate in the research at the start of each telephone call by carefully explaining consent and confidentiality processes, as well as the option to withdraw from the research and providing an opportunity to ask questions before the interview began. Where possible signed consent forms were obtained.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed and during the focus group detailed notes were taken to ensure the accuracy of data gathered.

8.4 Data analysis

A framework was developed for analysing the qualitative data and all data were sifted and organised according to the framework to ensure all data were treated equally. The researchers undertook thematic analysis of all the qualitative data gathered to draw out relevant themes and develop findings.

8.5 Interim round table discussion

At the interim phase of the research in November, a round table discussion hosted by Commonweal Housing was held with three stakeholders that participated in the research, along with the two researchers and two representatives from Commonweal Housing. The purpose of the discussion was to present the early indications from the research so far which included the desk research, document review and interviews with the first ten stakeholders. The stakeholders were invited to discuss these early indications and provide feedback related to the development of a potential model as well as make suggestions as to any gaps identified in the research so far. This process helped to 'sense check' the findings with those services currently supporting women, provide an opportunity to reflect on the information and discuss next steps and a way forward.

8.6 Methodological limitations

There are some important limitations to consider in this scoping study:

- This research included a relatively small sample of participants and so the findings are not generalisable to the wider population and should not be taken out of context. It was challenging to contact women guests and so a small amount of data from women has been included to offer insights and their opinions cannot be generalised to a wider group of women guests.

- The individuals were contacted through a snow-balling sampling technique to increase sample size and expand connections to other organisations and stakeholders that are working on this topic. Consequently, those invited to participate are not representative of the whole population of stakeholders in this field. Again, for this reason the findings should not be taken out of context.

- A comprehensive evidence review was beyond the scope of this feasibility study. A brief review of publicly available websites and documents was conducted for this research to assess the benefits and challenges of hosting and the different delivery mechanisms. It is likely that few of the smaller or informal hosting projects will have sufficient resource for external evaluation and formal impact measurement, and not all evaluations are publicly available. The evidence from each type of model cannot be taken out of context because the outcomes will depend very much on the delivery, processes and fidelity to each model.

- A comprehensive testing of existing models was beyond the scope of this scoping study. However, the data gathered provides a valuable feedback and perceptions about current hosting services, experience of hosts and women experiencing homelessness and about the perception as to the suitability of developing a pilot host housing scheme for women. This research, therefore, documents helpful insights into the experiences of host housing schemes and indications and suggestions as to useful elements to include in a woman only, gender informed, host housing model or pilot.

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