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Homelessness in Oxford: Risks and opportunities across housing and homeless transitions

Report from Dissemination event held in November 2019
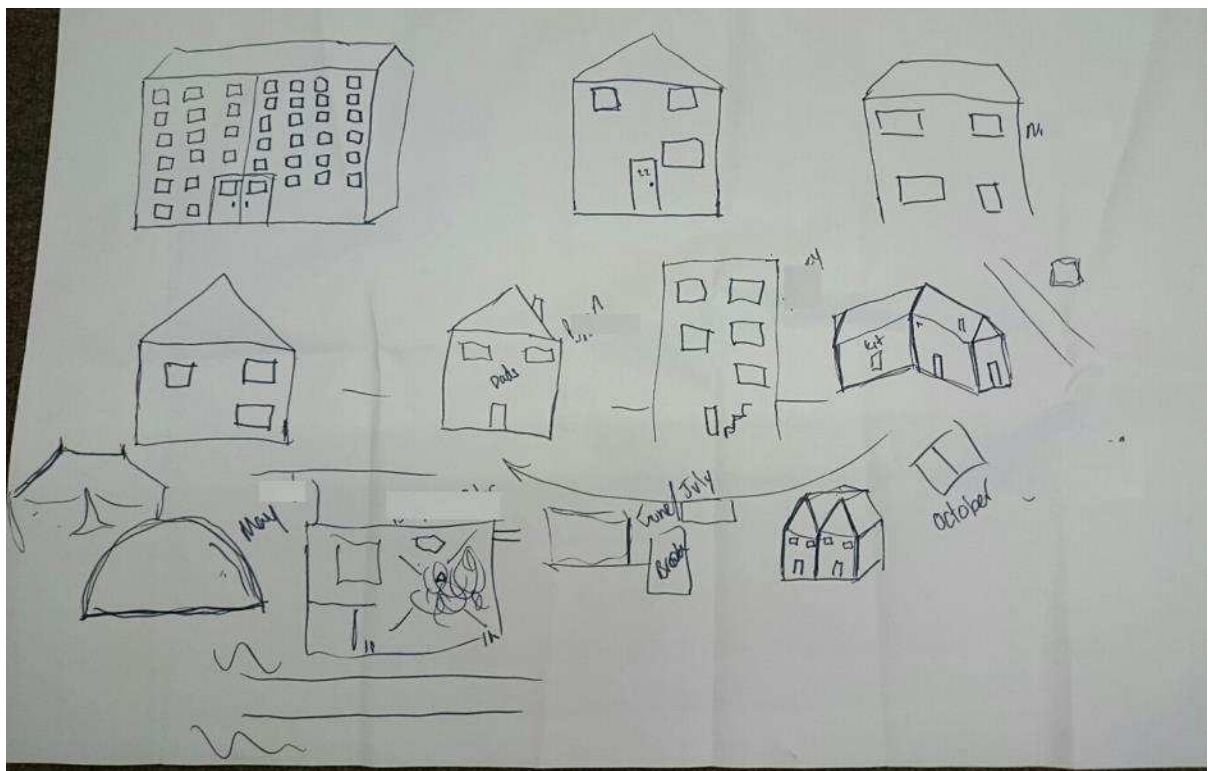
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June 2020

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The report authors

This report was written by Dr Elisabeth Garratt and Dr Jan Flaherty of Nuffield College, Oxford University. This project ran for one year from November 2018 to November 2019. Elisabeth is now a lecturer in Quantitative Methods at the University of Sheffield[1] and is continuing to write up and disseminate the project findings. Jan is now a Research Fellow at King's College London[2], working on a 3-year study examining policies and practices in the governance of parents who use opioids and their families.

Acknowledgements

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1. Executive summary

Project background and methods

- This project was motivated by the high levels of homelessness in both the UK overall and Oxford in particular. More specifically, although the term 'homeless' does not identify a single experience, the breadth of homeless experiences has not always been reflected in research on the topic. Knowledge about the different homeless experiences is thus highly imbalanced, and key evidence gaps remain. Furthermore, people's movements – or transitions – between the different homeless experiences remain under-explored. Our overarching objective was therefore to provide a holistic understanding of different homelessness experiences and pathways (including exits) in Oxford. We also sought to explore the roles played by statutory and non-statutory homelessness prevention and relief services in Oxford.

- This report is based on a dissemination event hosted by Dr Elisabeth Garratt and Dr Jan Flaherty and held at Nuffield College, Oxford, in November 2019. The primary focus of the event was to share the project's initial findings with relevant stakeholders. The event comprised an overview of the project's participants, followed by presentations exploring risks and opportunities at the point of housing and homeless transitions, and participants' views of local support services. It concluded with a participatory workshop that explored the role of services in either preventing or supporting homelessness in Oxford at different points in the lifecourse; the workshop results are available for the first time in this report.

- In this project we recruited 39 currently or formerly homeless people in the city of Oxford and interviewed them using life history interviewing and life mapping methods. We were particularly interested in people's transitions (and reasons for transition) between different housing and homeless experiences.

Project participants

- Overall, two-thirds of the sample were men. There was a relatively even spread of age, ranging from 27 to 62. Most participants were from the UK, although small numbers were from EU and non-EU countries.

- We found that having a single episode of homelessness was rare: just two participants had been homeless once, while 16 participants had ten or more homeless experiences.

- People's first experience of homelessness was generally either sofa surfing (20 in total) and rough sleeping (10 in total).

- Early independent living seemed to be a risk factor for later homelessness. A large proportion of participants left home to live independently when they were teenagers, and one-third of participants were first homeless as teenagers.

- Predictably, many participants faced particular issues that may have affected their ability to find and retain housing. Mental health problems (29 in total), substance use (24 in total) and experiences of prison or young offender institutions (11 in total) affected large proportions of our participants. Many participants faced multiple challenges.

- The majority of our participants had a clear connection with Oxfordshire: they had always lived in the area, grown up in the area then returned after time away, or had moved to Oxford in adulthood. Six participants came to Oxford when they were already homeless.

Key findings about participants' trajectories through homelessness

- We grouped risks and opportunities at the point of housing and homeless transitions into four themes that emerged from the interviews: structural, practical, emotional, and social networks. We also identified the cross-cutting themes of risky transitions and 'unseen' transitions.
- Structural risks and opportunities – which provided the context through which other factors are experienced – covered a lack of affordable housing, evictions, and institutions. Practical risks and opportunities covered relationship formation and breakdown, not meeting criteria for statutory homelessness, safety or conditions in current accommodation, and practicalities of the weather. Emotional risks and opportunities included freedom, travel, or escape, people no longer feeling able to cope, and being 'in the way'. Risks and opportunities in social networks covered having limited or no networks, family networks, and rough sleeping networks.
- Risky transitions were those that exposed participants to particular personal risks. Within this category, we identified short-term intimate relationships, 'stopgap friends' with housing, and strategic rough sleeping. 'Unseen' transitions were those that related specifically to experiences of hidden homelessness, and which statutory or voluntary services may be less likely to be aware of. Within this category, we identified the diverse housing situations experienced by participants, sofa surfing, and live-in work.

Key findings about participants' views on services

- Oxford enjoys a wide range of statutory and non-statutory organisations offering services for accommodation (including emergency accommodation), day services, education, advice, health, and spaces outside of homeless services. There was limited evidence that people came to Oxford for services. Some people developed support networks in the city, which may be linked to the availability of services.
- What people valued about services included having their own space, services that met their multiple needs, clear communication from staff, staff with excellent interpersonal skills, and the availability of purposeful yet enjoyable activity.
- What people wanted to change about services included issues with staff (especially communication issues), accommodation that did not suit people's needs, and a lack of choice, agency, and control. Some participants felt harassed by outreach, or suspicious that sleeping places would be taken down.

Workshop: Ideas for intervention throughout the lifecourse

- Finally, we held a workshop for attendees to explore ideas for practical and policy intervention aimed at tackling homelessness at different stages of the lifecourse. Workshop participants worked in groups to discuss the question: *What opportunities, across the lifetime, can be created that could either prevent homelessness or support people most effectively when they become homeless?*
- Opportunities relating to childhood covered the importance of personal relationships, finance and funding, and information and training provision.
- Interventions during the teen years and young adulthood covered joined-up working to support families, promoting teen mental health, the importance of youth groups and outreach for young people, and family support and early intervention.
- Interventions during middle adulthood included housing (availability, affordability, and security), developing people's personal skills and capabilities, and provision of support.
- Opportunities relating to older adulthood focussed on ensuring appropriate and tailored support, particularly social care and end of life care.

Policy suggestions

- Policy ideas related to participants' trajectories through homelessness that were described in our interviews were separated into those related to prevention and those related to intervention. Prevention-focussed activities included the availability of affordable private and social housing, legislation for improved security of tenure, proactive intervention at times of crisis, mediation support between teenagers and their parents or carers, and improved mental health support in the workplace. Intervention-focussed activities covered monitoring of and action on anti-social behaviour in shared accommodation, initiatives that promote access to work, more consistent housing support when leaving institutions, and actions that (re)build positive social networks.
- Policy ideas related to services include ensuring that people feel safe in hostels through appropriate provision, co-ordinated support that is not confined to the homeless pathway, opportunities for people to engage in meaningful activities, and promoting positive social networks.

What next?

- This report provides an initial summary of the project findings. In the coming months we will be writing up the full project findings in greater detail for publication in academic journals. The event prompted several positive conversations about how our research can inform local practice and to date we have been invited to contribute to several pieces of work, including with Oxford City Council. We are also seeking to engage with Oxford University and its constituent Colleges to consider the steps they can take to protect both their employees and the general population from homelessness in Oxford.

2. Background to the project

Homelessness is a major issue, both nationally and particularly in Oxford. In 2017, the charity Shelter estimated that 307,000 people in Britain – or 1 in 200 – sleep rough or live in temporary housing, hostels, or bed and breakfast rooms (Shelter, 2018). In 2018, the rough sleeping rate in Oxford (8.2 per 10,000 households) was far higher both than England overall and London (2.0 and 3.7 per 10,000 households, respectively) (MHCLG, 2019c). The government has committed to halving rough sleeping by 2022 and eliminating it entirely by 2027. These targets are supported by both the 2017 Homelessness Reduction Act, which strengthens and broadens statutory duties on English and Welsh Local Authorities to prevent and relieve homelessness (supported by £1 billion funding), and a new Rough Sleeping Advisory Panel, tasked with developing a national prevention strategy. However, recent work has raised concerns about both the lack of understanding of the drivers of increasing homelessness, and of the effectiveness of measures to alleviate homelessness (National Audit Office, 2017), potentially undermining these commitments.

This project was motivated by the observations that the term 'homeless' does not identify a single experience and instead describes a range of overlapping experiences, including rough sleeping, statutory homelessness, and hidden homelessness. Reflecting the diversity of homeless experiences, there is also no single definition of homelessness in the UK. For understandable reasons, past research has focused primarily on rough sleepers, the most vulnerable and identifiable group. The government defines and estimates the scale of rough sleeping as people 'bedded down' (lying down or sleeping), about to[3] bed down in the open air, or living in buildings or other places not designed for habitation, such as cars, stations and car parks). The scale of rough sleeping in England had risen dramatically over time, more than doubling to 4,677 between 2010 and 2018, in figures known to be underestimates.

The term 'statutory homelessness' identifies people for whom local authorities have a duty to secure appropriate accommodation, based on their eligibility for assistance, unintentionally homeless status, and specified priority need group. This type of homelessness has also been rising: following improvements in the early 2000s that culminated in a low point of 41,780 homeless acceptances in 2009, the scale of statutory homelessness grew to 57,890 in 2017[4], slightly lower than its peak figure of 59,260 in 2016 (MHCLG, 2019d). Hidden homelessness – people living with family or friends because they have nowhere else to stay – is not currently identified in government statistics[5] and no official definition exists. Recent estimates suggested that 3.74 million adults in England were hidden homeless in 2018, an increase of one-third since 2008 (Fitzpatrick et al., 2019)[6]. The

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[3] Defined as sitting in/on or near a sleeping bag or other bedding.

[4] Due to legislative and administrative changes, 2017 is the most recent date for which historically comparable data are available.

[5] Statutory homelessness figures will include some hidden homeless households, but are incomplete because these figures only capture those who have presented to the local authority.

[6] This estimate of the scale of hidden homelessness analyses 'concealed households', defined as single adults or family units living within other households but who want to form separate households if they have opportunity. The estimated figure of 3.74 million adults in England draws upon data from the English Housing Survey and Labour Force Survey. It offers an approximation of the scale of hidden homelessness because not all concealed households want to form separate households, while some concealed households – particularly the most informal or temporary – may not be included in household surveys.

relative absence of data and lack of monitoring means that its scale and characteristics are largely unknown. Knowledge about the three homeless groups is thus highly imbalanced, and key evidence gaps remain. As researchers based in Oxford, we were particularly concerned about the city's long-standing history of high levels of homelessness, and we wanted to better understand people's experiences of homelessness in Oxford with a view to identifying relevant preventative and alleviative measures.

In recognition of the imbalanced evidence base on homelessness, this project's overarching objective was to provide a holistic understanding of different homelessness experiences and pathways (including exits) in Oxford. In particular, while the characteristics of statutory homeless people have been explored, their transitions into hidden homelessness and rough sleeping are poorly understood. Our project was the first systematic attempt to track people's movements between homeless experiences to capture the full spectrum of homelessness in Oxford, an approach that appears never to have been taken previously. We also sought to explore the roles played by statutory and non-statutory homelessness prevention and relief services in supporting Oxford's homeless population. This component considered the availability, use, and suitability of support services – both homeless and wider support organisations. While the project had a local focus and we were interested in gaining an in-depth understanding of homelessness in Oxford, homelessness is clearly an issue of national concern. The 2019 homelessness monitor reported that 75 per cent of Data from the 2019 homelessness monitor demonstrate that three-quarters (75 per cent) of local authorities considered rough sleeping to be a problem in their area, while 23 per cent considered it a 'major problem' (Fitzpatrick et al., 2019). The project's findings are therefore also likely to have relevance and value to understanding housing and homelessness in other parts of the UK (and potentially beyond), particularly areas like Oxford that are characterised by healthy labour markets, high housing costs, and significant inequalities. The project lasted for one year, between November 2018 and November 2019.

The current report

This report is based on a dissemination event hosted by Dr Elisabeth Garratt and Dr Jan Flaherty and held at Nuffield College, Oxford, in November 2019. The primary focus of the event was to share the project's initial findings with stakeholders drawn from national and local government, local statutory and third-sector frontline support services, academia, Oxford University, and our research participants. After a welcome and introduction to the project from Sir Andrew Dilnot, Warden of Nuffield College (see

Figure *1*), the event and accompanying report covered four main components:

1. An overview of the project's participants, outlining their current and past housing or homeless experiences, and connection to the city of Oxford
2. A presentation exploring risks and opportunities at the point of housing and homeless transitions, which was a key focus for the project as the fluid and transitory nature of homelessness is well recognised yet poorly understood
3. A presentation summarising participants' views of local support services, considering what participants valued and what they would like to see changed
4. A participatory workshop that explored how services can make a positive difference in either preventing or supporting homelessness in Oxford at different points in the lifecourse

Figure 1: Sir Andrew Dilnot welcoming attendees to the dissemination event

3. Overview of methods

Recruitment

To gain insights into the full range of homeless experiences – a key aim of this project – we sought to recruit a broad sample. We purposively recruited 39 currently or formerly homeless adults via staff and recruitment posters at relevant third sector organisations, advice centres, housing departments, online adverts and through snowball sampling. Participants were eligible if they were currently homeless or had experienced homelessness in the past three years. Due to the diversity of homeless experiences we recruited participants who self-defined as homeless, but asked relevant questions to check their eligibility.

We recognise that this sampling strategy inevitably presents a partial picture of homelessness in Oxford as we cannot be certain that all homelessness experiences were represented in our sample, nor in the proportions they are experienced within the city. We cannot attempt to generalise in a quantitative way from our findings and are instead looking for insights rather than for statistical generalisations. By recruiting participants who are in contact with services, we were unable to gain the perspectives of those who were not in touch with homelessness or wider services at the time of interview, arguably the most vulnerable group. However, our winter fieldwork means that we may have reached those who would not be identified at other times of year because of the wider range of emergency winter accommodation options available (Severe Weather Emergency Protocol, Oxford Winter Nightshelter), thereby potentially resulting in a more diverse sample.

Life history methods

In this project we used the method of life history interviewing, a narrative approach in which participants give a personal account of their life, in their own words, from childhood to the present day (Atkinson, 2001). Ours was a guided life history interview, framed by people's housing and homeless histories. We also used life mapping, beginning by asking participants to draw the first place they remembered living as a child, and continuing this task to create drawings of their housing and homeless history up to the present day (see Figure 2 for an example life map and Figure 3 for how the life maps were displayed at the event).

Life history interviewing was chosen as a means of constructing individual biographies in relation to housing and homelessness, yet the approach also allowed us to trace the changing structural context of homelessness both in Oxford and nationally. This feature was particularly valuable when considering changes to the local housing market and to statutory and non-statutory service provision. It revealed that while some of our participants had accessed social housing in the past, more recent discussions centred on the scarcity of social housing, even among priority groups. Other participants similarly described their struggles to remain adequately housed over the individual lifecourse as Oxford became a more pressured housing market with increasing rents.

The visual aspect of the life mapping technique suited the research focus of exploring transitions through housing and homelessness, and different homelessness experiences. It had two particular advantages. First, this approach actively encouraged participants to construct their own story, which was considered an important means of participants conferring agency and control over the research exchange. It also had potential to restore self-esteem and move beyond the dominant accounts of homelessness as a stigmatised identity. Second, it encouraged understandings of the emotional as well as the event-based journey through people's life histories. Using this approach revealed that many participants had experienced different forms of homelessness. If we had started interviewing from the onset of adult homelessness this may not have been recorded. It was also the case that some incidences of homelessness, such as sofa surfing or squatting, were not recognised as such by participants and it was only through telling their housing history that this was revealed.

Figure 2: Jason's life map
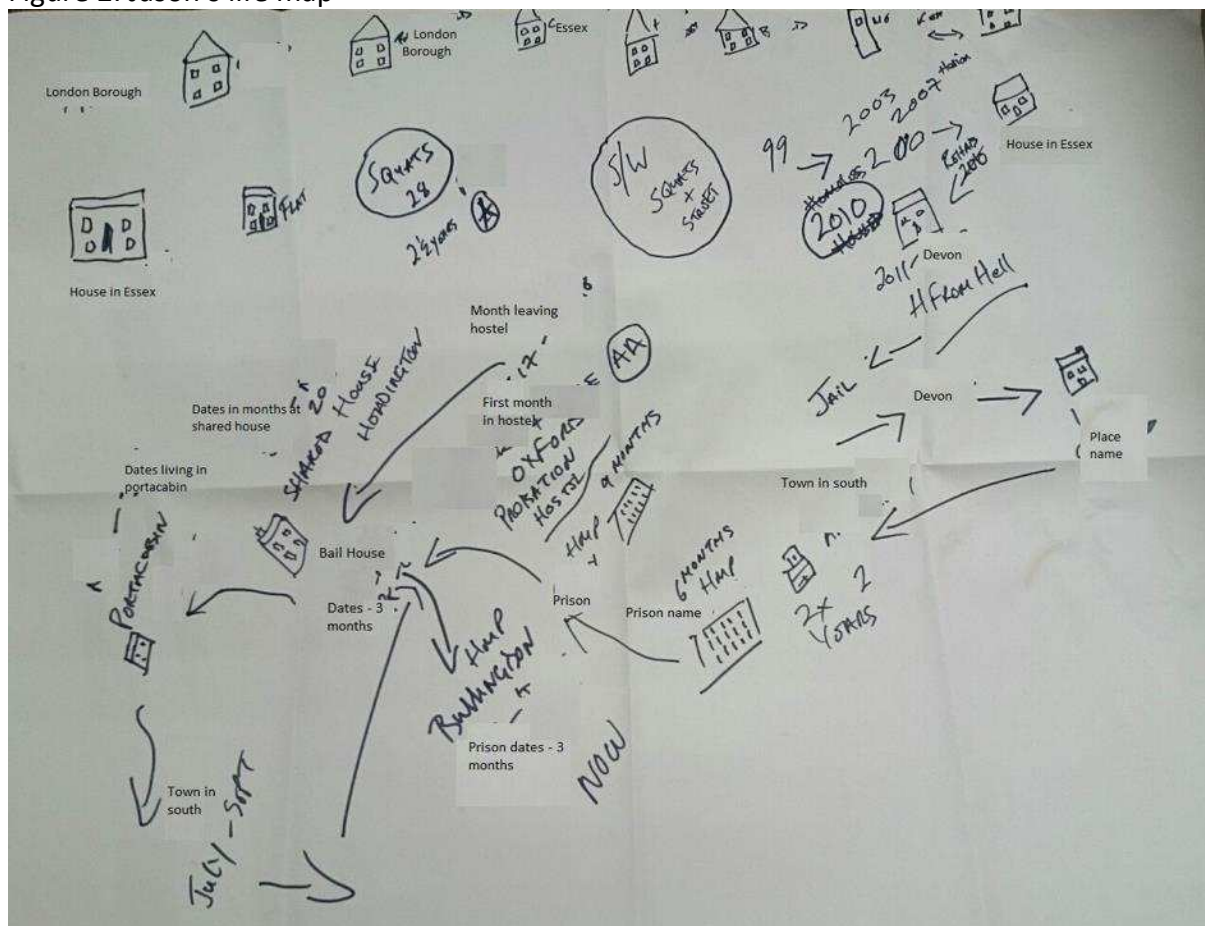
Analyses

A range of analytic methods were used. To explore participants' demographic characteristics, we collated this information from the interview transcripts. When seeking to understand risks and opportunities at the point of housing and homeless transitions, we grouped these into key analytical themes. When exploring participants' views of local support services, we grouped the data according to theme and service provider to identify patterns in participants' accounts that could give us insights into participants' main considerations in relation to service provision.

Ethical considerations

The potential vulnerability of our participants and sensitivity of the research topic necessitated careful planning and monitoring of the project. This project secured ethical approval from Oxford University's Central University Research Ethics Committee (reference R59704/RE001). Here we briefly mention some of the project's ethical considerations. Safe fieldwork practices were followed throughout to maintain researcher and participant safety. To ensure transparent informed consent was granted, all participants were provided with information about the project's aims and what participation would entail, and given the opportunity to ask questions. An oral consent process was used to protect their privacy. While interviewing, the researchers paid careful attention to any signs of distress, giving participants breaks where needed and in one case, terminating the interview. All participants were offered information signposting them to relevant support services. Following interviews where participants become distressed, where possible we made brief follow-up contact the next day. To protect their privacy, all data (including audio recordings) were anonymised or pseudonymised and stored securely under password protection. In this and subsequent reports, participants are referred to using pseudonyms, and where relevant, identifying information has been changed or removed.

Figure 3: An event attendee reviews a selection of life maps produced by participants

4. Overview of participants

Sample description

In total we undertook 39 interviews with currently[7] and formerly homeless people. We recorded a range of information in our interviews to build up a picture of the characteristics of the people we spoke to, ranging from basic demographic information to a more detailed picture of their experiences of homelessness over time. As a qualitative project that used non-probability sampling methods, the figures listed in this section cannot be said to represent all currently and formerly homeless people in the city of Oxford, or elsewhere. Instead the figures should be seen as illustrating the range and general scale of participants' different personal characteristics.

Table 1 shows that around two-thirds of the sample were men, replicating existing evidence on the gender balance of people experiencing homelessness. There was an even spread of age, with a reasonably high number of participants aged 50 and over. Most of the participants were from the UK, although small numbers were from EU and non-EU countries.

Table 1: Participants' basic demographic information

		Number
Gender	Male	25
	Female	14
Current age	20-29	5
	30-39	11
	40-49	8
	50 and over	15
Country of origin	UK	29
	EU	3
	Non-EU	7
TOTAL		39

[7] One of our participants defined himself as homeless but was actually living in a hostel for ex-offenders so was not officially homeless according to the government definitions outlined in Section 2. Although perhaps not strictly eligible, we decided to retain his interview on grounds of his self-identified homeless status, and because we did not want to discount his experiences. More generally, many homeless experiences (sofa surfing, for example) do not have a formal definition so it was not possible to conduct explicit eligibility assessments.

Participants' links to Oxford

While homelessness is a national concern, it is a particular issue in the city of Oxford. The latest figures reveal a rough sleeping rate in autumn 2018 of 8.2 per 10,000 households in Oxford, far higher than both the England average of 2.0 per 10,000 households, and the London figure of 3.7 per 10,000 households. The high prevalence of homelessness in Oxford meant we were interested in whether our participants had a clear link to Oxford. We considered links to Oxford as described by participants, rather than the criterion of local connection used by statutory services[8].

Figure 4: Participants' links to Oxford

10 grew up in Oxfordshire and never left

12 lived in Oxfordshire prior to becoming homeless

6 came to Oxford when already homeless

9 grew up in Oxfordshire then returned after time away

2 came to Oxford by chance

Clear link to Oxfordshire	31
No clear link to Oxfordshire	8
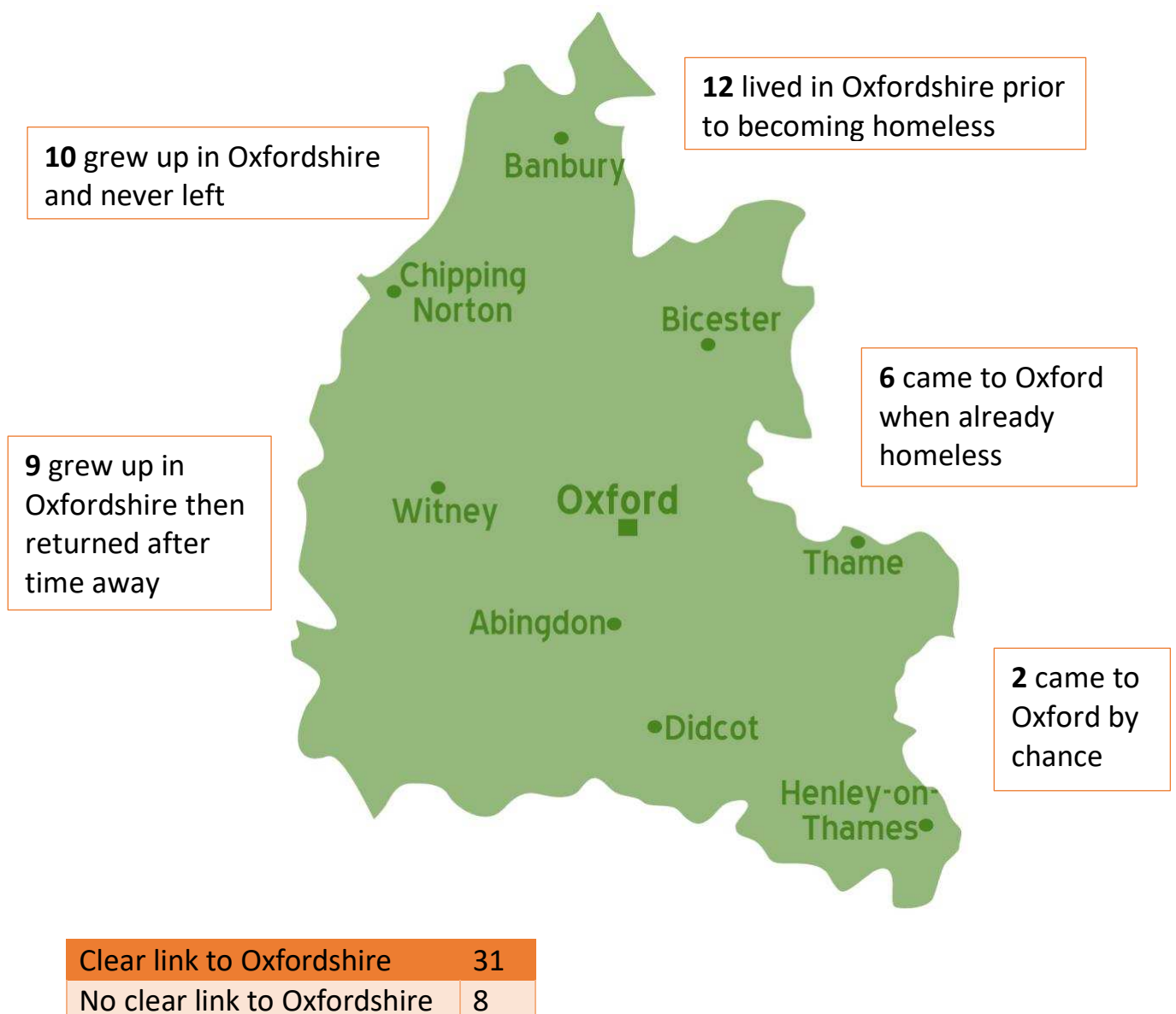
[8] Oxford City Council ascribe a local connection based on: continuous residence in Oxford for the past six months; residence in Oxford for at least six out of the last twelve months; residence in Oxford for at least three out of the last five years; employment in Oxford for at least sixteen hours per week (excluding short-term, marginal or temporary work); Family association with close relatives who have been continuously resident for at least five years.

Figure 4 shows that three-quarters of our sample (31 in total) had a clear link to Oxfordshire[9]. Overall, ten said they had grown up in Oxfordshire and remained in the area; their risks of homelessness were highly localised to Oxfordshire. A further nine participants had grown up in Oxfordshire and returned after time away from the area, often for work, either elsewhere in the UK or abroad. Twelve participants had grown up elsewhere but had moved in adulthood (for work or family reasons) and become homeless in Oxfordshire. Those who returned to Oxfordshire after time away generally did so either to reconnect with old networks (primarily family) or because they felt at home in Oxford.

Of the eight participants who did not have a clear link to Oxfordshire, two came to the area by chance when they were independently allocated refuge accommodation in Oxford[10]. A further six participants came to Oxford when they were already homeless. Some cited practical reasons such as social networks, while others gave more emotional reasons of liking the place, or had come here due to chance such as when travelling through. Overall, therefore, these patterns do not support the suggestion that Oxford's homelessness population is significantly inflated by those who are drawn here for the services (although we do not have the data to rigorously test this hypothesis).

The local nature of the current project means that we are inevitably unable to know whether or how these figures would differ in a different city, and caution is needed when considering their applicability to other settings. Nonetheless, our observation that the majority of our sample had a clear link to Oxford suggests that the risk of homelessness in Oxford may be quite high. For those with a link to the city, many had experienced insecure housing and low pay, which in the context of severe challenges to housing unaffordability in Oxford (discussed in further detail in Section 5 below), may have placed people at significant risk of housing instability and homelessness.

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[9] Although our research project and sampling strategy focussed on the city of Oxford rather than the wider county of Oxfordshire, in this section we do not distinguish between the city and county because many services and referral processes do not follow this distinction, and some participants who became homeless in the county were directed towards the city to access services that were available here.

[10] Other participants who had links to Oxfordshire had also been placed in the city from elsewhere in the county due to a lack of services in other areas.

Current housing situation

We recorded participants' current housing situation at the time of interview. This revealed far greater complexity than the three groups described in the Introduction (rough sleeping, statutory homelessness, and hidden homelessness) so we report people's more detailed housing situations here. We also defined people's housing situations according to how these were described by participants, which will not necessarily correspond to official government definitions.

The timing of the project fieldwork over the winter (December 2018 to April 2019) meant that some of our participants were in short-term seasonal emergency accommodation only available during the winter months. The picture of people's housing situations presented below would necessarily be different had we undertaken the project at a different time of year.

Table 2 illustrates the diversity of housing situations within our sample. A large number of participants were in supported accommodation of various kinds (14 in total), in their own accommodation, or in emergency accommodation for rough sleepers. For those in their own accommodation, two had secured this independently through the private rented sector, while five had received assistance through the homeless or other pathways. Several people were in supported accommodation either within the adult homeless pathway[11], another pathway (mental health, over-55s, domestic violence)[12] or in charity-run supported accommodation[13]. A small number of people were in statutory or charity-run temporary housing, although we found that temporary housing was not necessarily short-term in nature, with one participant having already spent one year in temporary accommodation. At time of interview, two participants were currently sofa surfing, although the majority of participants (33 in total) had sofa surfed at some point. Three participants were currently rough sleeping, although as with sofa surfing, a far larger number of participants (28 in total) had slept rough at some point. Such figures make it important to remember that the values presented in Table 2 are a snapshot of participants' experiences at the time of interview but inevitably do not reveal their full range of experiences. For the eight participants using emergency accommodation for rough sleepers at the time of interview, their destinations after this provision ended were unknown, and it is likely that many returned to rough sleeping.

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[11] The adult homeless pathway is the route through which rough sleepers access support that aims to find accommodation in hostels or supported accommodation, connect them with support services (employment, training, substance use, mental health issues), and helping people into permanent accommodation and work. Rough sleepers must be verified before they can access the support on this pathway.

[12] These forms of supported accommodation are aimed at enabling vulnerable people to live independently in the community and comprise housing with individually-tailored support.

[13] While we refer to charity-run supported accommodation as a pathway, eligibility for this accommodation and the accompanying support available may be arranged less formally than statutory provision.

Table 2: Participants' housing situation at the time of interview

	Number
Own social or private accommodation	7
Supported accommodation (adult homeless pathway)	7
Supported accommodation (another pathway)	3
Supported accommodation (charity)	4
Temporary housing (statutory or charity)	3
Sofa surfing	2
Emergency accommodation for rough sleepers	8
Rough sleeping	3
Unclear/other	2
TOTAL	39

This more nuanced picture of people's housing situation is valuable because not all people experiencing homelessness are captured in official figures. Various data are routinely collected, including the number of rough sleepers and people accepted as statutory homeless. Yet one of the project's aims was to take a more inclusive approach to studying homelessness and thereby gain insights into the diversity of housing used by currently and formerly homeless people. Further work from this project is using these details of people's housing situations to create a typology of housing and homelessness that can be used in future research.

First homeless experience

We recorded people's first experience of homelessness as this information might prove valuable in identifying housing situations where early intervention might be effective in averting later homeless experiences. Compared with their current housing situation, considerably less variation is evident in people's first experience of homelessness (see Table 3), demonstrating the presence of key pathways in experiences of homelessness. Half the sample (20 in total) first experienced sofa surfing, and this was evident across the full age range, from 16-year-olds to those in their 50s. A further ten went straight into rough sleeping, but this experience was concentrated among younger participants, with six of the ten being aged 19 and under at the time. Small numbers of people were first statutory homeless, in supported accommodation on a non-homeless pathway, or their experiences were unclear. The high level of initial sofa surfing suggests that people used their financial and social resources (if they had them) to get by and avoid rough sleeping, attempting to stay within the boundaries of 'mainstream' life when initially finding themselves homeless.

Table 3: First homeless experience

	Number
Statutory homelessness	4
Supported accommodation (another pathway)	2
Sofa surfing	20
Rough sleeping	10
Unclear/other	3
TOTAL	39

Looking in more detail at the age of first homeless experiences, 13 participants were first homeless as teenagers, while three participants were first homeless aged 50 and over. While concentrated among younger groups, the risk of homelessness was by no means confined to young people. We also note that the decision only to select participants who had been homeless in the past three years means that when exploring the experiences of people who were first homeless as teenagers we are only capturing insights from those who have also experienced homelessness currently or recently. Some of this group had been homeless for a long time: the current ages of those who were first homeless as teenagers ranged from 28 to 55, identifying this group as one who have experienced highly entrenched homelessness. We have not captured the experiences of people who were homeless as teenagers but who have not been homeless recently, and whose homeless experiences are likely on average to have been shorter.

Teen homelessness

Looking at teen homelessness in more detail, 24 participants left home to live independently when they were teenagers. These moves reflected a range of reasons. Some moved out of the parental home to pursue employment opportunities or relationships, trajectories that are common in young people from less advantaged households, in which space or finances may be limited.

Others left the parental home following a breakdown in the parental relationship (see Nicola's quote below), and four participants reported that they had been kicked out of the parental home. Regardless of specific circumstances, early onset of independent living therefore seems to indicate a significant risk of subsequent homelessness.

"But I mean, as I remember it, she [mum] said if you don't like it leave. And I said, okay, then, and packed my bags. It was never like some big, me being thrown out particularly. But yeah, she [mum] said if you think you can do a better job go and live somewhere else. So, I said, okay then, and I did. It hasn't exactly worked out."
(Nicola, female, 30-39)

As outlined above, 13 of our participants (or one-third of the sample) became homeless as teenagers, indicating very early instability. As noted above, because we only interviewed people who were still, or recently, homeless, our sample necessarily comprises those whose housing instability continued in some way into adult life, although we should note that long-term instability is not necessarily true of all those who experience teen homelessness.

Among those who were first homeless as teenagers, six went straight to rough sleeping, clearly illustrating a real lack of alternatives for people lacking both financial resources and independent social networks. Some were unable to access the benefits system, because they were ineligible, were unaware of their rights to benefits or housing, or did not know how to access these. A further six participants began by sofa surfing, but this first experience was less common than it was for other age groups, probably because these very young participants had fewer networks or resources to draw upon. The available networks may themselves have held limited resources: compared with older groups, friends were more likely to be living in a parental home (rather than independent accommodation), and therefore potentially less able to accommodate a sofa surfer.

A similar number of men and women had first experienced homelessness as teenagers. The lower overall risk of homelessness among women means that this pattern may suggest a proportionately greater vulnerability to teen homelessness among girls, although the nature of how we sampled participants for this project means we cannot be certain about this possibility.

Half of our participants who were homeless as teens had ten or more homeless episodes, suggesting that early experiences of homelessness may set people on a path of long-term homelessness. Overall, therefore, teen homelessness appeared to be a key risk factor for later homelessness.

Number of homeless episodes

In this project we collected detailed information about people's episodes of homelessness over time. It was important for us to examine the number of homeless episodes because snapshot figures that capture a person's current experience say nothing about the number of times they have been homeless, nor the types of homelessness they have experienced over a period of time. The project's particular focus on people's transitions – and reasons for transition – between different housing and homeless episodes made it important to record the homeless episodes each person had experienced in their life[14]. Exploring the number of homeless episodes also offers insights into the persistence or intermittence of homelessness over time. By taking a lifecourse approach we were able to explore each individual episode of homelessness from the first time a person experienced homelessness to their current housing or homeless situation.

In this report, the term 'homeless experience' relates to a single episode of homelessness, such as sofa surfing or staying in a homeless hostel. These episodes could be brief, with some lasting a single night, or longer term, lasting several years. When reference is made to being homeless more than once, as most of our participants had been, we explored these episodes in terms of transitions. A transition could be moving between different types of homelessness, such as going from sofa surfing to rough sleeping, or having the same experience in a different location, such as moving between homeless hostels. These transitions between episodes could be an opportunity for intervention or change.

Overall, just two participants had only one homeless episode, and twelve had experienced two to five homeless episodes. A further 16 participants had ten or more homeless episodes; in some cases it was not possible to determine the number of episodes. Unsurprisingly, teen homelessness was common among these participants, although we also interviewed people who had been homeless ten or more times following an initial episodes of homelessness in their 40s. The duration of these ten (or more) episodes was variable: for some participants, their experiences of homelessness were interspersed with periods of housing, while others were continually homeless for a number of years. The presence of these multiple homeless episodes tells us that homelessness is not a single or static experience and was instead very dynamic, with plenty of change both in and out of homelessness, and between different types of homelessness.

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[14] We also acknowledge the importance of examining the length of homeless episodes, and the variety and pattern of different homeless episodes. These themes will be explored in future work.

Issues facing participants

People experiencing homeless are likely to have faced or be facing particular issues that that contribute to their becoming and remaining homeless, and the duration of their homelessness experiences. In our interviews we asked people direct questions about their health at the end of the interview, and also asked them questions about their health (and other issues) at relevant points in the interviews. In this report we use the term 'mental health' when participants used these terms, and not as a matter of clinical diagnosis. We also note that some responses to trauma (especially abuse and neglect) are vulnerable to being mis-diagnosed as mental health issues. In addition, these behaviours are perhaps particularly liable to be identified as issues because people are in the service spotlight, and might not be considered as such in different circumstances.

Health and mental health

Overall, 29 participants reported mental health problems, and some reported more than one condition. The majority (28 in total) reported anxiety or depression, while seven identified a more serious condition, including personality disorder, PTSD, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia. Three participants reported that they had been admitted to a psychiatric hospital at some point in their lives; five participants said they had attempted suicide.
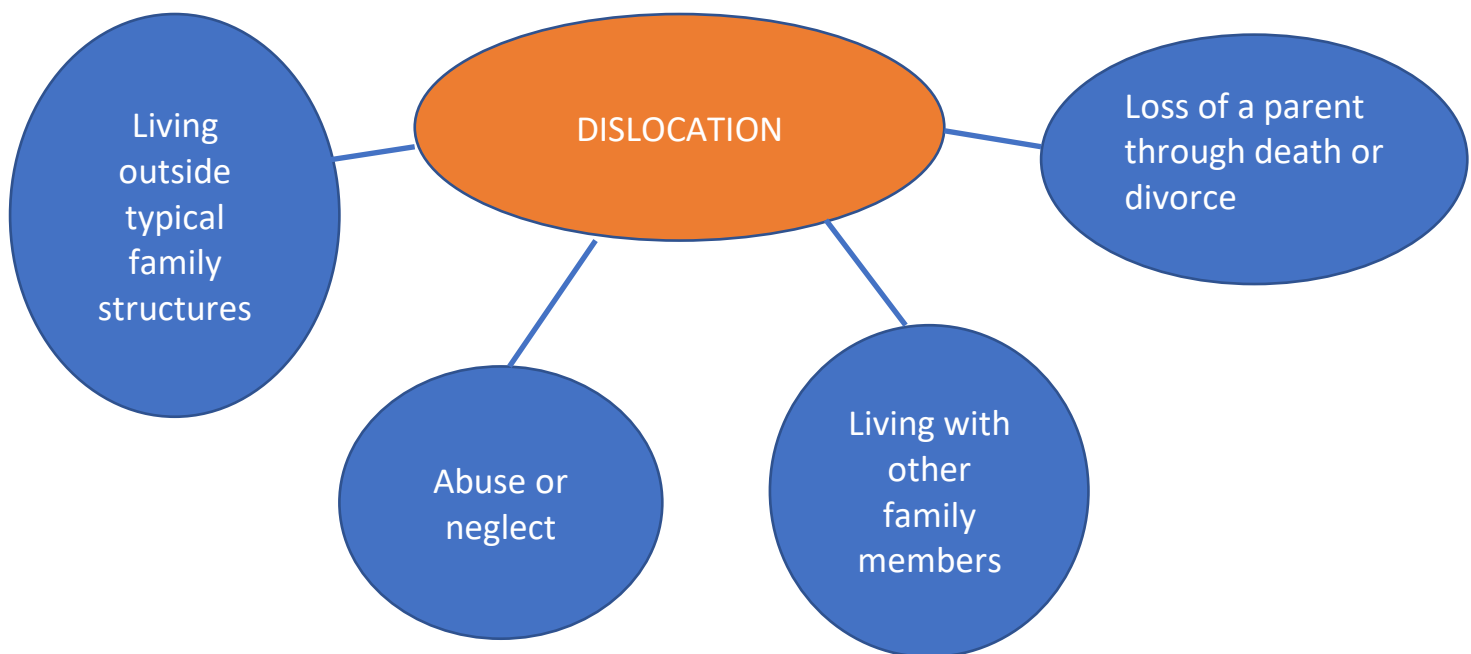
Five participants had diagnosed, or suspected, autism spectrum condition[15] (ASC). This prevalence is far higher than the national estimate of one per cent and may suggest a vulnerability to homelessness among people on the autistic spectrum. Other evidence is also accumulating to suggest this possibility (Churchard et al., 2018).

[15] Also known as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Early childhood experiences

By taking a life history approach, our interviews gave us insight into people's childhoods, which have previously been identified as influencing the risk of homelessness in adulthood (Bramley and Fitzpatrick, 2018). What became apparent in our interviews was a real sense of dislocation (see Figure 5). Many of our participants reported complex family arrangements such as living with family members other than their parents, or spending time between different homes throughout childhood. Four of our participants migrated to the UK as children. Nine had lived outside typical family structures before the age of 18: four had been kicked out of home, two attended boarding school, one had spent time in a children's home, one was an unaccompanied child migrant, and one had spent time in a young offenders institution.

Figure 5: Features of dislocation in participants' early lives

By taking a life history approach, our interviews gave us insight into people's childhoods, which have previously been identified as influencing the risk of homelessness in adulthood (Bramley and Fitzpatrick, 2018). What became apparent in our interviews was a real sense of dislocation (see Figure 5). Many of our participants reported complex family arrangements such as living with family members other than their parents, or spending time between different homes throughout childhood. Four of our participants migrated to the UK as children. Nine had lived outside typical family structures before the age of 18: four had been kicked out of home, two attended boarding school, one had spent time in a children's home, one was an unaccompanied child migrant, and one had spent time in a young offenders institution.

In addition to this geographical dislocation, many participants reported difficult events in childhood which brought about psychological dislocation, often combined with geographical dislocation. Loss through death and divorce loomed large for some: four participants experienced the death of one parent or step-parent, one lost both parents, and two participants experienced the death of a sibling. One participant lost his entire immediate family through death by the time he was 15. Parental divorce or separation (reported by 15 participants[16]) was identified as a very significant event for some participants which impacted on their adult life to no less an extent than loss through death. In practical terms, parental divorce or separation was likely to impact on families' financial resources and often meant a change in living arrangements, both in terms of where people lived and who they lived with. These changes to living arrangements were not only practical, and could also be accompanied by heightened family stress. Such experiences were unsurprisingly unsettling and may have interrupted these participants' notions of home. While parental repartnering was described in positive terms by some, for others it introduced further instability or new forms of friction within the family

Childhood neglect and abuse also featured in our interviews. Thirteen participants reported significant abuse, either physical or emotional. These experiences of childhood abuse and neglect created difficulties in participants' own adult relationships that may have placed them at particular risk of homelessness. We also know from existing research that adverse childhood experiences are linked with a greater likelihood of mental health problems and drug and alcohol use, which themselves increase vulnerability to homelessness (Fitzpatrick et al., 2013). Structural risks, which we examine below, and adverse life events in adulthood add an extra layer of risk for people who experienced childhood dislocation or trauma.

Adversities in adulthood

In addition, 24 participants reported significant drug or alcohol use, and five participants said they had undertaken rehabilitation programmes. Overall, 11 participants had served a sentence in prison or young offenders institution. There was a mix of sentences, ranging from a matter of weeks to 15 years. Some had served more than one sentence. As is well established in the existing research literature, adverse experiences in early life (described later), mental health issues, and drug and alcohol use are concentrated among people who have experienced homelessness (Fitzpatrick et al., 2013). While these might seem like individual issues they can be linked to structural factors such as intergenerational poverty and disadvantage, which in turn impacts on educational and employment opportunities, and housing.

[16] In this category we also include one participant whose mother fled domestic violence from his father, and another participants whose parents had separated before he was born and whose mother's boyfriend was in and out of jail throughout his childhood.

5. Transitions through housing and homeless experiences: Risks and opportunities

Having described the sample and explored the early context of people's lives and some of the wider issues facing our participants, this section of the report focuses more specifically on risks and opportunities at the point of transitions between housing and homeless experiences. The different types of transitions through between housing and homelessness are illustrated in Figure 6. We explore four key dimensions, although there is inevitable overlap. Within each of these dimensions was the cross-cutting possibility of risky transitions, defined as those that exposed participants to particular personal risks, and we explore these separately. 'Unseen' transitions were those that related specifically to experiences of hidden homelessness, and which statutory or voluntary services may be less likely to be aware of. While we describe these transitions as 'unseen' we acknowledge that they are not unseen by all.

Figure 6: Different types of transitions through housing and homeless experiences
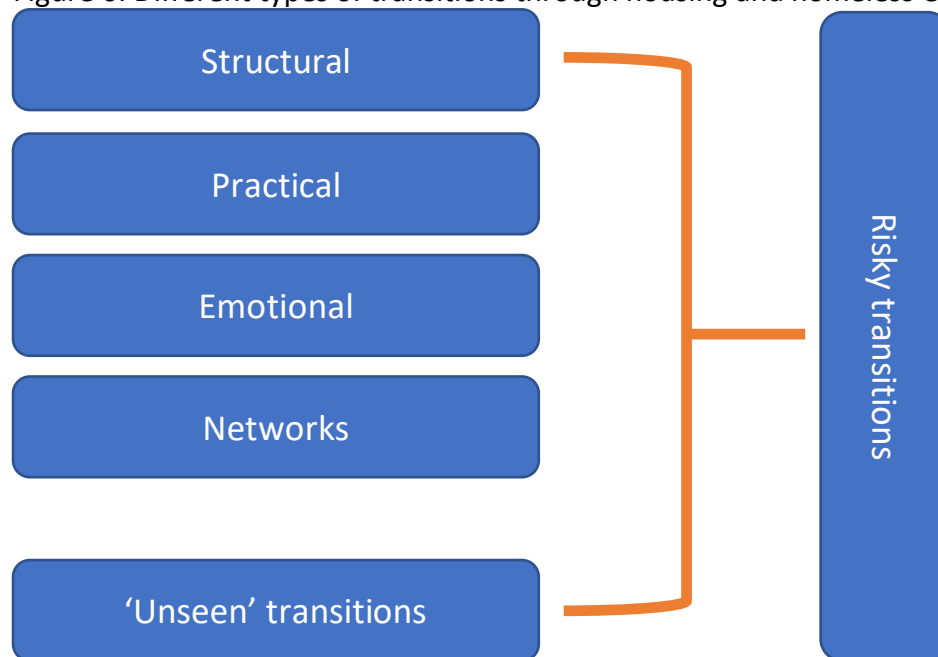
Structural risks and opportunities

Structural risks and opportunities were identified as those that '*locate the causes of homelessness in broader forces such as housing market conditions, poverty and unemployment*' (Bramley and Fitzpatrick, 2018: 97). While discussed separately from practical, emotional, and network-related factors, structural factors should be seen as providing the background context in which the other dimensions are experienced rather than operating as distinct or entirely separate factors. We identified four primary structural risks and opportunities:

1. Lack of affordable housing
2. Evictions
3. Not meeting criteria for statutory homelessness
4. Experiences of institutions

Lack of affordable housing was evident in high rents and long waiting lists for social housing, both in Oxford and elsewhere. High rents meant that housing options for people on lower wages or benefits were very limited. As Anil explained, *"After that flat I just find getting another home so, so hard, £500 just for single room"* (male, 20-29). Emma (female, 40-49) likewise worked in a series of low-paid jobs and described a *"constant battle"* to retain accommodation.

The lack of availability of social housing and consequent fragility of people's housing situations was a key structural risk factor for homelessness among our participants. Some of our participants had gained access to social housing in the past[17], but the social rented sector has contracted over time and this resource was rarely available now, even for those with young children or significant health needs. Nationally, there were 39,000 fewer new social lets in 2017/18 than five years earlier in 2012/13 (Fitzpatrick et al., 2019). Although figures on the scale of social housing in Oxford are not available, the opportunity to secure social housing in the city seems rare, and guidance on the Oxford City Council reads '*Only households in high housing need are likely to receive an offer of housing and they may have to wait many years before they receive an offer*' (Oxford City Council, n.d.). Consequently, many participants did not join the housing register – either because they had no hope that it would help them (some had been told this by officials), or because of past negative experiences. Others did not apply to join the housing register (or put off from attempting this) because it was too administratively complex and they did not understand the process.

Several of our participants had accrued arrears from former properties, which can bar them from bidding or even joining the housing register. These issues can serve to trap low-income groups who cannot afford private rents or access social housing. Some of our participants had accrued arrears as a result of administrative issues relating to Universal Credit, including confusion over the value of payments, inaccurate guidance, sanctions, and the five-week wait. This finding is supported by national-level research which revealed that 38 per cent of landlords who let to tenants on Universal Credit had experienced tenants accruing arrears in the past year, with a mean value owed of £1,150 (Simcock, 2017).

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[17] Either because they were statutory homeless or had accessed social housing via the general register.

The absence of social housing both closes off access to affordable housing, and will further intensify pressures on the private rented sector, potentially resigning people to poor-quality accommodation here, as Emma describes:

"It was quite difficult using the kitchen sometimes and the bathrooms were… again, no sense of home comforts, but a place to kind of doss or just be for a while and, again, low, low rent." (Emma, female, 40-49)

Precarity was also an issue: some people found that when they had to leave a property (commonly due to relationship breakdown, arrears, or because a landlord wanted a property back to refurbish or sell) they could not find another one. A range of housing situations followed these involuntary transitions: those with social resources typically turned to sofa surfing or returned to the parental home, some of those with financial resources sought temporary commercial accommodation in hotels or backpacker hostels, while those with insufficient social and financial resources often resorted to rough sleeping.

The absence of affordable housing meant that many of our participants had spent time in shared housing. Under 35s are restricted to a shared accommodation rate under Housing Benefit or Universal Credit costs, confining them to live with others in equally stressed financial conditions[18]. The conflictual relationships several participants reported in these settings were not simply an unpleasant experience to endure, but could also be triggering to those who had witnessed family discord or arguments earlier in life. Under these conditions, problems between residents would often arise, leading to participants moving out of accommodation (often with nowhere secure to go), or to being evicted.

While affordability issues pose longstanding challenges to securing adequate accommodation for low-income groups, welfare changes over the past decade have doubtless intensified these pressures and will continue to do so. The introduction of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) in 2008 served to link the value of Housing Benefit to 50 per cent of the value of similar local properties. Any shortfall between rental payments and Housing Benefit must be met by tenants. Analyses from the Institute for Fiscal Studies revealed that the proportion of low-income[19] people in the private rented sector whose Housing Benefit is less than their rent and thus have to make up a shortfall in their rental payments increased from 74 per cent in 1994–1996 to 90 per cent in 2013–2015. In the social rented sector this increase happened more recently, rising from 56 per cent in 2010–2012 to 68 per cent in 2013–2015 (Joyce et al., 2017). The reduction in LHA from 50 to 30 per cent of local rents in 2011 and LHA freeze between 2016 and 2020 have further squeezed tenants. Consequently, the proportion of low-income renters who face a rental payment shortfall has increased by an estimated 12 percentage points in the private sector and by 10 percentage points in the social sector (Joyce et al., 2017). This challenge to affordability is likely to be particularly stark in high-demand areas like Oxford, where tenants may have few options to reduce their rental costs through downsizing or moving to a cheaper area. The median monthly rent for a one bedroom property in Oxford – suitable for a single person or couple – was £997 in 2019

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[18] The experience of living in shared accommodation was not confined to under 35s, however, and some of our participants had lived in shared housing at older ages.

[19] Defined as within the bottom 40 per cent of the income distribution in their region.

(Oxford Market Rent Summary, n.d.), yet the LHA rate for this property type was just £711, leaving a median shortfall of £286 every month. This divergence between rental costs and LHA increases for larger properties, with the median monthly rent for a three bedroom property – for a family with children, for example – in Oxford estimated at £1,500 per month, one-third or £500 higher than the LHA rate for this property type (£1,000 per month).

Relatedly, these changes also appear to be impacting on landlord behaviour, where tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit are at greater risk of having their tenancy ended by their landlords than tenants not receiving Housing Benefit (O'Leary et al., 2018). The gap between rental prices and Housing Benefit may also encourage risk aversion among landlords when selecting tenants due to concerns about delays to payments and the ability for tenants to sustain expensive tenancies. Indeed, a recent survey found that 69 per cent of 540 landlord in England and Wales said they would be less likely to let to housing benefit recipients in the case of future benefit changes (O'Leary et al., 2018). Such attitudes seem particularly likely in Oxford and other areas of high housing demand, thereby further restricting housing options for low-income groups and potentially perpetuating the acceptance of poor-quality accommodation among tenants.

It is important to note that this divergence between housing costs and people's available resources is by no means confined to those receiving benefits. Someone working 35 hours per week at the national minimum wage of £8.62 per hour[20] would earn £301.70 per week and spend 83% of their income on housing (assuming median rental costs for a one bedroom property in Oxford), leaving just £210 per month for other living costs.

Finally, the lack of affordable housing could block people's attempts to move from the homeless pathway into more secure housing. While for some, the adult homeless pathway offered a route out of rough sleeping and into housing, others felt 'stuck' while on the pathway. The lack of available or appropriate follow-on housing options meant that sometimes people stayed in homeless hostels longer than necessary.

Evictions were reported by several participants. Some had been evicted due to antisocial behaviour or rent arrears, while others were evicted because landlords[21] wanted to sell or refurbish the property. Under all these circumstances, evictions resulted from structural factors related to housing affordability and broader social inequalities, which in turn made it difficult to identify suitable replacement housing. The impact of these factors was compounded by people being asked to move on at relatively short notice: landlords are legally required to give two months' notice to quit, which may give people insufficient time to find new housing. This issue was especially evident in shared housing, where tenants may not have a formal tenancy agreement so landlords were not bound by these legal requirements. Under all these conditions, people can be just one move – or eviction – away from homelessness.

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[20] This figure is the national minimum wage from April 2020 for those aged 25 and over; its value is lower for younger age groups.
[21] We use the term 'landlords' throughout this report as it is a more widely used-term than 'landlady', and we do not know their gender in all cases.

Several of our participants had been evicted due to rent arrears, demonstrating the affordability challenges of sustaining a tenancy. As Paul described:

"No… my… my rent was like… nearly seventy-five, eighty quid a week and I was only getting [from work as a kitchen porter] about a hundred and twenty, a hundred and thirty pound a week"
(Paul, male, 30-39).

Paul later stated that he accrued rent arrears and *"got kicked out"*. In another clear demonstration of social inequalities, Nicola was evicted with her two young children when her landlady wanted to give the home to her son. Nicola was unable to find affordable accommodation in the private rented sector and her position on the housing register made it highly unlikely she would secure social housing. Finally, evictions for antisocial behaviour often took place in the context of poor living conditions, including difficulties with other tenants. For example, Tinsel described how the noise and loud behaviour from nearby tenants in her housing association flat, *"turned me into um [pause] big breakdown"* so was in this sense still a reflection of structural factors. Tinsel's experience exemplifies the so-called 'new orthodoxy' of research into the causes of homelessness, which acknowledges the importance of interactions between individual and structural-level factors and recognises that certain individuals are more likely to become homeless under challenging structural conditions (Batterham, 2019).

Not meeting criteria for statutory homelessness was challenging if participants approached the council for assistance but found they did not meet criteria to be classed as statutory homeless. In the meantime, people would move into temporary paid-for accommodation such as B&Bs or a backpackers' hostel if they had funds, or sofa surfing and rough sleeping if not. Five of our participants had been denoted statutory homeless, but many others were not, because they were not eligible, 'intentionally' homeless, or did not meet Council criteria for local connection[22]. Although the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 widened the scope of homelessness prevention and relief activities to strengthen the provision of council assistance to those not accepted as statutory homeless[23], some participants had not approached the council because they had low expectations of the assistance available to them. This attitude may reflect either a lack of awareness of these legislative changes, or the limited potential for the Act's provisions to meaningfully improve people's housing options in a high-pressure housing market like Oxford. As discussed already, many participants either joined the general housing register but had suitably low expectations of being housed via this route, or did not even join the housing register.

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[22] Some has clear links to the city but did not meet the stricter criteria for local connection.
[23] Before then, most local authorities carried out prevention and relief activities, but this was not a statutory duty.

Experiences of institutions played a varied role in the risks and opportunities faced by people at the point of housing and homeless transitions. While categorised under structural risks and opportunities, experiences of institutions were also practical in nature. When considering risks, leaving prison seemed to be a particularly risky time, with some participants moving from prison directly into rough sleeping. The paucity of support for prison leavers at the time of release and risk of homelessness is well known: figures from the Ministry for Justice revealed that one in six of 220,411 prisoners released between April 2015 and March 2018 left prison for 'unsettled' accommodation, probably sleeping rough or other homeless experiences (Elgot, 2018). From a financial perspective, the £47 discharge grant and further payment of £50 to cover their first night of release in temporary accommodation is clearly insufficient to fund accommodation in the private rented sector. Furthermore, this grant must be applied for in advance, but prison leavers are not always informed of their release date ahead of time, so may be unable to access this (limited) support. The five-week wait for Universal Credit is likely to compound financial difficulties in this group.

Alongside practical challenges at the point of release, prison leavers were not always emotionally prepared to leave prison, as Tom (male, 30-39) described: *"It didn't feel real. To be honest it was probably about a week of being out it started to feel real"*. This emotional adjustment may limit people's ability to seek support from statutory or charity services, and from their social networks. This risk, that prison leavers move directly into rough sleeping, may also reflect people's overall weak financial position and limited or disrupted social networks.

More positively, for some participants time spent in institutions offered the opportunity for change. We found that inpatient stays could place people on more positive trajectories, with three of our participants moving from hospital into supported accommodation (one each via the homeless pathway, mental health, and asylum support). For these participants, their hospital stays interrupted their everyday lives and provided the opportunity for them to engage with support services and thereby gain access to housing. In this sense, opportunities for housing transitions could be characterised in both structural and practical terms. As part of the recent Trailblazer pilot programme in Oxfordshire, community navigators were embedded within a range of services and spaces – including hospitals – with the aim to identify people at risk of homelessness and seek to connect them with services. While we do not know the exact process through which these three participants gained access to supported accommodation, such instances demonstrate the potential value in engaging with homeless people in hospital settings.

For others, attending a residential drug or alcohol rehabilitation programme gave them the opportunity to address addiction issues and make a positive move into housing. While some participants who attended rehabilitation programmes seemed to benefit in practical terms by being connected with relevant services, others reported psychological benefits of addressing harmful habits that had defined their lives, often for considerable periods of time. We note however that not all participants reported benefits following residential rehabilitation programmes, attesting to the importance of adequate support for people experiencing homelessness at this time.

Several practical risks and opportunities emerged, presenting either risks for greater housing insecurity, or the opportunity for improved security. These practical matters played out against a backdrop of structural factors relating to housing costs, poverty and employment opportunities and were evident in a range of spheres, including the (inter)personal, with regard to services, or less predictable factors like the weather:

1. Relationship formation and breakdown
2. Safety or conditions in current accommodation
3. Practicalities of the weather

Relationship formation and breakdown could provide both risks and opportunities. Relationship breakdown is clearly a time of risk, and is often an immediate trigger for homelessness – commonly sofa surfing or rough sleeping – among those without the financial resources to secure their own housing. We found that relationship breakdown often also coincided with a deterioration of mental health, substance use issues, and sometimes the loss of paid work. In this way it presented a real shift in people's worlds even if their housing situation did not change directly following relationship breakdown. For some participants, relationship breakdowns lead to episodes of homelessness on more than one occasion, and sometimes a move directly into rough sleeping. On the other hand, relationship formation could more positively mean a transition *out* of homelessness. However, these relationships often meant dependency on partners if the tenancy was in their partner's name, and relationship breakdown could lead to immediate homelessness again.

Safety or conditions in current accommodation were problematic for some. In some cases, people had accommodation but moved because they felt unsafe or at risk, as Emma describes below. These situations reflect broader problems of housing affordability, job insecurity and poverty. As noted, problems with shared accommodation and antisocial behaviour was a significant factor for people moving out of accommodation both in the private rented sector and homeless pathway, sometimes with nowhere to go. In such cases, while technically voluntary, these housing transitions were not truly a matter of choice:

"She [housemate] started off alright, she leant me all the Harry Potter books, but then she started to get really bullying and, erm, it was strange for me and didn't feel safe. I have to be clean and safe, if I'm not clean and safe then I, I, I can't confront the situation, but I think I should get out of this situation."
(Emma, female, 40-49)

Many participants mentioned issues with accommodation within the homeless pathway. Some participants moved out of the hostel system or refused offers of hostel accommodation because they felt physically unsafe or to avoid being housed with people drinking or using drugs. Moreover, homeless pathway accommodation was not always appropriate, with one participant declining an offer of shared accommodation because her

children were not allowed to visit for safeguarding reasons. Such moves served to make them intentionally homeless and thus unable to access statutory homelessness assistance.

Finally, *practicalities of the weather* played a role in some transitions. In the winter, small numbers of people moved from tents into the Oxford Winter Nightshelter. For others, the winter months prompted short-term moves out of tents and into sofa surfing or contact with the homeless pathway through the sit-up service[24] or Severe Weather Emergency Protocol[25]. Some cycled between tents and alternatives, although these changes did not happen in all cases, and some of our participants described staying in tents in the snow.

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[24] The sit-up service provides overnight accommodation for twenty verified rough sleepers, before their local connection has been confirmed. Service users are invited to sit or bed down on the floor in the communal area of O'Hanlon House on a night by night basis. Basic support is available and some lockers are provided.

[25] The Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) makes emergency accommodation available during periods of so-called 'severe weather', typically when temperatures below freezing are forecast for three consecutive nights. The purpose of SWEP is to prevent homeless deaths during cold weather, and encourage engagement with support services during the winter months. It is an open access initiative, basic facilities and food are available at three locations, and no verification is needed. It is funded by Oxford City Council.

Emotional risks and opportunities

Alongside the practical risks and opportunities outlined above, other risks and opportunities were more emotional in nature. Again, these emotional factors played out in several different ways:

1. Feelings of freedom, travel, or escape
2. No longer feeling able to cope, due to:
    - Psychological change
    - Mental wellbeing
    - Drugs or alcohol
3. Feelings of being 'in the way'

Some participants spoke about their *feelings of freedom* in relation to rough sleeping, or the initial move into rough sleeping as like being on holiday. Rough sleeping was also described as '*travelling*' by some[26]. By framing rough sleeping in positive terms, or even as a choice, people could assert control over their circumstances and retain dignity and self-esteem. The reality was often that people were facing a lack of choice or escaping difficult home lives.

One key reason that people moved through homelessness experiences, such as from hostels into rough sleeping, is that they *no longer felt able to cope* in a particular environment. Sometimes this reflected a psychological change. For example, some of our participants had spent a number of years in and out of rough sleeping and said they were tired and getting 'too old' for it, which prompted attempts to secure housing. Other participants left hostels due to the negative impact on their mental health, risking loss of support. The busy hostel environments – characterised by noise and unpredictability – could also be very challenging for people on the autistic spectrum. A smaller number of transitions into, or back into, homelessness occurred when people left secure private or social accommodation into homelessness, citing reasons of boredom, loneliness and risk of suicide. Sometimes, a feeling that participants had 'had enough' was a trigger for positive change. This mainly occurred in relation to substance use, when participants would move accommodation or move out of rough sleeping because they wanted to stop using drugs and get away from people using substances.

For those sofa surfing, *feelings of being 'in the way'* were often expressed as a reason for moving on. In these circumstances, people lived in a state of uncertainty, often not knowing how long they could stay, or where to go next. In terms of emotional or ontological security, this makes planning challenging (Somerville, 2013). One participant, Emma (female, 40-49), referred to this feeling as a *"non-permanent sense of being housed"*. Some people managed this uncertainty by staying in a number of people's homes, but at other times feeling being in the way prompted people to move into rough sleeping with all the risks that came with that.

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[26] The government definition of rough sleeping does not include spaces used for recreational purposes such as travelling. We identified travelling experiences as homelessness when participants clearly did not have a better place to stay.

Risks and opportunities in social networks

The availability and strength of networks were also critical in people's transitions between housing and homelessness, and could present both risks and opportunities at these times of transition.

1. Having limited or no networks
2. Family networks
3. Rough sleeping networks

First, those with *limited or no networks* were more likely to move into rough sleeping as their first homeless experience, because they lacked opportunities to sofa surf or stay with family, which could protect against (or considerably slow) the movement into rough sleeping. As already noted, the majority of people who went straight into rough sleeping were teenagers, who were likely to lack networks that could provide the necessary support to avoid rough sleeping. The other three participants whose first experience of homelessness was rough sleeping also lacked support networks: one was a recent migrant, another an asylum seeker and the third declared himself to have undiagnosed Autism Spectrum Condition and described very limited networks.

Family networks were often used as a source of temporary housing. A parental home was a vital resource, returned to by many participants at times of need. In these instances, the available accommodation varied widely, from a private room to a camp bed on the kitchen floor. Participants from less advantaged backgrounds were less likely to draw on family networks due to financial and space constraints. This resource was sometimes lost. Notably, when participants became estranged from family members, which sometimes followed a period of staying with family, the loss of this resource and their reduced network placed them at greater risk of rough sleeping. For others – especially those who had left or been kicked out of the family home as teenagers – this resource was absent.

Some people developed *rough sleeping networks* with others in the same position. These could be supportive, through the provision of material help such as clothing, and advice about where to access support or food. However, these networks were not always positive and the development of these networks in hostels and supported accommodation led to the initiation or intensification of drug use for some. Loyalties to others also led to potentially worsening circumstances. For example, Gary met his former partner in supported accommodation but when she was evicted, he chose to leave too, moving into rough sleeping:

"We was there [supported accommodation] for a few months, we then had to leave. Um, I was obviously concerned with her obviously being out on the street on her own. And not knowing if she was going to get any support. And yeah, I made, probably the wrong decision in hindsight. But I chose to basically move out [supported accommodation]. Move back onto the street"
(Gary, male, 20-29)

Risky transitions

As Gary's account illustrates, transitions are a time of change and therefore risk. We identified the cross-cutting themes of risky transitions, defined as those that exposed participants to particular personal risks. Some transitions – whether characterised as structural, practical, emotional, or network-related – were directly risky. While it might be expected that risky transitions are generally those that are involuntary – meaning that people cannot plan or prepare for them – we found that participants were making choices about their housing situations even when making risky transitions, albeit within highly constrained options.

These risky transitions could be grouped into three themes:

1. Short-term intimate relationships
2. 'Stopgap friends' with housing
3. Strategic rough sleeping

Some participants, both men and women, became involved in *short-term intimate relationships* as a means of managing their homelessness if they lacked the resources to attain their own housing. These relationships were ones in which people would leave as soon as another housing option became available. This strategy was sometimes conscious, as we can see from Adrian:

"[…] And I thought… I suppose… it… it's selfish really but I did think to myself, 'Well, she's got somewhere to stay as well'. So, I thought, 'Hmm… I could stay there as well' you know, and it gets me off the street […]"
(Adrian, male, 40-49)

Other participants reported staying with *'stopgap friends' with housing*, which – although they were pleased with this opportunity at the time – also posed risks. Some people ended up staying with people in equally precarious housing circumstances, or who were dealing with mental health or dependency issues themselves. In some cases this lead to worsening circumstances.

Lastly, two of our female participants resorted to *strategic rough sleeping* as a means of gaining help. Accessing the homeless pathway – the route to hostel accommodation and support – can only be achieved by being verified as someone who is sleeping rough . For two of our participants, their need to access housing support and the verification process through which their eligibility was determined meant they made themselves more vulnerable in the short term by moving into rough sleeping. Amelia was living in a chain hotel she could not afford, while Inzali could not remain in a sofa-surfing arrangement with family due to overcrowding. The absence of support for people until they are sleeping rough has also been reported elsewhere (Dumoulin et al., 2016). These participants felt they had tried many other options, including long-term sofa surfing, and had been so desperate that they had resorted to strategic rough sleeping, where they slept rough in prominent places to become verified quickly with the aim of accessing services more directly:

"I had a sleeping bag and a blanket from the Gatehouse, my personal belongings with me and a bag and I didn't sleep. I sat there all night because I knew St Mungo's the outreach team would need to verify me."
(Amelia, female, 40-49)

'Unseen' transitions

Alongside the risky transitions described above, this study revealed the extent of hidden homelessness – or 'unseen' transitions – in people's lives. While experiences of hidden homelessness were extremely wide-ranging, certain experiences were particularly prominent. These 'unseen' transitions were grouped into the following themes:

1. Diverse housing situations
2. Sofa surfing
3. Live-in work

Our participants reported a wide range of *diverse housing situations* that may not immediately seem characteristic of homelessness, but were used either to avoid more extreme experiences of homelessness, or provide relief from these. These included commercial accommodation (hotels, B & B's, backpacker hostels), camping[27], house-sitting, and informal agreements such as sofa surfing in exchange for small sums of cash. Some of our participants had spent time in squats or protest sites, generally as a means of attaining housing when more mainstream options were not available to them for financial reasons, although some became politicised through this experience and sought this type of accommodation subsequently.

Sofa surfing was highly prevalent, reported by 33 of 39 participants. Networks of family or friends could be used to provide housing of varying suitability, which for some people lasted a number of years. Despite their longevity in some cases, these arrangements could also end abruptly or involuntarily due to arguments, overcrowding or being in the way, leaving people with little or no time to make alternative arrangements. In these circumstances, people remained homeless but often unseen by statutory or voluntary support services.

A number of our participants recounted *live-in work* ('tied accommodation'), ranging from a pastoral role in a boarding school to living in a Portacabin at a coal yard, but was typically low-waged and insecure. Live-in work may be particularly appealing in areas like Oxford where housing costs are high. However, live-in work was inevitably risky because losing your job would also entail losing your home involuntarily, with very short notice[28]. We list live-in work under 'unseen' transitions because – despite its clear diversity – for some of our participants the opportunity to combine paid work with short-term accommodation did present a useful way to avoid or mitigate homelessness in a way that may not be visible to others. For example, Lauren used her long-standing paid work as a carer as part of juggling her hidden homelessness. Furthermore, some housing situations described as live-in work – such as Jakob's – were clearly disguised homelessness.

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[27] We considered in camping in commercial campsites to be a form of hidden homelessness, distinct from rough sleeping in tents.

[28] Employers are only required to give service tenants one week's notice if they want to end their employment.

Jakob: And this time… I think was last time, because I find some house and make some bathroom for one guy.
Interviewer: Okay.
Jakob: And he give me for three months, a small room.
(Jakob, male, 30-39)

"So, at the moment I'm just staying… well I do two nights at work [carer sleep in], and then four nights with one [friend], and then one night with another friend"
(Lauren, female, 50+)

What to do?

Having looked at the different types of risks and opportunities in housing and homelessness transitions the question is how policies and services can be designed to minimise risks and maximise opportunities. In particular, can points of transition be exploited to allow meaningful intervention to take place? When considering this question, it is helpful to separate these actions into the different approaches needed for prevention and intervention:

- **Prevention**: Focussing on the causes of homelessness throughout the life course and where preventative actions can be most effective
- **Intervention**: Identifying the support needed in the here and now for people currently experiencing homelessness

Prevention

A range of preventative actions emerged at different levels, ranging from national-level policies to assistance with interpersonal relationships:

1. Availability of affordable private and social housing
2. Legislation for improved security of tenure
3. Proactive intervention at times of crisis
4. Mediation support between teenagers and their parents or carers
5. Improved mental health support in the workplace

At both a national and local level, the *availability of affordable*[29] *private and social housing* is very limited. It has long been recognised that investment in affordable housing is crucial to homelessness prevention (and will likely have an impact on homelessness relief, too). Even with housing benefit top-up, Oxford's high housing costs makes the private rented sector unaffordable to people on low incomes, as Ryan describes below. Evidence linking greater availability of private rented accommodation with lower risks of homelessness suggests that the absence of affordable housing in the private rented sector could have a direct impact on the risk of homelessness in Oxford (Bramley and Fitzpatrick, 2018).

"It was just, I went to a letting agent. I went to quite a few and they were all…they weren't really reasonable, affordable for me."
(Ryan, male, 30-39)

Indeed, the difficulties some of our participants relayed in finding affordable accommodation and the poor-quality accommodation that some were prepared to accept reinforces the need for greater provision of and access to affordable private and social housing. Oxford City Council operates several help to rent initiatives, including the Lord Mayor's Deposit Guarantee Scheme (effectively providing a deposit for private rented

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[29] When discussing housing affordability, we are referring to social or private sector housing that is affordable to low-income tenants, not to schemes such as shared ownership and the affordable rent schemes, which are not affordable to those experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

accommodation), Home Choice Scheme (which helps low-income tenants to find private-sector accommodation by offering incentives to landlords) and Rent Guarantee Scheme (which provides financial and tenancy management support for families at risk of homelessness). These are good examples of small-scale initiatives that can improve access to housing and (slightly) reduce pressure on council housing. In recognition of their geographic variation, Crisis recently called on the UK government to set up a national deposit guarantee scheme (Gousy, 2016).

To succeed, these local initiatives require support from national-level policies. As discussed above, gaps between housing costs and the value of incomes or benefits creates considerable challenges to affordability and vulnerability to homelessness among low-income groups. Reversing the reduction in Local Housing Allowance (LHA) introduced in 2011 – or, better still, removing LHA altogether – would reduce the proportion of low-income renters whose Housing Benefit is insufficient to cover their rental costs and consequently make housing more affordable for this group

Legislation for improved security of tenure could also protect against transitions from private housing into homelessness. The end of an assured shorthold tenancy is a significant precipitating factor into statutory homelessness, accounting for 22 per cent of households owed a prevention or relief duty in England between April 2018 and June 2019 (MHCLG, n.d.), although more detailed analyses reveal that the growth in this proportion over time reflects the growth of the private rented sector overall, rather than growing insecurity within this tenure (Rhodes and Rugg, 2018). Furthermore, the risk of homelessness varies considerably between different types of tenant, so the short-term nature of assured shorthold tenancies does not by itself make tenants likely to face homelessness (O'Leary et al., 2018).

Scotland introduced indefinite rental contracts in December 2017, so offers a test case into the potential impact of greater residential security in the private rented sector on homelessness. A YouGov survey of 752 private renters in Scotland found that the proportion who reported worrying about becoming homeless was half as high for those on the new, more secure tenancies than the older, less secure tenancies (15 and 29 per cent, respectively), although initial evidence shows no change in the number of people becoming homeless from the private rented sector in Scotland (Shelter, 2019). At present there are no plans for England and Wales to follow suit, as consultation on a three-year tenancy model revealed limited support for such changes among both tenants and landlords (MHCLG, 2019b).

Much has also been made of the planned abolition of Section 21 (so-called 'no-fault') evictions, which currently allow landlords to end a tenancy with two months' notice, and was framed as a measure to increase security in the private rented sector. However, questions have been raised over the potential impact of this change. Recent figures demonstrate that 90 per cent of tenancies in England are ended by tenants (MHCLG, 2018), although this headline figure may conceal significant variation and it is possible that landlords end a greater proportion of tenancies among low-income groups who have more restricted housing options. Among tenancies ended by landlords, evidence from a recent

landlords survey in England and Wales revealed that arrears (37.1 per cent), anti-social behaviour (9.4 per cent) or damage to property (8.9 per cent) collectively accounted for over half of these tenancies ending (O'Leary et al., 2018), which will be unaffected under revised legislation. Indeed, the small number of participants who became homeless from the private rented sector when their landlord ended the tenancy generally had rent arrears so their landlords had clear grounds for eviction, therefore this group would not be protected by the planned abolition of Section 21 evictions.

Opponents to these legislative changes have also suggested that they could backfire if landlords become more restrictive when choosing tenants (barring benefit claimants or low-income groups, for example) or exiting the market entirely. Careful consideration is clearly needed over how to balance the need for improved security in the private rented sector against the potential for policy changes to inadvertently further restrict housing options for those who already have the fewest resources and choices.

Early help, in the form of *proactive intervention at times of crisis* such as bereavement or relationship breakdown (parental or own) could be very valuable. As outlined above, many of our participants had experienced significant loss in their early years, thus more attention is needed on how to offer intensive support at these times of loss. Equally, while crises during the early years were arguably particularly significant, it is important not to overlook such experiences at other stages of the lifecourse. Job loss, relationship breakdown and other traumatic events created a vulnerability to homelessness, regardless of age. Three of our participants became homeless when 50 or over, reinforcing the importance of support throughout the lifecourse. At the national level, financial provision in the form of non-repayable crisis grants could help people bridge the financial difficulties brought about by relationship breakdown. Ending the five-week wait for Universal Credit would also provide financial protection at this time. At the local level, schemes such as the Lord Mayor's Deposit Guarantee Scheme may be effective in helping people bridge the gap of changing personal and financial circumstances. Greater mental health provision is also crucial to support people at times of crisis. Such support could be extended to employers in the form of designated leave (akin to bereavement or parental leave) to those experiencing significant relationship breakdown. While this intensive support is difficult to envisage in the current climate of cuts to mental health support for young people, such interventions have considerable potential to prevent longer-term negative outcomes both in housing, and on wider measures of work, criminal justice, and mental health.

On a similar theme, *mediation support between teenagers and their parents or carers* could offer protection against homelessness, both in the short and longer term. As described above, early independent living and teen homelessness often led to long term homelessness, so targeting preventative efforts during the teenage years could pay off both individually and economically. For some of our participants who left home to live independently or became homeless as teenagers, preventative services such as family mediation may have enabled young people to remain living at home for longer.

The Homelessness Code of Guidance advises local authorities to include mediation as a preventative measure for 16- and 17-year-olds who approach them as homeless (MHCLG, 2019a). However such initiatives are not a statutory requirement and provision is not universal. Oxford City Council offers informal mediation by Housing Needs Officers, but this is unlikely to be an adequate substitute for specialised provision. This approach could be strengthened by accompanying community hosting initiatives such as Nightstop, which offer breathing space for young people to spend a few nights in a safe space out of the family home with the aim of reducing family tensions and enable young people to remain in the family home for longer. However, these initiatives rely on volunteers and are geographically variable (not currently available in Oxford[30]), limiting their potential impact and the extent to which councils can reliably deliver a combination of mediation and community hosting. It is also crucial to note that mediation is not appropriate in all cases. Mediation is not suitable in situations of abuse or violence – which several participants reported – and relies upon parental co-operation, which will again not be present in all instances.

Finally, ***improved mental health support in the workplace*** could prove valuable by helping people remain in work and thus provide the financial stability to manage a tenancy. Some of our participants wanted to work but as Amber describes below, relevant support was not always available and people were sometimes treated badly at work.

"The place I worked at wasn't very supportive, they didn't understand what was going on. Because I'd gone from being a really, really hard worker to all of a sudden being sick all the time and not being there and needing to be away from everything. So, they didn't understand that and they were very, very unsupportive of it. To the point that managers would be very snide to me. So, I ended up leaving, leaving that job because I couldn't cope."
(Amber, female, 20-29)

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[30] The Sanctuary Hosting initiative operates in Oxford and surrounding counties, offering community hosting to refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable migrants.

Intervention

While prevention is clearly preferable to intervention, our interviews revealed several potential opportunities both during experiences of homelessness, and at the point of transition more specifically.

1. Monitoring of and action on anti-social behaviour in shared accommodation
2. Initiatives that promote access to work
3. More consistent housing support when leaving institutions
4. Actions that (re)build positive social networks

First, *monitoring anti-social behaviour in shared accommodation* has potential to improve security for people living in shared housing. This applies to shared housing in the private and social rented sectors, and in supported accommodation. Encountering anti-social behaviour from others was a significant influence in people's decisions to leave accommodation and transition into homelessness. Better support or mediation to deal with anti-social behaviour could therefore reduce the risk that people leave shared accommodation because they feel unsafe. While our participants tended to describe experiences of anti-social behaviour from others, those engaging in such behaviours also need suitable support to address its underlying causes. For example, Callum described below the difficulties he faced when sharing accommodation in the homeless pathway. In the private rented sector, additional duties could be placed on the landlords of shared housing to monitor anti-social behaviour and appoint an independent mediator. In shared social housing and supported accommodation, such provision would be the responsibility of accommodation providers as part of the package of support offered to tenants.

"I've got to be up in the morning. I'm washing…. I've only got a couple of sets of clothes and one of them I'm wearing to work every day, pulling bins and that and they stink and I'm handwashing them every day. The guy downstairs is turning the radiators off so I can't dry my clothes every night. And all that, just keeping me awake and all that, I just ended up walking out in the end, losing my job, losing everything."
(Callum, male, 40-49)

Problems with anti-social behaviour were not confined to those living in shared accommodation, although they were arguably more intense. Some participants faced difficulties with neighbours when living in self-contained accommodation that appeared to concentrate groups of people with high needs; consideration needs to be given to the collective support needs of such groups. Illustrating the concentration of issues in some housing types, Tinsel's account of the antisocial behaviour she encountered in her housing association flat led to her own eviction due to antisocial behaviour (see below). Attempts to reduce eviction due to anti-social behaviour are particularly important to people's longer-term housing prospects as such evictions could create a barrier to accessing social or private housing in future.

"Um, so when my neighbour was evicted um someone else moved in and this person liked his music, his alcohol and his drugs er which caused me a lot of disruption."
(Tinsel, female, 30-39)

Initiatives that promote access to work – either by retaining existing work or securing new work – could also prove effective by giving people an income that could enable a move into independent housing. Many people described wanting to work, and several had worked while they were homeless. Others mentioned work-related activities such as CV and computer classes offered by Aspire and Crisis. Unfortunately, participants who were rough sleeping found it hard to obtain or retain work partly due to stigma, as Phil's case shows:

"And with the wages I was getting and the Universal Credit, I bought a tent and a sleeping bag. And uh, a big bag like that and kept all my clothes and everything in it, and my toiletries and things like that. And my work uniform, I always kept that clean. But there's a launderette, so on my days off, I used to go the launderette and clean all my clothes and my sleeping bag. But then, the [pub] found out I was homeless. So they said to me, you cannot work here with no address."
(Phil, male, 50+)

Even with a regular job, Oxford's high housing costs mean that participants faced a long wait in temporary or hostel accommodation before they could afford a private sector tenancy of their own, as Tom acknowledged:

"Yeah, purely because I'm going to have to get a job, which I want, obviously. But get a job, get a serious amount of money behind me to pay deposits, first and last month and everything like that. And then get all my services put in, it's, it's not cheap, so…it's not like, oh I've got a job I can move in somewhere straight away. It's, I've got a job and have to wait six months and save up every penny and then go and move somewhere and spend all that money."
(Tom, male, 30-39)

Bearing this in mind, initiatives to promote access to work need to be designed and delivered in conjunction with considerations for people's housing needs. Maintaining work is challenging for those without stable housing, as Amelia found when she was placed in temporary B&B accommodation after her sofa-surfing arrangement ended:

"I was a customer services manager so I was managing a team of people, it was very high stress and pressure. Um, great pay but um it was too stressful. Um, because I would take work home with me and a B&B environment wasn't great for that. I couldn't concentrate. So, I gave up my job and started claiming benefits."
(Amelia, female, 40-49)

Instead, initiatives to secure stable housing might be a more effective route to promoting work in people who are currently or formerly homeless. Housing First approaches – such as that currently being piloted in South Oxfordshire – provide rapid rehousing for homeless people with complex needs into mainstream housing while providing the intensive wrap-around support that might be needed to sustain their tenancy. Evaluations of these schemes have demonstrated positive outcomes for housing sustainment alongside wider benefits to mental health, social integration, substance use and anti-social behaviour (Bretherton and Pleace, 2015). However, the scant available evidence does not identify a significant role of Housing First approaches on work outcomes (Bretherton and Pleace, 2015). For many people – especially those experiencing substance use, mental health or

other complex needs –maintaining a tenancy is a challenge and an achievement in itself. It does of course remain possible that by addressing some of the key challenges to housing sustainment and people's general wellbeing, Housing First approaches could also contribute to people's ability to gain and maintain paid work in the longer term. However, there is as yet no evidence to support this possibility.

As already noted, institutions could provide the opportunity to gain support and instigate change. More *consistent housing support for people leaving institutions* would facilitate this goal. For some of our participants – commonly those leaving secondary or psychiatric care – institutions provided an opportunity to gain help and, in some cases, stable housing. Far less support was available to those leaving prison, exacerbating vulnerability. The recent Trailblazer programme involved multi-agency working to embed community navigators in hospitals, prisons and other services with the aim to identify people at risk of homelessness and intervene before they reach crisis point. Early evaluations reported promising findings: in 46 per cent of 706 completed cases, homelessness was either prevented among those identified as at risk, or accommodation was secured for people already experiencing homelessness (Oxford City Council, 2019). In light of these recent optimistic evaluations, we recognise that some of our participants' less positive experiences predated this initiative.

Finally, *actions that seek to (re)build positive social networks* could help connect people with sources of support that might protect against future homelessness. These sources of support could include family, friends, neighbours or colleagues.

5. Local services in Oxford

The second presentation delivered at the event focussed on the local services that work to support homeless people in Oxford. In the context of the wide range of statutory and non-statutory organisations offering a range of services aimed at supporting people experiencing homelessness, we wanted to discover how people felt about these services.

Overview of services

A wide range of overlapping services were available, as outlined in Table 4. Here we focus on services specifically for people experiencing homelessness, so Table 4 does not include all organisations mentioned by our participants. Some organisations offered a range of services, for example Homeless Oxfordshire are a large provider of hostel accommodation in O'Hanlon House, and also provides a day service from this location.

Table 4: Statutory and non-statutory services supporting homeless people in Oxford

Type of service	Detail	Examples
Accommodation services	Short- and long-term accommodation	Statutory services on the homeless pathway, charity-run accommodation
Emergency accommodation services	Available during winter only	Oxford Winter Nightshelter, Severe Weather Emergency Protocol
Day services	Providing food, laundry facilities, showers	The Porch, the Gatehouse, Homeless Oxfordshire (O'Hanlon House)
Educational services	Providing training, activities, education	Aspire, Crisis Skylight
Advice services	Providing guidance, signposting, advice	Shelter, Citizen's Advice Bureau, Oxford City Council, local advice centres
Health services	Physical and mental health, specialist care	Luther Street Medical Centre, mainstream GP practices
Spaces outside of homeless services	Spaces that were not services for people experiencing homelessness but widely used by this group	Public library, public spaces, mosque

What people valued

Looking first at what people valued, participants' responses covered a range of dimensions from the physical (space, meeting multiple needs) to the interpersonal (staff skills, clear communication) and emotional (purposeful activity), demonstrating that people's needs were not solely to do with housing or practical matters, but also related to feeling purposeful and doing something they enjoyed.

1. Having their own space
2. Services that met people's multiple needs
3. Clear communication from staff
4. Staff with excellent interpersonal skills
5. Purposeful yet enjoyable activity

Having their own space was important as it offered privacy, control, safety, and stability. Being able to 'shut the door' really mattered to people who had lived without privacy or security while homeless (and, sometimes, while housed too), as did being in control of their environment and the people they interacted with:

"I got this double room to myself you know, my own door to close"
(Victoria, female, 40-49)

Privacy and having space were cited as reasons for a range of housing decisions, including preferring to sleep rough or stay in a tent over supported accommodation. The perceived absence of privacy was also cited as an issue that influenced people's ability to sustain a tenancy in shared housing (both before becoming homeless and while on the pathway). Looking at specific services, the Oxford Winter Nightshelter (OWNS) was very popular, with participants reflecting the peace and quiet in this setting compared with hostels in the homeless pathway[31], although some did comment on the lack of geographical continuity at OWNS, which rotated around several churches in the city. OWNS refers people using their services as 'guests' and volunteers bed down in the same space as people accessing the service; this way of interacting with people who were homeless was recognised as respectful and cited by several participants as a further reason why OWNS was valued.

Participants really valued *services that met people's multiple needs*, as illustrated in Daniel's description of the day service at O'Hanlon House:

"You could um, have a shower, you could wash your clothes. You could ask for a...for clean underwear if you needed it. Um, there was always lunch time meals, at lunch time."
(Daniel, male, 30-39)

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[31] As a volunteer-run initiative, OWNS only accommodation people without the most complex needs and does not allow alcohol or drug use, so is arguably better placed to provide a more quiet and restful setting than hostels within the homeless pathway.

The basic tasks of being able to shower and launder clothes was very important to maintain people's sense of self. Furthermore, some of our participants were working, so remaining clean and presentable was especially important for these people. Several participants used the day service every day.

Services such as the day service were also valued because they gave people a place to be during the daytime. The majority of our participants were not working and therefore needed a place to spend their time. The social side of day services was commented on positively by some.

Clear communication from staff was also highly valued. Participants appreciated being given accurate information and advice, communicated in an understandable and empowering way, as demonstrated in Nicola's description of the debt advice she received at the Agnes Smith advice centre:

"They're really clear and put it in layman's terms"
(Nicola, female, 30-39)

Nicola later described how Shelter talked her through the process of being evicted and what she had to do, and once they couldn't help her any more, told her where to go next. Alongside practical help and signposting, empowerment was important. Our participants often had little control over important aspects of their lives, so were glad to feel like they could do something to change their situation for the better.

Related to clear communication, people valued *staff with excellent interpersonal skills*. Participants reported instances of staff being approachable, helpful, understanding, and kind. For example, when staying in a hostel, Amelia relayed how someone came to tell her to look through a donation of shoes because they knew her boots needed replacing. Likewise, Phoebe's key worker made her coffee because she was having a bad day and he knew she liked it. While perhaps small, these gestures were both practical and empathetic.

Finally, participants valued the opportunity to engage in *purposeful yet enjoyable activity*, illustrated by Paul's description of art classes at the Porch:

"Um, uh there was an um, art thing on Wednesday that just took your mind off the fact you was homeless"
(Paul, male, 30-39)

Exercise classes, yoga and art encouraged positive interaction that helped build confidence and self-esteem. Computer skills courses were also valued as being useful and helping to fill a skills gap. The characteristics are likely to contrast with the characteristics of different interactions, notably the information demands made of people when seeking help from the council and homeless pathway. In contrast, people seemed to value purposeful activity that was enjoyable and not a chore.

What people wanted to change

Turning now to consider what people wanted to change, the key issues raised were related to staff, and the suitability and flexibility of support. Participants' answers demonstrated a wish to exert some agency and choice over their circumstances.

1. Communication issues with staff
2. Wider staffing issues
3. Accommodation that did not suit people's needs
4. Lack of choice, agency, and control

While many participants made highly positive comments, *communication issues with staff* were reported by several people. Homelessness is characterised by dependency on others, and clear and effective communication could partly redress this balance by keeping people informed about their situation. Joined-up working was sometimes missing, for example some people reported little or no support following prison or rehab, meaning that some left prison to the streets. Similarly, participants reported that communication from staff about processes, eligibility and expected time scale was sometimes unclear. While some people did appear to be filling their time, others were not, and not knowing when help or accommodation would become available meant that people could not make plans, as Joe found:

"So, I was waiting for a room. They said there was a room coming up, I kept saying, 'How long?', 'We're not sure, we don't know'"
(Joe, male, 40-49)

Wider staffing issues were also reported. These centred on limited training, attitudes, overwork, and loss of relationships when keyworkers left or changed role. Staffing issues meant that people did not always have continuous support and could 'fall through the gaps' when staff members left or changed role; something that was not always clearly communicated or understood. We acknowledge that some of these issues may reflect challenges related to staff burnout or precarity so may be institutional or practical rather than personal in nature. Nonetheless, the presence of these issues demonstrates a need for services to consider the wellbeing of their staff alongside that of their service users.

As we have seen throughout, people's primary concern was not necessarily related to their housing, and our participants demonstrated considerable agency when navigating their housing and homelessness experiences. Thus, *accommodation that did not suit people's needs* was not accepted unproblematically. It is hoped that the new assessment centre and shelter at Floyd's Row[32] will overcome some of these issues.

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[32] Floyd's Row is a new assessment centre and 56-bed shelter in the centre of Oxford. It is commissioned by Oxford City Council and run by St Mungo's. Its goal is to get people off the streets quickly by offering improved assessments alongside accommodation and support services, including medical, drugs and alcohol support. Floyd's Row opened in January 2020 and with the expectation to be fully operational by April 2020. At the time of writing (May 2020) no further information was available but a delay to the full opening seems likely.

Linked with people's value of privacy, the converse was problems in shared accommodation, which some people really struggled with due to complex needs including trauma, mental health, and autism. Accommodation was not always suitable for practical reasons, for example the use of bunk beds in some hostels was challenging for older participants and those with disabilities; room sharing in general could introduce issues for people with mental health problems or autism spectrum condition. Finally, mixed accommodation was reported to be threatening to some women.

More broadly, the atmosphere in hostels was problematic for some, who described hostel accommodation as loud, stressful and chaotic. Some described the challenges of living in a space where people were shouting all night. Alcohol and drug use in hostels was off-putting to many, and several people reported avoiding the hostels for these reasons, as Ryan describes below. For those who had previously used drugs or alcohol, the hostels were feared as presenting the risk of relapse, highlighting the lack of suitable accommodation for this group.

"I don't like a lot of people in there, there's a lot of drugs in there as well"
(Ryan, male, 30-39)

The perceived safety in accommodation was also a key issue, for several reasons. Concerns about safety related to people's physical and psychological safety, and in relation to their belongings. Alcohol and drug use made participants feel psychologically unsafe as people started arguments or asked for money for alcohol or drugs. Physically, needles on the floor made people feel physically unsafe. Inzali likewise described not feeling safe following a fire in the hostel she was staying in:

"I'm thinking, thinking over and over, this place is not safe like my home"
(Inzali, female, 50+)

Finally, *lack of choice, agency, and control* within the homeless pathway provides the converse of the clear communication and own space that participants identified as valuable. Participants reported having to eat at fixed times and book washing machines if they wanted to use them. While perhaps necessary for practical reasons, such rigid rules and conditionality risked creating dependency that corrodes people's self-esteem and could undermine future independent living. This very structured way of living also risks separating homeless people from the non-homeless population, which could exacerbate distinctions between these groups and may impede future attempts at independent living within mainstream housing. Phoebe described her experience of staying in a hostel that had no cooking facilities for residents:

"You can't just put a load of washing on, you've got to book a laundry slot, then you've got to get your washing, lock your door, go down in the lift, yeah then get the key, then put them in"
(Phoebe, female, 50+)

Issues with outreach

Separate from participants' general comments about services for homeless people, several people made comments specifically about the outreach services[33] that are worth considering in greater depth. Outreach are important because for many people they are the first contact with homeless services. Distrust or ambivalence towards outreach could isolate people from support. Several people were homeless for long periods of time (sometimes years) before making the decision to engage with support, and maintaining good relationships with outreach teams is crucial for people experiencing homelessness to feel able to seek support when they are ready to. Participants generally saw being verified as helpful but two key issues emerged, as follows.

1. Feeling harassed by outreach services
2. Concern that sleeping places would get closed or taken down

Some people were repeatedly woken and consequently *felt harassed by outreach services*. The expectation that verification would prompt people to engage with support was not shared by all our participants. In particular, those with no local connection did not feel they could get any help beyond accessing day services, so they had little to gain from verification, which could not help everyone.

Additionally, some participants were *concerned that sleeping places would get closed or taken down* when discovered. Some people chose to sleep rough (often in tents) in remote areas to avoid being disturbed, thereby isolating them from services. As above, some people were (or believed themselves to be) ineligible for assistance so had legitimate reasons for wanting to continue sleeping rough, remaining undisturbed and preserving their sleeping places. More worryingly, news reports that St Mungo's outreach teams have in the past worked with Home Office immigration controls to identify rough sleepers who are in the UK illegally (The Guardian, 2018) reinforces some participants' decision to conceal themselves while sleeping rough. When considering this possibility, we emphasise that we do not know how widespread these practices have been, and they were not mentioned by any participant in this project. The potential impact of these practices on people's experiences of contact with outreach services in Oxford is therefore unknown and likely minimal. Nonetheless, the acknowledgement that outreach services may work in co-operation with organisations with different motivations could undermine the development and maintenance of trusting relationships between outreach teams and people sleeping rough, and thereby increase vulnerability.

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[33] Oxford City Council commissions St Mungo's to deliver outreach services, which are provided by Oxford Street Population Outreach Team (OxSPOT). The OxSPOT team makes contact with rough sleepers and seeks to help them to access accommodation and support services. These contacts are the first step in becoming verified, which is needed to access statutory-funded accommodation services (except emergency provision such as the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol). Referrals to OxSPOT can be made by phone or via the StreetLink website by people sleeping rough or members of the public

For policy-makers and service providers it is therefore important to recognise that when people who do not engage with services or appear to want to be on the streets, this is a rejection of what is available to them, or perceived to be available to them, not necessarily a rejection of wanting their own home.

Services in the Oxford context

Participants made various more specific comments about the nature of services available in the city of Oxford. These comments can be grouped into four key themes:

1. Connections to Oxford
2. Development of social networks
3. No local connection
4. The appeal of Oxford

As described in Section 4 above, while the majority of our participants had a clear *connection to Oxford*, eight participants had come to the city when they were already homeless (both deliberately or serendipitously), thereby becoming part of Oxford's homeless population. Others were moved into Oxford once on the homeless pathway because services were not available elsewhere in the county, for example Victoria was placed in Simon House from her hometown of Banbury, which has no homeless hostel. After being homeless for some time, one person undertook a deliberative internet search, identifying Oxford as a place with good homelessness services. Part of Oxford's appeal may lie in the 'hub' of services that met people's full range of needs, and is set to continue in a more consolidated form at Floyd's Row. As well as drawing a small number of participants to the area, the availability of services may also encourage people to stay in Oxford. Without endorsing this approach, the city's reputation for comprehensive service provision supporting the most vulnerable is something that should engender considerable pride among both statutory and non-statutory service providers.

Among those who were homeless when they came to Oxford, some then put down roots or *developed support networks* in the city and consequently did not want to move on. Adrian's account of the friendships he developed with other people experiencing homelessness in Oxford contrasted with his very transitory lifestyle prior to coming to Oxford that included accommodation with work, spells in prison, sofa surfing, and in charity-funded hostel accommodation in several places:

"Bonn Square used to be full of 'em [homeless people] and it… and it was summer. So, they used to come all day and they used to sit on the… you could sit right at the front, or on the monument or on the grass. But these boys used to go there. So, I've got the drink for 'em and… erm… so, they'd always give me a drink and that"
(Adrian, male, 50+)

Other people had *no local connection* anywhere, either because they had moved to the UK fairly recently, had moved around, or they had been homeless so long that they had lost any connection they formerly had. In these circumstances, simply feeling 'at home' may provide an inducement to stay, as described by Tom, who is not from Oxford but moved here after his release from prison because his father lives in the area:

Interviewer: Have you thought that, moving somewhere else outside of Oxford or?
Tom: I have, um, I like Oxford, I quite like Oxford.
Interviewer: What do you like about it?
Tom: I just love it, it's my home. I can walk round Oxford and know I'm home, right. I feel more at home walking up and down the main street in Oxford than I would sitting in a hostel.
(Tom, male, 30-39)

Finally, *Oxford seemed to hold an appeal* for people, whether they were homeless or not at the time of moving to the city. The tolerant, varied, and international culture within the city may have proved attractive to people whose lives have been lived outside the mainstream, some for many years. Indeed, Emma explained how she felt at home in Oxford when she visited on a day trip, long before she experienced homelessness:

"And also there were leaflets for things and concerts and all sorts of stuff going on and I thought, this is fascinating, it's almost like a little novel town, it's something really… and I thought, well, I could just hide here, you know, and, and I could just sit and read a book and be scruffy and it… in suburbia that can start to look odd…"
(Emma, female, 40-49)

Policy ideas

Participants' accounts of their encounters with services – both what they valued and what they wanted to change – suggest a range of actions that could improve these encounters. These suggestions can be grouped into the following themes:

1. Ensuring people feel safe in hostels through appropriate provision
2. Co-ordinated support that is not confined to the homeless pathway
3. Opportunities for people to engage in meaningful activities
4. Promoting positive social networks

First, linked with the comments above about the importance of people having their own space, it is crucial to *ensure that people feel safe in hostels through appropriate provision*. In particular, the provision of female-only spaces is important given some female participants' accounts of feeling uncomfortable or unsafe when accommodated near men. It is encouraging that the new facilities at Floyd's Row includes some female-only provision, going forward it important that this remains protected. Likewise, the challenges faced in hostels by people with ASC suggest that creating autism-aware facilities could improve the experiences of this group and potentially encourage them to engage with accommodation services instead of sleeping rough. In particular, changes to the hostel environment that recognise the sensory sensitivity experienced by many people with ASC (such as replacing bright lights with dimmer ones and creating quieter spaces in hostels) could be fairly simple and inexpensive to implement but offer a significant improvement on hostel conditions for this group. Such changes are also expected to have wider benefits to people who appreciate a quieter environment, such as those with certain mental health conditions. As noted when discussing what people valued, the Oxford Winter Nightshelter was rated highly, with participants speaking highly of its features, including small numbers, prohibition of drug and alcohol use, feeling of equality (related to the small number of people bedding down), an environment of respect and sharing breakfast. While it is clear that some of these features are specific to this setting, it nonetheless raises the question of whether some of these features could be transferred into the mainstream hostel sector, with positive effects.

Second, *co-ordinated support that is not confined to the homeless pathway* has potential to add value to people's experiences and promote engagement with services. As already noted, participants did not always experience continuous support within the homeless pathway. A number of participants had several support workers, which may not represent the best use of resources, and made it difficult to participants to keep appointments. Instead, measures encouraging support workers to work in co-ordination both within and across organisations are crucial both to avoid duplication of efforts and to ensure that support needs are not accidentally missed. This is particularly important for the most vulnerable people with multiple or complex needs. Later on, holistic long-term floating support is needed to ensure that support is not confined to crisis moments and continues after people become housed. Such provision is particularly important in light of evidence that the shift from homelessness and housing can involve a loss of networks and associated social support which can undermine the potential for people to sustain their housing tenancies (Mcnaughton and Sanders, 2007).

Furthermore, *opportunities for people to engage in meaningful activities* were spoken of very highly by a group who may have limited opportunities to do something purposeful. Activities including art, computer classes, and gardening gave people a purpose that was often missing for those who were not working. Our interviews gave many examples of services offering opportunities for meaningful activity; these should be continued and strengthened where possible.

Finally, *promoting positive social networks* could prove protective both against initial homelessness and offer support for people experiencing homelessness. Some people lacked social networks, leaving them vulnerable at the point of job loss or relationship breakdown. This seemed particularly challenging for young people. Potentially helpful interventions could include family mediation support to maintain familial networks and keep young people living within the family home, where possible. Wider initiatives aimed at promoting positive social networks could include low-cost community-based recreational activities, and social initiatives within the workplace. It is important that *positive* social networks are pursued: for some of our participants, networks were not a positive source of support and in some instances introduced to encouraged participants to use drugs or alcohol. Furthermore, seeking networks that embed people within the community could provide particularly valuable and may help counter the stigma often faced by people experiencing homelessness. Embedding people in the community may also serve to mitigate against cuts in support services and strengthen people's networks in this way.

6. Workshop on lowering risks and maximising opportunities

The workshop task

We held a workshop for attendees to explore ideas for intervention aimed at tackling homelessness at different stages of the lifecourse. Many of the event's attendees work within the field of homelessness in Oxford, so we wanted to take the opportunity to harness their collective ideas for homelessness prevention and alleviation in Oxford.

Workshop participants formed groups of six to discuss the question:

> *What opportunities, across the lifetime, can be created that could either prevent homelessness or support people most effectively when they become homeless?*

Each group considered a different point in the lifecourse:

- Childhood
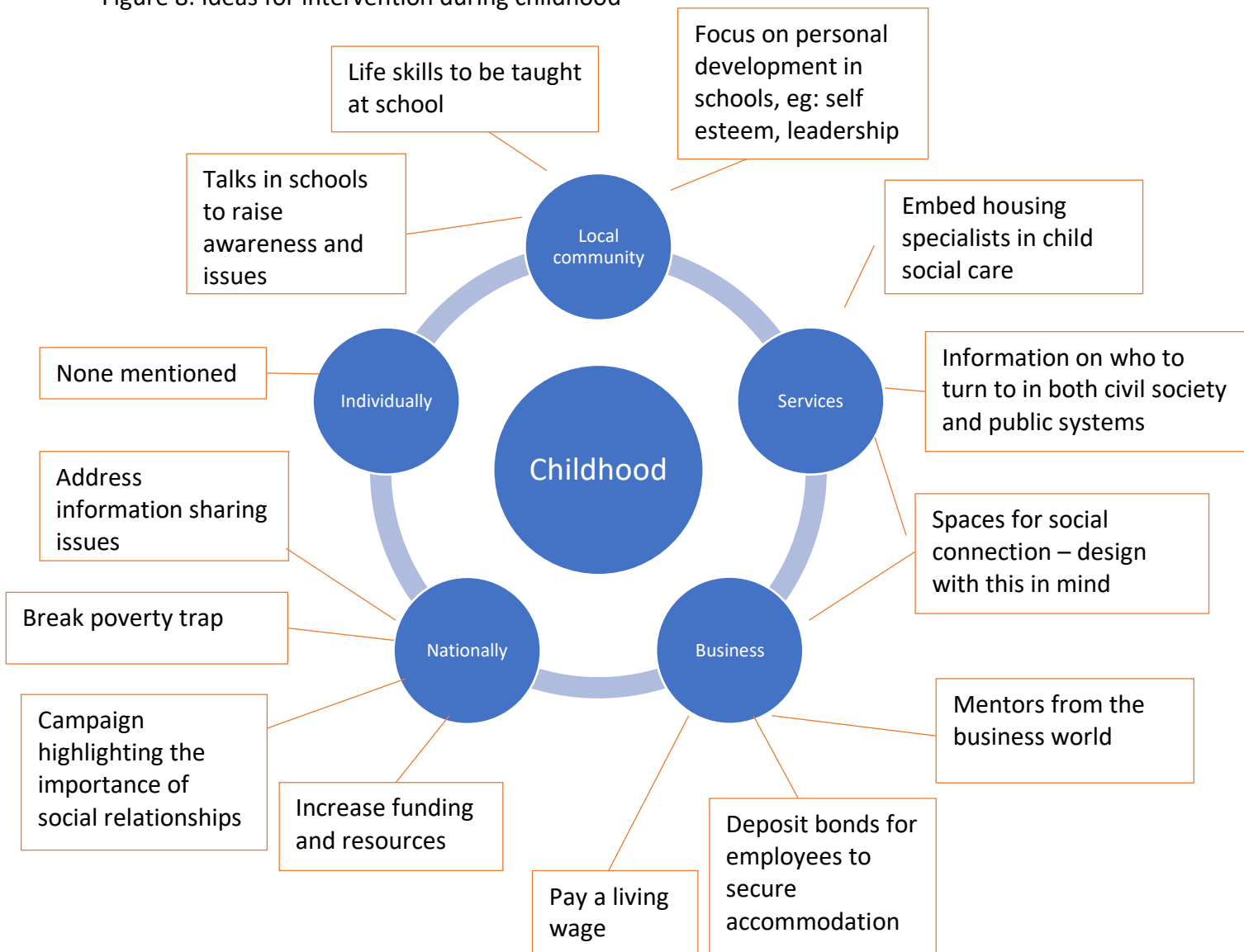- Teen and young adulthood
- Middle adulthood
- Older adulthood

Each group then considered the potential events or vulnerabilities at this point in the lifecourse, and ideas that might make a difference (actions, policies, campaigns). These actions were framed within the domains of individually, local community, nationally, services, and business, as illustrated in the figures below. The figures were printed on large sheets of paper and pinned to the wall, and the groups were asked to write their ideas on post-it notes and place these on relevant parts of the figure, as shown in Figure 7 below.

Figure 7: The workshop task in action

Workshop results

Figure 8: Ideas for intervention during childhood

Life skills to be taught at school

Focus on personal development in schools, eg: self esteem, leadership

Talks in schools to raise awareness and issues

Embed housing specialists in child social care

None mentioned

Information on who to turn to in both civil society and public systems

Address information sharing issues

Spaces for social connection – design with this in mind

Break poverty trap

Mentors from the business world

Campaign highlighting the importance of social relationships

Increase funding and resources

Pay a living wage

Deposit bonds for employees to secure accommodation

Local community

Individually

Services

Childhood

Nationally

Business

Ideas for intervention during childhood are displayed in Figure 8. Certain suggestions were made under the business domain; while this does not apply directly to children, the initiatives suggested may be relevant to their parents and therefore prove valuable to children in this way. Three key themes emerged across the different domains. First, the importance of personal relationships, ranging from a campaign highlighting personal relationships in the national domain, to a focus on personal development in schools under the local community domain, to designing spaces with personal connection in mind under the services domain. A varied and overlapping approach here could provide valuable in building children's personal relationships. A second theme evident across the domains was finance and funding: within the business domain, suggestions included paying a living wage and businesses offering deposit bonds to help employees secure accommodation, while the national level included the general suggestion to increase funding and resources for children. Finally, information and training provision emerged as a third theme across the domains, with suggestions focussing on talks in schools to raise awareness of issues, teaching life skills in schools, embedding housing specialists in child social care, and the provision of information on sources of support in civil society and public systems. It is therefore encouraging that Oxford City Council's housing and homelessness strategy for 2018-21 includes homelessness education and prevention work for young people attending Oxford schools (Oxford City Council, 2018).

Figure 9: Ideas for intervention during the teen years and early adulthood
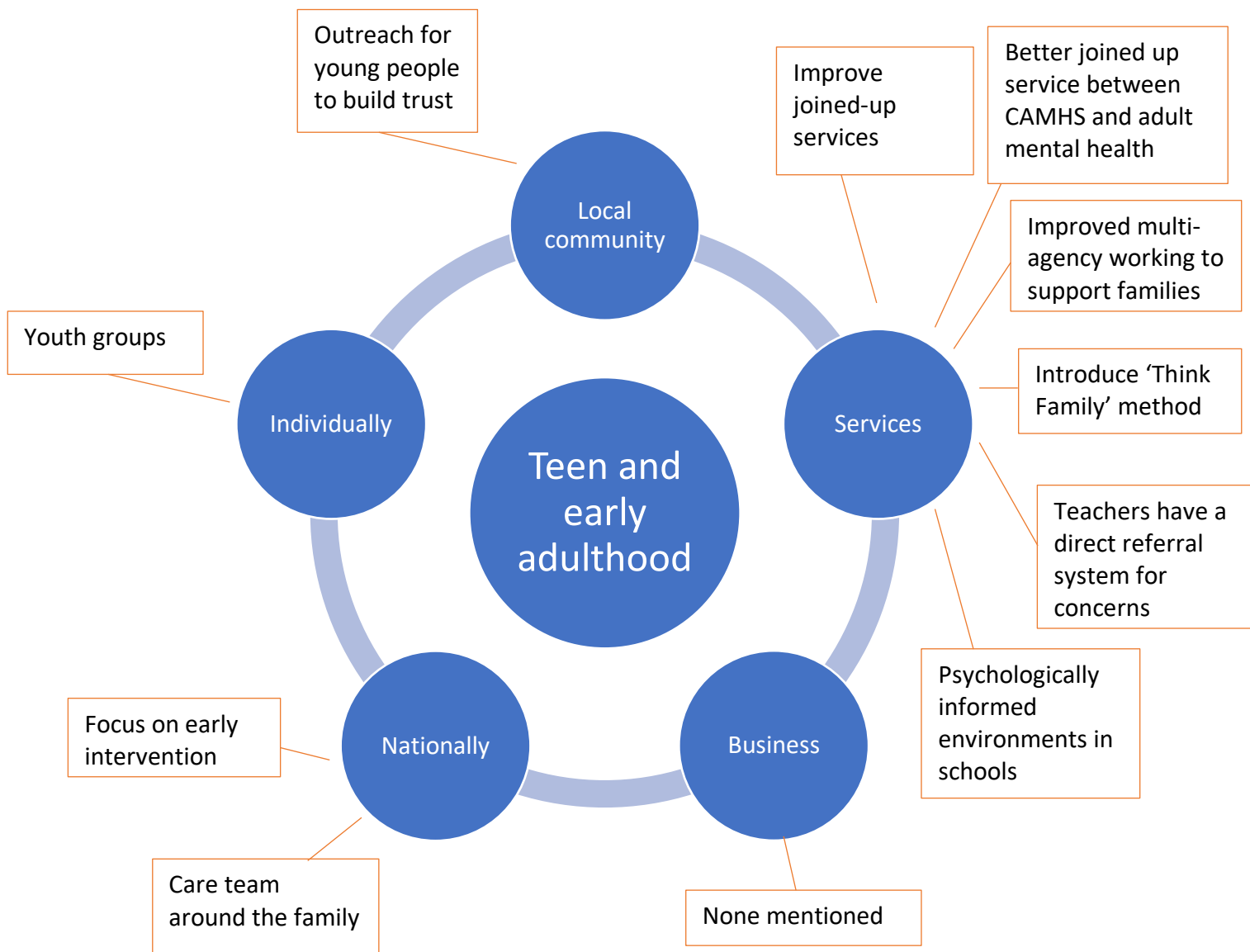

Figure 9 shows ideas for intervention during the teen years and early adulthood. Again, certain themes appeared across the dimensions. Several suggestions noted the importance of joined-up or multi-agency working to support families, including provision of a direct referral system for teachers to raise concerns about their students, and the possibility of introducing the 'Think Family' method of co-ordinated service delivery. Other suggestions focussed on promoting teen mental health, including the provision of a psychologically informed environment in schools, and collaboration between Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and adult mental health. These suggestions seem particularly relevant in light of the impact that parental separation or bereavement had on our participants throughout their lives. Relatedly, others suggested the importance of youth groups and outreach for young people, which may prove valuable in building resilience and positive social networks, and giving young people a productive way of spending their time. A large number of our participants had left the family home during the teenage years. While for some this appeared to be an unproblematic transition to the next life stage, for others it

was in response to conflict at home, and 13 of our participants became homeless as teenagers. The presence of support for young people in the form of youth groups and youth outreach could help promote positive family relationships that would enable young people to live in the family home for longer. Finally, some suggestions focussed on family support and early intervention, including through the provision of care teams working with families.

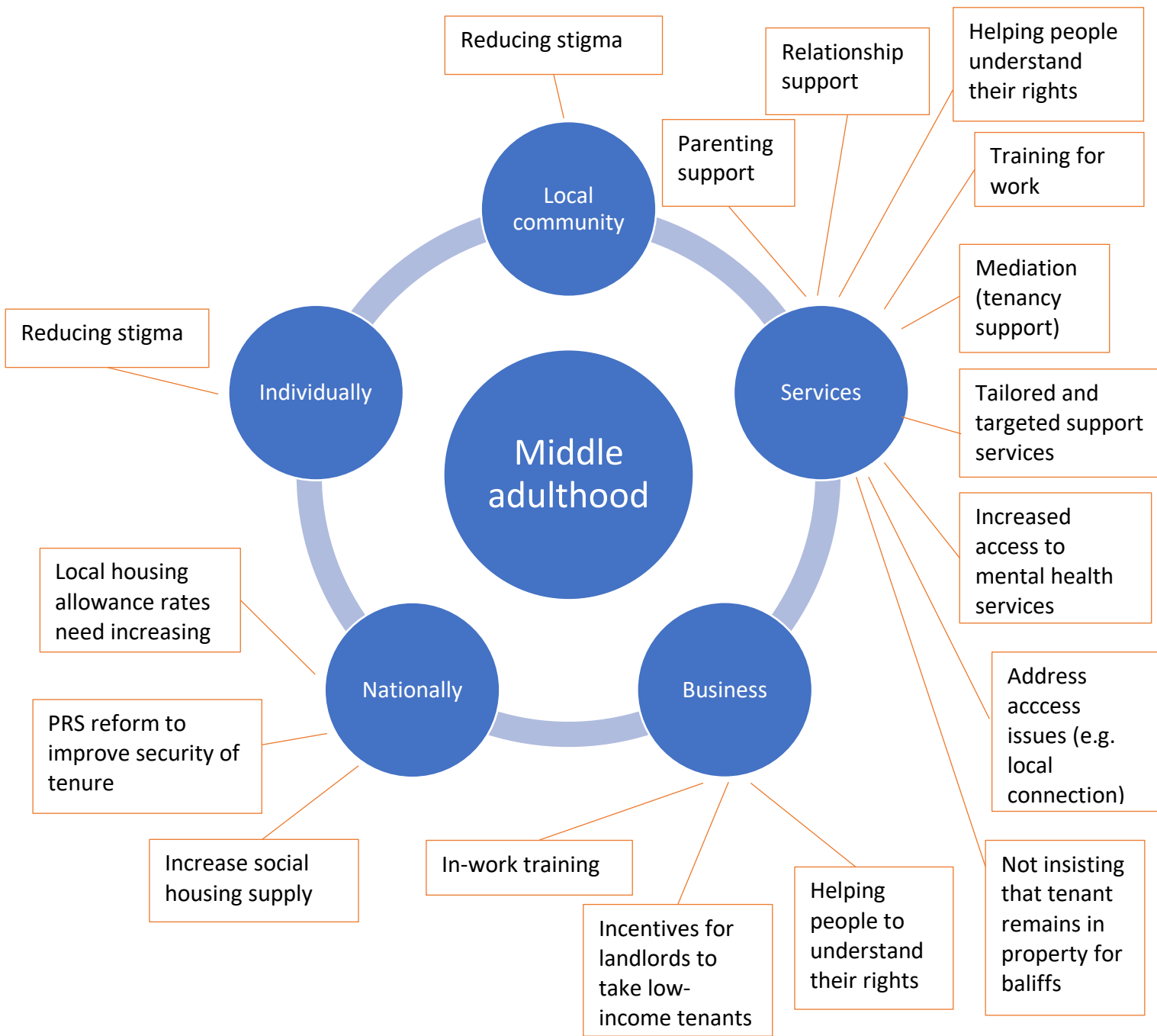Figure 10: Ideas for intervention during middle adulthood

Figure 10 shows ideas for intervention during middle adulthood. The first main theme centred on housing: increasing local housing allowance rates, improving security of tenure in the private rented sector, and increased supply of social housing. Some of these housing-related suggestions relate to processes and rules surrounding housing provision, including incentivising landlords to take low-income tenants, not insisting that tenants remain in properties when being evicted, and offering mediation to support people in maintaining their tenancies. The impact of the lack of affordable housing in Oxford on our participants was clear to see, with people resorting to poor-quality private rented sector accommodation, accruing arrears, or having no choice but to share accommodation with others experiencing similar financial precarity. Expectations of accessing social housing via the general housing register were suitably low. Several suggestions centred upon developing people's personal skills and capabilities by offering parenting and relationship support, reducing stigma, and helping people understand their rights. These person-focused interventions overlap with the third theme identified in this age group, focussing on provision of support. Suggestions included training both to prepare people for work and to help them maintain employment, although as our interviews revealed, such measures need to be accompanied by support from employees and protection from discrimination for those seeking to work while homeless. The provision of tailored and targeted support services, and increased access to mental health services were also emphasised. Access issues, in particular local connection rules, are also relevant here.

Figure 11: Ideas for intervention during older adulthood
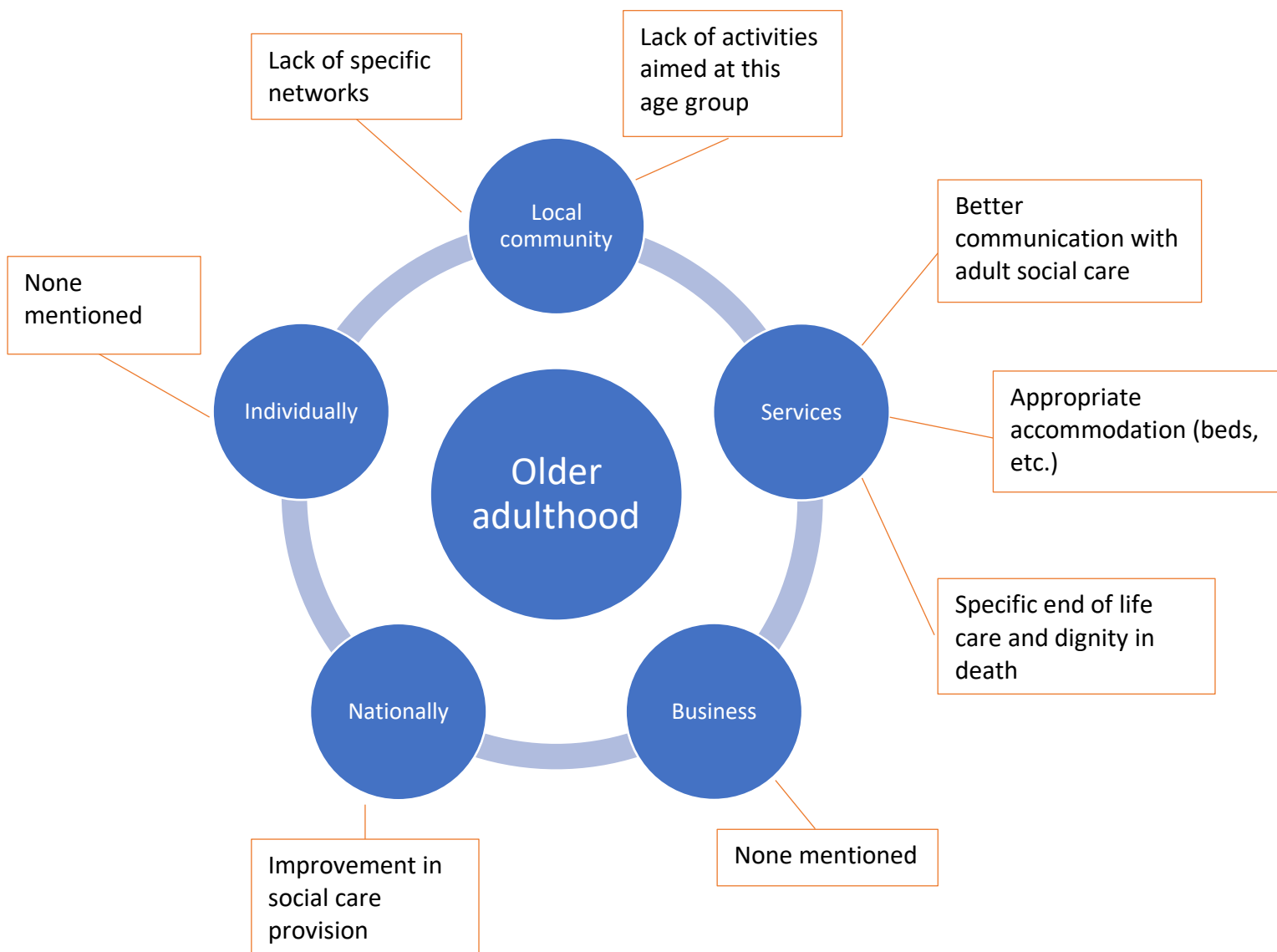
As can be seen in Figure 11, fewer suggestions for intervention were made in relation to older adulthood, although whether this reflects the workshop participants generally working with a younger client group or simply having fewer ideas cannot be determined. Suggestions focussed on ensuring appropriate and tailored support, in relation to social networks, the availability of activities aimed at this group, and accommodation options. Support needs extended to end of life care, although it should be noted that the tragically low life expectancy for people experiencing homelessness means that provision for end of life care should not be confined to older adults. Social care provision emerged as an important theme, both as something in need of improvement, and where communication could be strengthened.

Overall, some key themes were apparent in the workshop results from the different stages in the lifecourse. Improving access to support (especially mental health) and strengthening multi-agency working were suggested as being beneficial across the lifecourse. Many more specific suggestions were made in relation to the different age groups. Likewise, developing people's personal skills and capabilities through information provision and training opportunities was considered valuable at a range of ages, with actions including relationship and parenting support, work-related training, mediation, and activities aimed at building trust and promoting positive social networks. Structural factors were also noted, including increased provision of social housing, improving security of tenure in the private rented sector, tackling poverty and paying a living wage.

7. What next?

In the coming months we will be writing up the full project findings for publication in academic journals. These articles will contain more detailed analyses that aim to gain a more in-depth understanding of homelessness. We will also be considering what further research would be helpful in understanding some of the issues arising from the current project.

The event prompted several positive conversations about how our research can inform local practice and to date we have been invited to contribute to two pieces of work by Oxford City Council, the first to revise their county-wide rough sleeping strategy and the second a review of non-accommodation based services for people experiencing homelessness. We look forward to sharing our findings and feeding into these pieces of work in a valuable way.

In addition, our advice has been sought in relation to a feasibility study exploring the potential of a housing-led approach to homelessness across Oxfordshire, and to a funding proposal for a programme of health service provision for people experiencing homelessness in Oxfordshire.

We also believe that Oxford University and its constituent Colleges have a responsibility to consider their role in contributing to the context of housing and homelessness in the city of Oxford. Indeed, some of our participants had worked at the University or Colleges in the past. We are concerned that the University and Colleges could be doing more to protect both their employees and the general population from homelessness. We are seeking to engage both with the central University and – where possible – its constituent Colleges to consider their roles here. On 13th November, Elisabeth Garratt spoke at an event hosted by Blavatnik School of Government entitled '*Oxford's housing and homeless crisis: Why is it happening and what can be done?*. This event is part of the *Blavatnik School in Oxford City* initiative, which seeks to link public policy initiatives in the city of Oxford to the work of the Blavatnik School of Government. Over 200 people attended the event, including many people from the local community. The event can be viewed on the Blavatnik School of Government's YouTube channel. Following the event, Elisabeth Garratt contributed to a 'call-to-action' guide on homelessness that will soon be available on the Blavatnik School of Government's website.

Elisabeth Garratt also contributed to a podcast entitled 'Gimme Shelter, Ending Homelessness' for the *Reimagine* series hosted by the Skoll Centre for Entrepreneurship, based at Oxford University's Saïd Business School[34].

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[34] The podcast is available here: https://www.sbs.ox.ac.uk/research/centres-and-initiatives/skoll-centre-social-entrepreneurship/reimagine-podcast

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