



HAVE YOUR SAY 12 November 2015

Homeless Action Inverness (HAI) is made up of representatives of organisations working with people who are homeless, at risk of becoming homeless or moving out of homelessness in the Inverness area. HAI exists to make a positive impact on the wellbeing and experiences of people in these situations and we do this by listening to them, providing support and by raising awareness of the issues they face.

One of the main functions of HAI is to organise consultation events with service users. These offer formal opportunities for people who are or have been homeless to give feedback on their experiences of homelessness and the services they have received. Twice annually, facilitated conversations takes place over lunch and the information is recorded and collated into a report which is sent to relevant authorities. A market place is set up with a range of agencies offering information about their services.

Previously known as “Speakouts”, the last event in November was re-named “Have Your Say”, following feedback that the name conveyed some negative perceptions to some of the people we wished to engage. Whether or not this was the reason, the November event had the best attendance of recent years.

26 service users (21 male and 5 female) participated in facilitated conversations based on a defined set of questions about their experiences and their health and well-being. A note-taker and facilitator were allocated to each table and information was recorded over a hearty lunch provided by Highland Homeless Trust, New Start Highland and Calman Trust. The information gathered is presented in this report in the format in which it was recorded. The comments and perspectives contained within the report are not those of members of HAI, but those of service users, as captured on the day and in their words.

A number of people wondered what would be done with the information and whilst they were informed that it would be circulated to authorities it was suggested it would be useful to have a Housing Policy Officer attend the next event to explain if and how the information is used to effect change.

Member organisations of HAI are committed to working collectively and collaboratively to enable people experiencing homelessness to receive the best possible services to meet their needs.

Mairi Macaulay
Chair
Homeless Action Inverness

SERVICE USER FEEDBACK

Question 1

a) What was your experience if you presented as homeless within the past 12 months?

- Electronic tag at Department of Work and Pensions doesn't work, 9 times I tried
- Bewildering – never happened before – shock, couldn't believe I was in this situation
- Shocking, no help, nobody referring me to any services. Quite depressing, suffer from ill health. Lack of info and empathy even at police station. Prejudged as a junkie/alcoholic. No info over a weekend & how to keep myself safe over that weekend. 4 days of walking the streets & sleeping rough then put into Highland Homeless Trust after 4 days. Could have died - nobody would have cared. 40 years later not enough info and no prevention - once you are back on your feet you're doing well, you're left on your own. Saw this 40/50 yrs ago & it's still happening – on-going support needed
- Refugees get better conditions than us
- Government spending millions on refugees
- Nothing was good, lack of information, left to walk streets until admitted to hospital with hypothermia
- Left penniless by DWP - objectively left to my own wits to survive
- A lot of anxiety regarding it, prison sorted out Caley House before I got released
- (from 10 years ago) – got a good location, Muir of Ord, which I asked for
- Prisoners leaving prison take so long to get somewhere when presenting as homeless
- There's the embarrassment factor, carrying all our belongings to the service point
- It takes time but you're wandering the streets until you get the phone call from the homeless officer.

How did you find dealing with DWP?

- Set 45 mins
- Have you seen so & so he might be sleeping – he appeared from back room & he was getting wide. I was frustrated no need for. I would have been sanctioned for being 45 min late.

b) What has been good?

- Good support - met Caley House while in prison so I went straight there
- Nothing good
- Got a house but I can't go near it because my girlfriend is still there. Council tenancy - her name not on the tenancy
- Mairi has supported me
- Good support in Caley House
- Felt helped, kept right, got a place straight away
- From Service Point I was put in a place straight away. Always provided with someone by my side. I was helped
- Where I am now is better, it's self contained with a cooker and shower
- Staff have been good
- The staff can be friendly but not efficient, I had my support worker trying to find out about my housing points they've been lost since February
- Relief at not getting put in to a hostel or B&B when presented as homeless.
- Thankful to have got somewhere, was at crisis point – Merkinch might not be first pick/ideal but has access to things that are useful: PO, shops bookies.
- Help from work colleagues was superb.
- Not worried about where I will be placed – but feel safer in the city centre – helps to manage mental health condition.

- Accommodation in at the moment – not bad, happy not to be on a street corner.
- People in Council – treated me with respect, didn't look down at me, no stigma.

c) What has not been so good?

- Meaningful use of time, things to do
- I had a 5 month old child and they knew I was an alcoholic but they put me beside a pub
- I was put in an area I didn't want to be in – couldn't afford it. They didn't want to know my reason
- A (named) member of staff at Service Point was unhelpful. Said they'd no duty to re-house me because I was in the wrong over defending myself when someone threatened to stab me. I was chucked out. The one who threatened me got to stay where we'd both been*
- Told to go back to the town I'd come here from
- Promises of an interview never materialised
- It's a worry what kind of facility you will get, I've been in a few shit holes
- I've been in lots of places, when it's shared the fridge is always raided
- When it's shared you can't have your own stuff
- Sharing a bathroom isn't good
- Once I'd just got out of New Craigs and put into a shit hole
- If you have addictions, when you've just come out of prison and have to wait for hours to find out where you're going to be placed, you end up going for a drink or whatever then you turn up at the B&B drunk
- In sheltered accommodation in Inverness you can use if you have addictions, there's no support with this
- I'm in self contained but really worried because I'm going to a shared place
- Been in a B&B since June – one person moving in can have a huge impact, it can affect everything
- Do feel secure – but not really. Have a heightened sense of awareness. Cameras offer security – would be worried about being blamed for something I haven't done
- Areas that people don't want to go – less tolerant of gay people
- Difficult to come to terms with being homeless – never expected it to happen to me. Stability to nothing. If you have a chaotic life, it's easy to move to relying on alcohol. Can feel resentful of what other people have.

d) What could be done differently?

- Society is to blame, not the homeless people - we are the fall guys, we would have to take the stick
- It goes back to the Government - homelessness is life in this country and it is still happening
- No rehabilitation - plenty talking, nobody saying anything
- Service Point staff should have professionalism (refers to * above). If they have no people skills, they shouldn't be in the job. One (named) member of staff "is a diamond"
- Coming out of prison, if the housing appointment was made in advance it would take a weight off your mind
- Complete the paperwork at a later time
- You get released from prison at 8/9am in the morning and have to wait until the service point is open
- Not take or be allowed to take drink or drugs while in a B&B, we should have dry houses to give people a chance
- Sometimes you feel safe and secure but no support to help
- Accommodation – need a better set of regulations to protect people. Rather than being fearful, they should be a stepping stone for moving on
- Vulnerable people might open the door to others – spy holes in B&B would be useful

- Important not to be seen as a 'soft touch'
- Difficult to change the perception of what homeless accommodation is
- Council need to build affordable houses – was paying £750 in rent. Had to manage without other essentials to meet this.

Question 2

a) What has been your experience of receiving Universal Credit?

- Haven't had to have it
- Nor have I
- I had to wait 12 weeks as I was out of the country. Have been out of country and have to wait 2 years for PIP. Had a CPN to give me food parcels but no money. The first home I was given a 3 bed bungalow in Golspie - lived in the smallest bedroom due to heating bills. After 2 weeks there I ended up in hospital for 6 weeks, now I'm in Nairn
- Changing from Job Seekers to ESA I ended up in New Craigs
- Receiving ESA at moment
- none on Universal Credit, so n/a
- It sucks
- I've had no money for 3 months, then I eventually got some
- A friend told me about the Welfare Fund so I could get help
- I don't get all my housing benefit so I've £75 a week stacking up all the time, it's all debt
- No one was on Universal Credit – therefore not worried about it
- Process of Universal Credit explained – all now worried that it would make money more difficult to manage.

b) What support have you received when applying?

- 4/5 weeks to get first payment. Got grant when I got out of prison - social worker phoned up and got it sorted
- DWP tar everyone with same brush - they tell you what they want you to do
- Government policy is causing all this homelessness
- I volunteer with Signpost 3 days a week
- On ESA I can work 15 hours
- If I take a job I have to leave my home (Caley House) - where will I go?
- I went to the CAB this time, the woman was on the phone for 3 hours
- Usually I can do the forms myself but this time I needed help
- I needed help with the forms, on the phone for 45 minutes for ESA
- Aberdeen job centre help with forms and fax them through in the half hour appointment
- Inverness job centre must have the rudest people in the country
- Getting ID can be a nightmare for some people
- Job centre staff are actively encouraged not to tell people what they are entitled to
- No one to say you can get a short term advance.

c) Would you know how to access support?

- Yes, I find out myself - I tell them what to do, spread the word
- No

- Because of government cutbacks there's not the same people to help
- Phone call advisors are inconsistent with information.

d) How long did you have to wait until your benefit was paid?

- No wait
- 11 weeks - kept having to phone Scottish Welfare Fund - never had so much sympathy, nothing like DWP
- If I didn't get money from SWF I wouldn't have had electric
- Was left destitute for 3 weeks at start of claim
- UC can take 6 weeks to pay out money.

e) Have you been in rent arrears?

- Yes
- No rent arrears @ 45
- Get money every 2 weeks to pay rent/council tax/TV - but I am always late – got a back payment so I paid 1 month ahead to stop arrears coming
- Yes
- I am in arrears cause I don't get all my housing benefit
- The debt is stacked against me with housing.

Question 3

What do you think about applications being made online?

- Forced thing to stop you mingling – depersonalising. Had to go to CAB to get it done & they found it hard if you have dyslexia
- Where are you expected to get accommodation, it is a luxury - I can't even afford house insurance
- No use if you can't get internet connection
- Shocking
- Don't know about computers, never done it
- Go in and kick off. Do it through support worker
- Only 3 of the 8 in the group have on-line access unless in the library. Not allowed to do this in the Job Centre – PCs there are only for applying for jobs. *Facilitator - Have you still managed to claim?* Phoned, explained I was dyslexic, got help.
- Access 7-9pm, not in office hours
- Access at college
- That's alright if you are good with a computer
- I go down the phone route but when that stops I'll go to the CAB
- The job centre staff won't help
- My ESA money hadn't been paid, and they told me I hadn't applied
- PIP process can take weeks on end
- Currently easy to apply for benefits
- Not good if have to apply online – no internet access, hard to do if don't understand how to use a computer. Would go and get help from the service point
- Help in the prison to access things through the Link Centre
- Can't afford to get internet access – need to balance the books

- Free internet access is only for a short time (around 15 mins) and is not secure - £5 after free 15 mins is up.

Question 4

a) What has been your experience of 'drop-in' services?

- Food bank need – very helpful, even in 45 they would come in with a voucher
- CAB office in Golspie brought boxes to you - really good, no money for bus
- There are none
- *Facilitator – Manna House?* Went once, never again
- *Facilitator – Ness Bank Church?* Go there, horrible. Didn't like the food. Like the idea of this though
- One mentioned a Christmas Dinner from Salvation Army - "beautiful"
- Never used one
- It would have been helpful when I needed money
- Inverness needs a homeless drop-in service – the same as was on offer before. Would help people get their lives sorted out.

b) If you could use a drop-in service what would you use it for?

- **Meals?**
 - Yes
- **Harm reduction service?**
 - No
 - We know about needle exchanges. We use it. Some have shut down. Not sure where to go. Eastgate Boots one day per week. Too open. Staff would judge us
 - There used to be a van went round Dingwall. They'd phone you and you went along – needle exchange and information about BBV. It's not there now.
- **Employability service?**
 - Employment services - left waiting for 45 mins
 - At job centre I said it makes you want to 'top yourself' & staff said she would call the police
 - Why do they have to have security? If they were pleasant & nice to you and normal they wouldn't get your back up. They are led by targets and deadlines
 - I can't get my point across. You get a % of people just say 'forget it' and they walk away. Why do they have to wait until they have a crisis on their hands?
 - Job Centre for help – some of group say they're helpful, some say not so
 - Work Programme – didn't go beyond getting a CV in a year. Didn't help
 - You've got to go if you sign on
 - It's a joke - they "take the piss out of you". Some are nice - it's a roller coaster.
- **Anything else?**
 - Professional support – e.g. not going to their friends and talking about us then we meet them later
 - National Health Service
 - Help with children. Somewhere to take them, reasonably priced

- More about drug & alcohol harm reduction. Boots is embarrassing. They don't use a wee room. "Down the alley" was good. Need it 9-5 on more days - this is a city. Naloxone training.
- After school centre for children
- More places like Cale House, i.e. dry houses
- I don't think I'd last long if not in Cale House and put near a pub
- People are trying to do ok but they need places like Cale House
- It would be somewhere to go while you're waiting for a phone call about your homelessness
- Somewhere designated to go to for advice etc.

c) Do you think they are useful – if so, why?

- Foodbank

d) Do you think they aren't useful – if so, why?

- Employment

Question 5

a) How was the housing support service you received when you were in temporary accommodation?

- Yes, but difference between 45 and Caley House
- Caley House was successful because we got the support we needed with Drugs & Alcohol - encouraged by support worker. We got sorted out but when we came out we got back into drink/addiction. 3 days in my house and I discovered my neighbour was a drinker - tolerated it for 1 year then back into drugs. Better placing about where you are housed - I tried to sneak into my house to avoid neighbour who was drinker
- I have to sneak into my flat and lock myself in as my neighbour urinates in the flats
- Asking for support with housing was difficult
- Could have been prevented if housing planned properly
- Artch Courne is good
- Not allowed in sitting room if drunk, that's good but some get away with it
- Cale House Housing Support is good
- In "bed" only (no breakfast) accommodation. Can't get support. I've given up. I'm not fit to live there. I need supported accommodation**
- *Who feels supported?* Most do, not the person speaking above at **
- People should be placed where none smoke, drink etc if you don't drink or smoke
- People in supported accommodation helping themselves e.g. going to AA but have no money for bus fares to AA – staff should provide transport to help us keep clean
- Why do people get to smoke in their rooms in no smoking accommodation? I always get the blame.

b) Was it worthwhile?

- I have mental health problems; my support worker's been really helpful.

c) Did you receive the right amount/type of support?

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d) Was there anything about the support that could have been done better?

- Structure/meaningful use of time is important. Temptation comes in when you are bored
- Lots of things on but I can't afford to do them
- When I was in New Craigs I loved it- there were loads of things to do and loads of people to talk to

e) Are you aware of any changes to the support you receive?

- No

Question 6

What did you think about the quality of the temporary/emergency accommodation you were placed in?

- Next door was all done up nice & they put an alcoholic in it & he has ruined it & it annoys me - I keep everything nice but my place wasn't nice
- Need a common room at 45
- Nairn - no plates/kettle - had to go out and buy & friends bought me things. Blood up the walls and blood on the lamp shades. Bed has sheet/mattress protector/sheet and quilt to lie on as bed is horrible. They don't care - landlord making money, try to get away with not spending money
- There was blood everywhere, up walls etc. Knew previous occupant used drugs and had Hepatitis. Me and mate painted it ourselves. Shouldn't have been put in there
- Poor, pin holes all round a dart board – walls a mess. Staff don't do their job right. They're not there to speak to. If they're there, they're not interested. Tell us to go to the Council
- Fine
- Ok, some problems were fixed quickly. No heating, quite bad dampness. Kitchen not complete. Windows stream with condensation
- People are here from Caley House, the flats needed work
- I had temporary accommodation in Forres, it was horrendous
- I didn't have a cooker and it took weeks to get one, just before an inspection
- I had to have microwave meals which are far more expensive
- These places are not inspected as much as they should be by the council
- It's clean and safe
- Availability is the biggest issue
- Royal is strict – way it should be
- Larachbeg – agree with rules. Have to have structure but need to be suitable for the place. Person dependant – like smoking in the rooms
- Visitor policy – good for the sake of safety
- Visitors can be the reason for trouble
- Can be lonely places therefore want visitors
- Don't agree with anyone giving cheek to those who are helping them – council staff, cleaning lady, anyone
- Have lost tenancy because of the behaviour of friends and family
- Feel a sense of loyalty to those who have been through the same as you – try and help and then can spiral out of control. Person with the tenancy gets in to trouble
- Need help with life skills – would make a big difference.

Question 7

a) If you live in an HMO, do you know how to access:

a. Heat

- No
- In some rooms. Service charge paid. Unfair some have to pay extra. Not allowed to use tumble dryer. Use a clothes horse, takes ages to dry when cold.

b. Hot food

- Some have own kitchens, some not. Won't use microwave in my room, it spills out cold air. Never shown how to use cooker. Eat out every day.

c. Health items such as nebulisers or flu jabs?

- Health items – go to Dr's
- no access to first aid, when I cut my foot on broken glass I was given kitchen roll and sellotape
- coming out of prison you can feel you're better treated inside, so will reoffend just to go back
- no there's nothing
- there should be packs in B&B's similar to what is given to new tenants
- I've been in at half 10 when a fire drill is meant to be on but it's not happened
- food vouchers are given by the prison when you're leaving
- income max team give food boxes
- I got help with food from my support worker.

b) How have you found out this information?

- nothing there
- I've not had anyone telling me anything, only when I had my support worker did I get what I needed.

c) How much of this information comes from staff at your B&B?

- Staff don't tell you unless you ask. Might be posters up
- There's old posters but no information
- One poster said don't leave your bike here and another said no visitors but nothing else
- No info in mine
- It's all old info on the boards, nobody changes it.

Question 8

Do you know if you need to have a flu jab?

- No
- Yes, get a letter from nurse/GP – diabetic
- Yes, have asthma
- Got no idea
- I'm not certain if it's about a certain age or illness
- Some agency workers know, it's a choice
- 1 individual who had a long term condition knew about the flu injection and where to access it.
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Question 9

a) Do you know how to access services if you are concerned about your own or someone else's mental health?

- I do now since 45 & I recommend to friends and young folk
- Don't know how to access
- I'd send them to New Craigs
- Don't know what to do if someone's suicidal
- What's that got to do with my homelessness? - *participant became agitated at the question.*

b) Would you know what to do if you thought someone was at risk?

- Risk of what?
- We have friends who wanted to put themselves at risk
- Don't know of services
- Try to talk
- Vague knowledge
- I know but, I don't know what to do
- Don't know, possibly the doctor.

Question 10

What are your thoughts on those taking risks around drug use?

- Don't take them
- Don't get involved. It does concern me
- I've known the risks and I've not cared about the risk - I would say I don't care - I stopped drinking 15 years ago when my sister died from alcohol
- I won't be around people with needles but apart from that it's their choice
- Some are then noisy housemates
- We should get a choice to stay where no one uses
- Not good if folks have kids