



Housing Solutions to Social Injustice

# Building Together





# **Contents**

Foreword	3
The Commonweal Model	5
Our year at a glance	6
You're Home	8
Migration, asylum and trafficking	10
Call for New Ideas: Migration, asylum and trafficking	11
• Retreat Housing	14
Criminal justice	16
Depaul Northern Ireland Project	17
• The Phoenix Project	19
• Call for New Ideas: Criminal justice	21
Alternatives to custody housing pilots	23
At-risk youth	24
• Call for New Ideas: Young people	25
Young people at risk of serious violence	27
Young underprivileged writers	27
Research	28
No Access, No Way Out	28
Housing First for Rural England	29
Barriers to employment: Young people living in supported accommodation	30
Commonweal updates	31
London Housing Panel	31
New Vice-Chair	32
Jane Slowey Memorial Bursary	33
Governance	34
Financial reports	35
Commonweal footprint and acknowledgments	36



Jack Mactaggart (Chair, 2020-24), Amarjit Bains (Chair) and Ashley Horsey (CEO)

It has been a busy twelve months for Commonweal Housing and the sector at large. The new Government has correctly identified affordable, quality housing as a pillar of social justice, and is reforming the rental market, the supported housing sector, and housebuilding delivery to that end.

Commonweal has embraced the shift in attitude and enjoyed a very active year in turn, which included welcoming Amarjit as our new Chair, after Jack's five-year term came to an end. We are delighted Jack is able to stay on as member of the Board, maintaining the Mactaggart family support and tradition with Commonweal. We look forward to the years to come under Amarjit's leadership and the extensive sector knowledge and experience she brings to our discussions.

Strategically, this has been a year of learning, listening, and laying the groundwork for the future. We've continued to grow our existing partnerships, building on what works, while also exploring new ideas and connections to advance our mission: tackling social injustices through housing. We've published research, launched new feasibility studies, and prepared innovative pilot projects, always with a focus on supporting people facing some of the toughest challenges in our society.

We are proud to continue striving for better solutions for vulnerable groups across the UK. The You're Home project with East Belfast Mission, enabled by Commonweal, which provides affordable rental accommodation to those exiting homelessness, continues to produce hugely positive outcomes for service users as it approaches a key evaluation stage. We are also excited to hear from EBM that their discussion with the Northern Ireland Government to expand and replicate the model are progressing well.

We've also published important horizon-scanning research across two of our strategic themes: Criminal Justice, and Migration, Asylum, and Trafficking (MAT). These followed our earlier piece on young people and transitions to adulthood. Together, these reports shine a light on the housing gaps faced by some of the most marginalised groups, helping us, and others, to shape better responses.

In turn, we launched two Calls for New Ideas, inviting service providers to share their visions for housing models that could improve outcomes in these thematic areas. We commissioned eight new feasibility studies as a result, each an opportunity to explore, test, and learn alongside brilliant partner organisations. These are featured in more detail throughout this review.

Commonweal published several feasibility studies commissioned last year, which are summarised in this review. Meanwhile, our latest housing pilot projects with HAPANI (Horn of Africa People's Aid Northern Ireland), Servol, and Depaul NI are starting imminently, following months of collaborative groundwork.

Commonweal also published *No Access, No Way Out* in August last year, which investigated homelessness move-on into the private rented sector (PRS) – and found such move-on to be increasingly difficult, if not impossible, for certain groups in certain parts of the country. Researched and authored by ex-Commonweal Housing trustee Becky Rice, *No Access, No Way Out* lays bare the failures that have led to this point, and the main findings and our subsequent engagement work are detailed later in this report. The issues highlighted by *No Access, No Way Out* have sparked a wider discussion across the homelessness and supported housing sector, helping to continue Commonweal's role as thought leaders highlighting often overlooked or marginalised issues and areas of social injustice.

Elsewhere, Commonweal accepted an offer to become the Secretariat of the London Housing Panel, a forum of community groups and providers (including several former CWH project partners) advising the Mayor's housing strategy. We look forward helping the sector collaborate and have their voices heard, seeking to drive up supply and standards of housing everywhere.

Commonweal remains in a healthy and stable financial position; we thank Fred Marquis, our Finance Manager, for her stewardship of our finances over recent years.

The collaborative emphasis displayed by the whole staff team and all our partners inspires the theme of this report – *Building Together* – as we confront numerous housing injustices in the knowledge that there is much work to do, and that we cannot do it alone. On that basis, Commonweal would like to express sincere thanks to all our partners, supporters, and friends, with whom we work to learn and serve those in need. We also give special thanks again to Grove End Housing for their continued support and guidance, in the knowledge that the work detailed in the coming pages would not be possible without them.

As we move towards our twentieth anniversary in 2026, the Board are already thinking about the challenges and opportunities for the years ahead and are pleased we will continue that journey with real momentum and enthusiasm. Throughout this busy and hopeful year, we've been reminded again and again that real change happens in partnership. We're proud to be working alongside so many passionate people and organisations committed to creating a more just housing system. Thank you for being part of this journey with us.



# The Commonweal Model

Commonweal exists to find housing-based solutions to wider social problems. How do we do this?

#### Feasibility studies

Commonweal offers funding to frontline organisations for them to research whether their housing and support models are feasible. This research seeks to establish:

- Financial viability
- Capacity to deliver a solution
- Justification of a solution

#### Property-based pilot projects

If a model proves feasible, we support our partners to initiate a full propertybased pilot project that aims to tackle a social injustice through a new housing and support model. Projects tend to run for roughly seven years.

Commonweal acts to facilitate and enable the project, but the project is ultimately owned and operated by our partners. We do this in two ways. We either provide existing Commonweal-owned property, or we purchase new property with the help of social investment. Commonweal has an engaged network of social investors that we tap it into, facilitating the funding for property acquisition to bring our partners' projects to life.

#### **Evaluation**

We are dedicated to not only searching for solutions but reflecting on the results, whether successful or not, and crucially sharing those results as far and wide as possible, helping to inform best practice across the sector and influence policy where possible. All of our projects undergo an independent final evaluation, with a publicly published report into all elements of the project. We care just as much about the elements that didn't work as much as those that did.

#### Research

While we focus much of our resources and attention on the solutions to social injustice, we also want to understand the causes to them too.

That's why we have a dedicated research arm of the organisation, to enable new, groundbreaking research into different areas of housing and social policy. We want to dig deeper into the key injustices facing people in this country, and so while we commission our own research, we're also interested in hearing the ideas for new research from the experts across the sector.

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Building Together
Applied Review 2024/2

Our year at a glance









Three feasibility studies funded through Call for New Ideas: Young People.

6

JULY



Report rented published.



investigating homelessness move-on in the private sector (PRS)

project one-year



Open letter sent to Angela Rayner, Secretary of State at MHCLG, calling for improved PRS move-on for homeless people.





You're Home anniversary.



Launched latest Call for New Ideas: Migration, Asylum and Trafficking.



Report exploring the housing injustices faced by those involved in the migration, and the criminal asylum and trafficking systems published.



**Evidence Public Accounts** into Tackling Homelessness.





Mactaggart stepped down as Chair after five-year term.



Research

examining the

intersection of

homelessness

justice system

produced.

submitted to the Committee inquiry







**Amarjit Bains** welcomed as new Chair of the Board.



Five feasibility studies funded as part of Call for New Ideas: Migration, Asylum and Trafficking.





Commonweal website refreshed with design updates.



appointed as

Vice-Chair of

**Housing First** for Couples feasibility study by Solace Women's Aid and Single Homelessness Project published.



APRIL

2025

**MARCH** 

Commonweal appointed as the Secretariat of the London Housing Panel.



**Housing First** for Rural England report, co-produced with English Rural and Porchlight, published.



MAY

JUNE

#

**Property** 

acquired for

Servol's Phoenix

Project.

acquired for HAPANI's Retreat Housing project.



Four students supported by the Jane Slowey Memorial Bursary.



# You're Home

In partnership with Northern Irish homeless charity East Belfast Mission.

#### **Project overview**

You're Home is an affordable rental project with five properties in east Belfast, providing stable, independent housing at reduced rent for individuals recovering from homelessness.

This year marks the second anniversary of You're Home. Researchers at Queen's University Belfast are evaluating the project's impact and potential for replication, with findings to be published at the end of 2025.

176%

Demand for temporary accommodation in Northern Ireland has risen 176% over the past six years.

(Northern Ireland Audit Office, 2024)

# We spoke to project lead Tom Dinnen, the Hosford Community Homes Manager...

### Is there a typical situation for tenants before they move in?

Most of our tenants come from our homeless hostel, often feeling anxious about resettlement. They worry about the lack of funds to pay movers, pay utilities, as well as buy food and toiletries – because moves often happen between pay days. This anxiety is heightened by the immediate responsibility for their new house and their wellbeing without the daily support they became accustomed to in the hostel.

### What does the first month look like for tenants moving into a property?

The priority is to complete the change of address formalities to ensure uninterrupted benefits payments and avoid any lost mail and appointments. Clients receive a range of support to help manage independent living, including applying for rental support, setting up utility accounts, registering with a GP, ordering bins and navigating transport routes.

### What are the biggest challenges facing clients?

Due to the shortage of social housing, our clients are usually forced to live in areas they wouldn't typically consider, as houses near their family support networks are unavailable. Young clients without dependants are forced to live in shared housing due to unaffordable rents and the lack of one-bedroom housing around Belfast.

Overall, private rentals are too expensive, making it rare for service users to be able to access them. Clients also face barriers due to a lack of a guarantor and prejudice from landlords for being homeless or on benefits.

#### What learnings from the You're Home model are valuable to the sector?

Firstly, You're Home would not have happened without Commonweal's technical and financial support, which included securing social investment to acquire property for the project. Few homelessness organisations have the capacity and resources to take on a capital housing project, a challenge we faced until we approached Commonweal.

We want to use our partnership with Commonweal and our project's community impact to highlight the need for improved access to national social finance within the homeless sector in Northern Ireland.

### What initial insights have been captured from the pilot project?

In short everything has gone well. This project has had a transformative impact on the lives of our service users.

Additionally, the project has raised the profile of EBM and the Hosford Community Homes project – another community-led housing project we operate – allowing us to grow our services and open up new opportunities.

### What are EBM's ambitions for the project and beyond?

We have set up a new charity called Hosford Community Homes Ltd, to draw down a £2 million Financial Transactions Capital Investment (FTC) loan from the government to scale-up You're Home. We are still looking for £500k of match funding before we can draw down the FTC loan, but are confident this will be achieved.

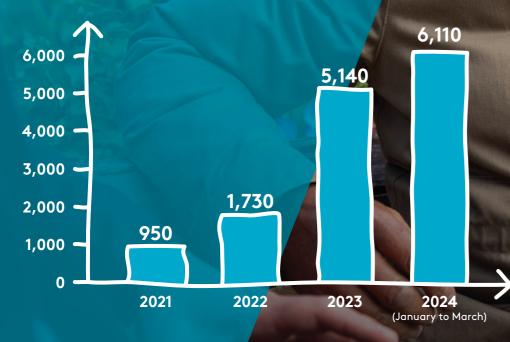
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Migration, asylum and trafficking

The experiences of migrants, asylum seekers, and victims of human trafficking are varied and nuanced. However, each group faces the prospect of insecure housing, with certain groups not entitled to access support services available to the wider citizen body.

Individuals transitioning out of asylum accommodation after obtaining refugee status often experience homelessness, and refugee homelessness has risen sharply, as seen in the graph below.



Number of people facing homelessness directly after leaving Home Office asylum accommodation in England.

(UKGov)

As highlighted by the Human Trafficking Foundation, both UK and non-UK nationals risk homelessness when escaping trafficking, as their housing is often tied to their exploitation. A lack of suitable safe accommodation options for survivors pre-NRM (National Referral Mechanism - the UK's framework for identifying victims of human trafficking) means they are often placed in hotels for extended periods without support.

Commonweal seeks to address homelessness and housing insecurity in the UK regardless of status or origin and continues to investigate and test support models to improve outcomes for the groups described above. We do not take express positions on policies relating to these issues, focusing our resources on alleviating the effects for those facing homelessness. Our feasibility studies and projects in this area are prioritising positive community integration, increasing employability, and serving those who have fled genuine persecution. Stable, safe housing provision acts as the basis for each of these desired outcomes.



# Call for New Ideas: Migration, asylum and trafficking

In late 2024, we ran our latest Call for New Ideas, seeking proposals for creative housing models to support migrants, asylum seekers, and trafficking survivors.

Guided by the key areas of housing need identified in Prof. Phil Brown's horizon-scanning research, the call focused on housing project ideas that:

- Address transition points between and within systems that drive housing insecurity
- Support survivors of trafficking
- Demonstrate possible long-term cost savings for the government by focusing on community integration and employability support

Commonweal funded five frontline charities to evaluate the viability of their housing models, detailed below.

Micro Rainbow is excited to work with Commonweal to find ways to support some of the most vulnerable people in our community: homeless LGBTQI asylum seekers with NRPF and who are at high risk of immigration detention.99

Sebastian Rocca, CEO and

#### Micro Rainbow

UK's leading not-for-profit supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) people fleeing persecution.

LGBTQI asylum seekers whose asylum claims have been denied.

#### Model overview

Shared accommodation and immigration advice while this group prepares a revised asylum claim, and until they can access statutory asylum support. This model seeks to implement a cross-subsidy approach to fund bed spaces for LGBTQI asylum seekers with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF).

Commonweal Housing **Building Together**  Commonweal Housing

Our aim is for UASCs to transition into adult life feeling fully supported, equipped, and confident of their independent and sustainable capacity to flourish. 99

Hetty Mentzel, Business **Development Officer** at Handcrafted

#### Handcrafted

A charity that empowers socially excluded individuals to gain skills and find housing.

#### Cohort

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASCs) aged 16-17.

#### Model overview

Shared housing for young people to live independently, with support workers nearby for emergencies and practical assistance. Residents would remain in the property beyond their 18th birthday to ensure a smooth transition to adulthood.

#### **Accommodation Concern**

Northamptonshire-based anti-poverty and homelessness prevention charity.

#### Cohort

Recently recognised refugees.

#### Model overview

Shared accommodation with tailored support to help refugees integrate into the community and find employment, including training opportunities and work placements. Additionally, the model aims to incorporate a funding structure to ease residents' transition into employment and support those with NRPF.



### Homelessness among new refugees rose by 350%

in England, between March 2023 and March 2024. (MHCLG, 2024)

With over 600 people coming people coming to our day centre last year, we know the urgent need to provide immediate safety and practical support for newly granted refugees at risk of exploitation, and those who have experienced exploitation but have not yet been formally identified. 99

Darek Karwacki, CEO of Woolwich Service Users Project

### **Woolwich Service Users Project**

Southeast London grassroots charity providing practical and emotional support to those seeking help in the community.

#### Cohort

Unverified survivors of modern slavery and newly granted refugees at risk of exploitation.

#### Model overview

A trauma-informed housing service focused on creating a safe space to prevent re-trafficking and reduce rough sleeping. This initiative intends to address the lack of accommodation for trafficking survivors pre-NRM.

#### **Devon and Cornwall** Refugee Support

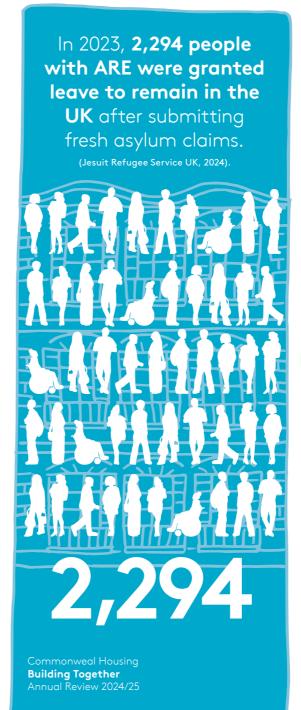
A grassroots asylum seeker and refugee organisation.

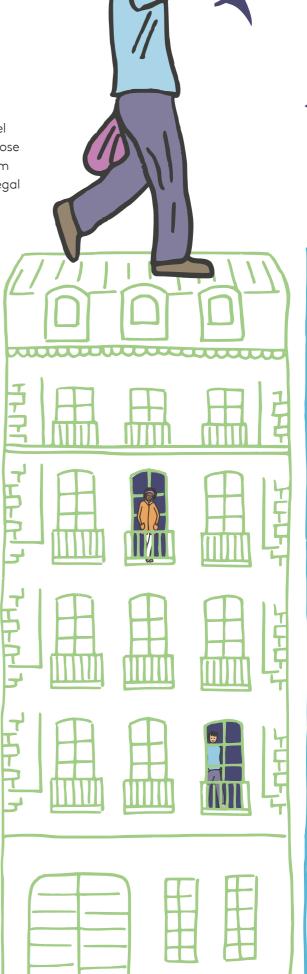
#### Cohort

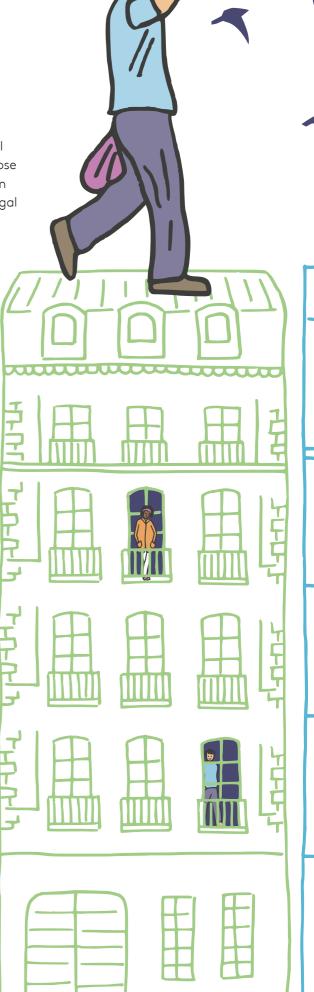
Appeal Rights Exhausted (ARE) asylum seekers - those who have gone through the asylum process, appealed and failed

#### Model overview

A cross-subsidy shared accommodation model designed to house ARE asylum seekers and those with NRPF by subsidising housing benefits from sanctuary seekers. Individuals would receive legal support to gather evidence for fresh asylum claims or navigate new immigration routes.







13

## **Retreat Housing**

In partnership with HAPANI – Horn of Africa People's Aid Northern Ireland, a non-governmental organisation supporting individuals from the Horn of Africa (Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Sudan) that reside in Northern Ireland.



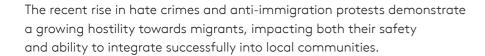
#### **Project overview**

Retreat Housing aims to provide stable accommodation and support to refugees and asylum seekers from the Horn of Africa, who face challenges finding accommodation after their refugee status has been granted.



# Since HAPANI was founded in 2011, how has the landscape for refugees in Northern Ireland changed?

The landscape has evolved significantly. We have seen rising numbers of asylum seekers, increasing housing pressures, and a greater recognition of integration challenges. Refugees now face heightened difficulties securing housing, employment, and achieving social integration.













asylum seekers were supported in Northern Ireland in December 2024, coming from at least 68 different countries. The top five nationalities were Somali, Eritrean, Syrian, Sudanese and Iranian.

(Home Office, 2024)

#### What are the biggest housing challenges facing refugees in Northern Ireland?

Refugees face long waiting lists for social housing, and private rents have increased significantly. Refugees are required to leave asylum accommodation within 56 days (previously only 28) of receiving their status. Many are forced into temporary housing, hostels, or sofa-surfing. Those who lack personal connections or local support networks are particularly vulnerable. There are no other refugee-led housing initiatives beyond HAPANI's Retreat Housing Strategy.

#### How does a lack of stable and affordable housing affect newcomers?

Housing insecurity causes significant stress, anxiety, and depression among refugees, exacerbating trauma and making it harder to rebuild their lives.

Without a fixed address, many struggle to access employment, as landlords often require proof of stable income and employers may be reluctant to employ those without settled accommodation.

Stable housing is a crucial factor in refugee integration, enabling individuals to participate in community life.

#### What support will be available to clients through the project?

Alongside providing affordable, safe housing, our Retreat Housing project will provide comprehensive integration support, including:

- Signposting to access mental health services and medical care
- Help to maintain tenancies and navigate benefits support
- Connecting individuals with job training programmes and employment support
- Supporting skills development, including language training
- Connecting refugees with local groups to foster inclusion and belonging

#### How does community-led housing support refugee integration?

Community-led housing is a powerful new tool for refugee integration, providing long-term solutions to housing instability.

This housing model aims to help combat social isolation through peer support, helping newcomers build friendships. Refugees in such schemes are more likely to gain employment, contribute economically, and integrate socially than those in unstable or temporary housing. There is a conscious desire to promote positive relationships with long-term residents, ensuring refugees are seen as contributors to society – rather than burdens.



# Criminal justice

Homelessness and involvement with the criminal justice system are strongly correlated, and it is safe to assume there is a causal relationship between the two. Offenders who left prison without accommodation in 2022 had almost double the proven reoffending rate of those who had somewhere to live.

A significant number of people enter prison directly from homelessness. Furthermore, a prison sentence itself can create conditions which increase the likelihood of becoming homeless, which in turn can increase the likelihood of reoffending. Landlords are known to discriminate against potential tenants with an offending history.

Commonweal has long placed emphasis on the positive effects of the right housing model to decrease reoffending. One of Commonweal's early flagship projects, Re-Unite, provided family housing on the point of release for women leaving prison to reunite them immediately with their children. Only 10% of women supported by the project reoffended, against a national average of around 25%.

The shocking numbers of people leaving prison homeless has led to the issue increasing in importance, but there is a lot of work to do. In November 2024, Commonweal published horizon-scanning research carried out by Nacro, the criminal justice organisation, detailing housing provision gaps in the criminal justice system.

Commonweal are continuing work with providers aiming to reduce reoffending amongst those leaving prison.

15.4% of prison leavers were

1190/o were immediately sleeping rough upon release.

released into settled

accommodation.

(MOJ, 2024)

Depaul Northern Ireland Project

In partnership with: Depaul Northern Ireland, a local arm of international homelessness charity Depaul.

#### Project overview

A trauma-informed Housing First service designed for women leaving prison in Belfast who have complex psychosocial needs, such as addiction issues and mental ill-health.

Ahead of the launch of this project in late 2025, Deirdre Canavan, Senior Services Manager at Depaul NI, highlights the challenges women prison leavers face.

What specific vulnerabilities do women leaving prison face that differ from those of men?
Women face unique vulnerabilities that are often more complex and gender-specific, typically stemming from different pathways into offending, social roles and the lasting effects of trauma, including those illustrated on page 18.

Overall, these vulnerabilities mean a one-size-fits-all model cannot meet complex needs.

What is the current situation for women leaving prison in Northern Ireland with no home?

Women face serious challenges securing safe, appropriate accommodation. They can apply for homelessness assessment from the Housing Executive three months prior to release, but full eligibility only begins 28 days before.

Women on remand, who represent the majority of the female prison population, face uncertain release dates and are often released without proper support, relying on unsafe hostels, emergency B&Bs or sofa-surfing.

Depaul's feasibility study referenced the fact that most women are placed in mixed-gender hostels, where they often report feeling unsafe, being pressured into relationships, and generally exposed to environments that exacerbate mental health issues and substance abuse.

In Northern Ireland, women-only accommodation remains extremely limited; the closure of a women-only service in 2022 removed 21 beds, leaving only a 10-bed service at that time.

Why is it important to identify women in need of housing support before their release? Without pre-release planning, women are too often released into mixed-gender hostels, emergency accommodation, or unsafe environments that can trigger relapse, exploitation, reoffending or further trauma.

Our project aims to address these issues by:

- Collaborating with prison staff to identify women at risk of homelessness
- Engaging with women up to three months before release to understand their needs
- Developing resettlement plans for each woman during custody, with follow-up community support measures

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DEPAUL



Substance misuse linked to relationships

Many women
offend to support
their own or
a partner's
addiction
- relational
dynamics are
a key factor in
both offending
and recovery.



Care giving responsibilities

of female prisoners are primary carers for children, yet imprisonment frequently results in loss of custody and disrupted family ties, especially without safe housing for reunification.

#### How does your Housing First approach aim to improve outcomes for women?

Our Housing First approach offers women immediate access to safe, women-only accommodation without preconditions. It acknowledges that housing is not a reward for recovery, but a foundation for it.

Women will receive trauma-informed support delivered by trained staff who understand the impact of adverse experiences and create psychologically safe spaces for women to shape their recovery and resettlement pathways.

When adapted to meet the specific needs of women, Housing First not only improves individual outcomes, but also contributes to systemic savings in the justice, health and housing sectors.

Desired outcomes from our project include:

- Improved access to safe long-term housing, reducing the revolving door of homelessness and custody
- Reduced risk of reoffending and a successful transition into the community
- Improved mental health and emotional wellbeing, along with a reduced reliance on crisis services

Specifically, how does trauma-informed support help break the cycle of reoffending for women? Trauma-informed support plays a crucial role in reducing reoffending amongst women by tackling the underlying causes of their criminal behaviour.

Key components include:

- Building resilience for personal development
- Supporting long-term stability through engagement with probation, mental health services, addiction recovery, and employment support
- Promoting identity change and desistance from crime
- Reducing crisis-driven responses with early interventions to secure housing and support upon release to prevent crises like homelessness or relapse

# The Phoenix Project



In partnership with Servol Community Services, a housing charity specialising in mental health.

#### **Project overview**

The Phoenix Project will provide specialist supported accommodation for male prison leavers with complex mental health needs, helping them reintegrate into the local community and reduce reoffending.

Ahead of the project, Gaynor Brooke, Director of Services at Servol, discusses the importance of stable housing for prison leavers with mental health needs.

From your experience, how does the disconnect between the health and criminal justice systems impact individuals with serious mental illness (SMI)?

When transferring from prison to the community, individuals often experience a disruption in their mental healthcare. Without this, they are more likely to reoffend and return to prison.



The separation between the health and the criminal justice systems often results in fragmented services. There is a risk that people are viewed primarily as offenders, rather than someone in need of medical care, and this can restrict their access to appropriate services. Legal barriers – including privacy and confidentiality laws – often prevent effective collaboration between the two systems.

#### What barriers do individuals with SMI face upon their release from prison?

Numerous factors can significantly impact reintegration. These include:

- Housing instability, as homelessness is a common issue
- No continuity with mental health care in the community
- O Stigma and discrimination, which can increase isolation and may lead to mental health relapse
- Challenges finding employment and managing debt
- Estrangement from family and friends
- Legal constraints may make reintegration into society difficult

#### How does your model aim to bridge the gap between prison and the community?

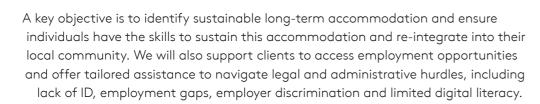
Our project will provide specialist support and housing for adult ex-offenders who have identified enduring and complex mental health problems. This includes those with a dual diagnosis – individuals with both a mental health disorder and a substance use disorder.

We have extensive experience providing crisis management for individuals living with mental health problems, including schizophrenia, bipolar and schizoaffective disorders. We expect individuals to stay in the support model for 12 months, with 3 to 6 months in-house, followed by outreach support in the community.

#### How does the project aim to reduce reoffending rates for this group?

On release from prison, people face challenges finding accommodation, work and maintaining relationships. For those living with SMI, these barriers are heightened, leading to cases of individuals reoffending intentionally to return to prison as they perceive it as a safe place.

We aim to reduce reoffending by providing safe and stable interim accommodation to allow individuals time to transition from prison to the community. Our structured support programme is co-produced with service users, their families, caregivers, and mental health and criminal justice professionals to address clients identified needs.



#### What other desired impacts do you hope this project will achieve?

By providing specialist support to ensure continuity with mental health care on release from prison, we aim to reduce instances of mental health relapse, which often lead to offending behaviour.

Our project will help clients develop skills for managing their mental health in the long term, enabling them to pursue goals such as education and employment.



We have continued to support our partners from this Call for New Ideas cohort in their research into potential housing models aimed at supporting those engaged with the criminal justice system.

#### Solace Women's Aid and Single Homeless Project

Solace is London's largest domestic abuse and sexual violence charity. SHP helps single Londoners who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

#### Cohort

Rough sleeping couples, where domestic abuse is suspected or known to occur.



#### Model overview

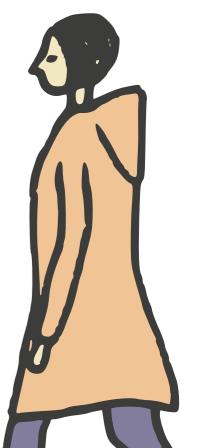
A Housing First service that provides survivors and perpetrators with separate but concurrent, independent housing and wrap-around support. The model follows key principles for safe and effective delivery, emphasising survivors' autonomy and safety and addressing the unmet needs of perpetrators.

#### Update

- Solace, SHP and Commonweal held a webinar sharing insights from the feasibility study, attracting around 200 attendees.
- SHP and its partners are implementing this model by delivering a Housing First service with a couples specialism, funded by Homes England's Single Homeless Accommodation Programme and commissioned by Camden Council. Commonweal is pleased to contribute funding towards an evaluation.

It was either they help him or help me – and that's what put us off accepting the help, that they were trying to separate us. 99

Survivor interviewee



#### **Brighton Women's Centre**

BWC provides a range of services to women around Sussex.

#### Cohort

Women leaving prison.

#### Model overview

As a solution to the lack of women-only housing options for women exiting prison in Sussex, this model proposes accessible trauma-informed temporary accommodation. It aims to provide short-term housing to prevent homelessness upon release, allowing women to rebuild their lives.



Over half of women (53%) left prison without settled accommodation

last year.

#### Update

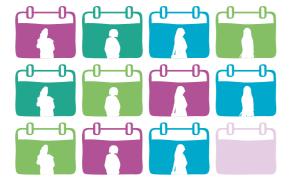
BWC is set to publish their report in Autumn 2025, and plan to host a round table event to present findings to stakeholders involved in supporting women to access safe housing upon release.

# Alternatives to custody housing pilots

As we continue exploring housing solutions that reduce the negative impacts of time spent in prison for women, we have two pilot projects in development set to test alternatives to custody. We hope to launch these pilot projects in 2026, utilising Commonweal-owned properties across London.

**70**%

22



**70% of prison sentences** given to women were for **less than 12 months.** 

(Prison Reform Trust, 2021)

#### **Advance and Housing for Women**

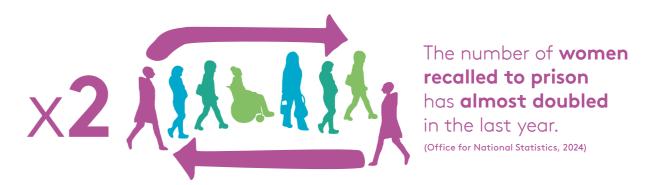
Advance is a national women-led charity that provides housing and support services for women and girls. Housing for Women (HfW) is a charity and housing provider supporting women.

#### **Project overview**

Advance and HfW's proposed project aims to test supported accommodation as an alternative to custody for women at the point of recall, when all other engagement options have been exhausted.

The pilot seeks to explore how supported housing options can influence probation officers' decisions to recall and instil greater confidence that women can receive adequate community support.

The 2018 Female Offender Strategy cited lack of safe accommodation as a key driver of the reasons for recall.



#### Women in Prison and Housing for Women

Women in Prison is a national charity supporting women affected by the criminal justice system.

#### **Project overview**

Women in Prison, also collaborating with HfW, will test a supported housing model for young women at risk of being remanded due to housing insecurity.

A lack of safe and stable housing is a key factor in magistrates' decision to remand women into custody. To help ensure these women can remain in the community, the project aims to provide safe and supportive accommodation for 6 to 9 months, or in alignment with court proceedings time frames. Women will have access to 24-hour support, alongside a tailored plan to develop skills, improve their mental health, manage their tenancy and access long-term housing.



85% of women on remand have been charged with a non-violent crime.

(Justice Committee, 2023)



Almost **two thirds of women remanded** to prison are either found **not guilty** or a given a **community sentence.** 

(Justice Committee, 2023)

# At-risk youth

Children who grow up in care, or around violence and criminal activity, are far more likely to end up facing homelessness as an adult. These trends are worsening: in 2024, the Become charity reported a

54% increase in care leavers (18-20 year olds) facing homelessness since 2019.

# 1 in 10



Nearly 1 in 10 young people leaving care become homeless in the two years after they turn 18.

(Homeless Link, 2024)

of the homeless

population in England have been in care, whilst only

the total population of children aged under 18 in England have been in local authority care.

(GOV, 2024)

Commonweal approaches these challenges asking our guiding question: can outcomes be improved by supplying secure, stable housing, with the right services integrated? Commonweal has worked with numerous partners to research and pilot models of supported housing for at-risk young people, including those at key transition points - such as former young carers leaving home.

One of the at-risk groups Commonweal is intent on supporting further is care-experienced children. In 2014, Crisis found that 25% of single people experiencing homelessness in the UK had been in care, with reports that almost 25% of the adult prison population have previously been in care. As Homeless Link report in a Commonweal-commissioned study into youth at risk of homelessness, the size of this vulnerable cohort is increasing – in 2023, 12,200 young people in England aged out of the care system on their 18th birthday. This has increased by 2% since 2022, and by 7% since 2019.

Other young groups we're investigating with our partners are neurodiverse (particularly autistic) young people facing homelessness, and young people at risk of exploitation or serious violence. Stable accommodation, with the right support mechanisms, can be a crucial preventative step for groups at risk of long-term mental illness, impoverishment, and crime.



# Call for New Ideas: Young people

As part of this Call for New Ideas round, which opened in April 2024, Commonweal funded three youth organisations to investigate new housing models to support at-risk youth.

#### Depaul UK

Leading youth homelessness charity.

#### Cohort

Neurodiverse young people.

#### Model overview

Shared accommodation with intensive training support for autistic young people aged 18-24 facing homelessness. As part of the model, individuals can improve their skills and establish structured routines to enable them to move towards independent living and reduce the risk of homelessness.

12.5% of rough sleepers

screened showed strong signs of autistic traits, compared to the 1.1% prevalence in the general population.



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#### **Break**

A charity supporting young people leaving care in East Anglia.

Young people tell us that housing uncertainty and temporary moves cause anxiety and can be retraumatising at a time in their life when they need safety, security and stability.

Steve Hulme, Development Manager at Break **Cohort**Care leavers.

#### Model overview

A 'tenancy switch' model, whereby care leavers would initially live in a property supported by Break support staff for six months. After this period, the tenancy would be transferred into the young person's name. This approach focuses on addressing the lack of move-on options available to care leavers by providing a stable and comfortable transition to independent living.

#### MAC-UK

A mental health charity working with 16-25 year olds vulnerable to exploitation, abuse and offending.

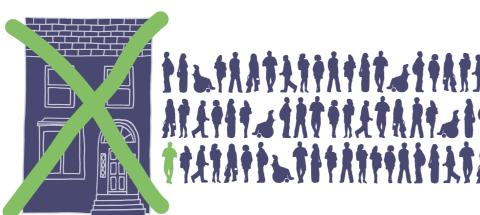
#### Cohort

Homeless young adults who have also experienced school exclusions, exploitation, abuse, the criminal justice system, or the care system.

#### Model overview

A cooperative housing model where young people would be responsible for looking after the daily running of the property. Involving individuals in the design and operation of the house aims to empower them to have autonomy over their lives, helping them express their housing and support needs.

young people in the UK were estimated to be facing homelessness in 2023-2024.





Building Together
Annual Review 2024/25

# Young people at risk of serious violence

We are pleased to continue supporting Gateway and Project Future, who provide community-based psychological services in Harringay.

#### **Base for Success**

In 2023, Gateway and Project Future proposed their 'Base for Success' model through our Call for New Ideas. The model is specifically designed for young men affected by serious youth violence, including gang affiliations, and involvement with the criminal justice system.

Young people at risk of violence struggle to access suitable housing, leading to cycles of homelessness, repeated trauma and continued offending. The model aims to provide young men aged 22 to 30 with self-contained housing and specialised trauma-informed support to build their stability and improve their psychological wellbeing.



Despite presenting to their local authorities and within health and social care services multiple times, 65% of young people had received no housing support before working with Gateway and Project Future.

Unfortunately, we were unable to translate this model into a property-based pilot due to uniquely high operational costs. However, we remain committed to exploring this issue further.

#### Research

Commonweal has funded research by Gateway and Project Future into the effectiveness of psychological housing intervention for young people involved in or at risk of serious youth violence and offending. This study will investigate factors contributing to successful housing outcomes and identify ways to improve access to housing for this group. It will also assess the 'Base for Success' model to help inform systemic changes in housing and service delivery for young adults impacted by violence.

# Young working-class writers in London

With funding from Commonweal, Off West End Plays & Playwrights (OWEPP) – a charity supporting artists and playwrights – will explore an affordable hostel model for underprivileged writers in London.

Talented writers could reside in the hostel for up to two years, allowing them time to hone their creative skills without the burden of high rent in the capital. This initiative seeks to create a level playing field for writers from working-class backgrounds to pursue careers in theatre, TV or film.



Young adults from workingclass backgrounds are 4 times less likely to work in the creative industries compared to their middle-class peers.

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# Research



# No Access, No Way Out



In August 2024, Commonweal published a substantial research report on homelessness move-on into the private rented sector (PRS), which had a particular focus on single people. PRS move-on is often an eventual pathway for service users in Commonweal projects, but an observable drop in options across the UK led Commonweal to commission the study.

Carried out by Becky Rice, No Access, No Way Out found an almost ubiquitous scarcity of private rented housing options for single homeless people. The report analysed the key drivers – a record surge in rent prices, a rapid increase in the number

Despite the stated value of LHA being the 30th percentile of local rental rates, the reality is bleak, especially for those experiencing homelessness whilst single and under the age of 35. This is the group entitled only to the lowest rate of LHA – the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR), which often fails to yield any viable move-on options.

of homeless people, and years of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) being frozen until 2024.

As an operation lead at a large provider surmised: "For under 35s my note says, 'Nothing available.' We basically have to go [to] supported accommodation for those people..." (No Access, No Way Out, p. 27)

With no route to the PRS and systemic barriers to work, homeless but stable individuals are stuck in limbo as they cannot afford to leave their current, often high-cost transitional support services.

Commonweal has been engaging with public sector bodies and other organisations on the recommendations made in the report – including meeting with the Department for Work and Pensions to discuss SAR reform. Commonweal will continue to investigate provision gaps and unscrupulous behaviour, hoping to improve outcomes for all renters, particularly those hoping to leave homelessness.

# **Housing First for Rural England**

Research from English Rural, Porchlight and Commonweal explores how the Housing First approach is a viable solution to the growing rural homelessness crisis.

#### The issue

People experiencing homelessness in countryside settings face unique challenges:

- Invisibility: Many seek shelter in barns or woodland rather than public spaces
- Isolation: Limited access to services and public transport
- Stigma: Small community sizes can heighten shame and prevent people seeking help
- Underfunding: Rural areas receive 65% less homelessness funding per capita than urban areas





Only 8% of homes in rural areas are affordable, compared to 17% in urban areas.

#### **Housing First solution**

The research found that just 8 to 12 Housing First homes in rural areas of East Kent could significantly meet the needs of homeless people, providing them with stable accommodation close to their existing support networks.

Recommendations for government and local authorities:

- Invest in a new tranche of rural Housing First provision
- Deliver affordable homes through scaled-up Rural Exception Sites
- Dedicate funding via the Homes England Affordable Homes Programme
- Provide ongoing financial support for Rural Housing Enablers

#### Outcomes

A roundtable on the need for Rural Housing First homes was held with leaders and housing cabinet members from councils across Kent.



# Barriers to employment: Young people living in supported accommodation

#### Research overview

Commonweal-commissioned research by Spring Housing will assess a government pilot scheme aimed at helping young people in supported housing secure employment.

The 'Rent Simplification and Support Proof of Concept' pilot was conducted in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the West Midlands Combined Authority.

This research, led by Spring's Thea Raisbeck – author of Commonweal's 2019 groundbreaking report Exempt from Responsibility, which exposed the underregulated exempt accommodation sector – will explore the benefits of this pilot programme for young people transitioning into work.

#### The issue

Current benefit rules cause a reduction in Housing Benefit when young people in supported accommodation earn above a certain threshold, discouraging them from entering the workforce or increasing their hours due to financial concerns.

#### The DWP pilot

The pilot provided additional financial support and a simplified benefits approach, whereby individuals pay a capped amount towards their rent, with the aim of encouraging young people living in supported housing into work.

#### **Findings**

Building on the DWP's evaluation of the pilot, Thea's research highlights the impact it had on young people. Initial insights demonstrate that the pilot yielded positive outcomes:

- Young people reported improvements in their wellbeing, confidence, social lives, family relationships and mental health
- Participants were able to plan for the future, evaluate their career options, and save money
- Many were able to secure longer-term or permanent contracts, with the majority of participants remaining in work

This evaluation will be published later in the summer.



Commonweal Housing **Building Together**Annual Review 2024/25

# Commonweal updates

# **London Housing Panel**

In early 2025, Commonweal was invited, after an application process, to become the new Secretariat of the London Housing Panel.

The Panel, which was founded in 2019, is a forum for 15 voluntary and community sector organisations to shape, advise, and scrutinise the Mayor of London's housing strategy. It is jointly funded by the GLA and the Trust for London, and Commonweal was proud to come on board as the new Secretariat.

Commonweal, which works in partnership with frontline service providers as a matter of course in pilot projects, is well-placed to take on this coordinating role. The Panel features organisations Commonweal has worked with previously – including Solace, Homeless Link, and Tonic Housing Association. Commonweal is proud to be working alongside partners new and old to help improve housing outcomes for Londoners.

The Panel has three key Strategic Objectives:

- Massively increase social housing supply
- Support all Londoners to be heard and thrive
- Take action on temporary accommodation

These strategic objectives form the basis of the three permanent 'working groups', which meet monthly. Full panel meetings take place four times a year and are attended by senior GLA officers and Deputy Mayor for Housing, Tom Copley. Secretariat responsibilities include providing briefings, supporting the Chair, and helping deliver Panel actions and decisions. Commonweal looks forward to further collaboration with the sector in this role.



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## **New Vice-Chair**

We are delighted that our long-standing Trustee Russ Edwards has taken on the role of Vice-Chair of Commonweal's Board.

Russ practiced architecture for over 15 years before moving into development roles, concentrating on regeneration projects in London for the last decade.

Since joining the Board in 2017, Russ has been an active and engaged member, significantly contributing to Commonweal's strategic growth over the past seven years.

As a long-term Trustee of Commonweal Housing, I am extremely proud to become the Vice-Chair and support our new Chair, Amarjit. I am very much looking forward to building on the fantastic legacy of the last 19 years of Commonweal.

The urgent need to explore new approaches to addressing social injustice with housing-based solutions is more critical than ever. I am excited to work closely with the team at Commonweal and our project partners in continuing to seek out the ideas and projects where our agility, knowledge and experience can make a genuine difference to those that need it most. 99

Russ Edward, Vice-Chair

# Jane Slowey Memorial Bursary



Since 2018, Commonweal has proudly supported University of Birmingham Social Policy students with grant funding to enable them to delve deeper into their final-year research.

In memory of our late Trustee, dear friend, and University of Birmingham alumna, Jane Slowey CBE, the bursary annually supports up to four students following in Jane's footsteps by investigating housing-related issues and injustices.

Each recipient receives £2,500, along with mentoring support from Commonweal.

As with previous years, the 2024/25 recipients delivered excellent research projects exploring a range of current societal issues.



#### **Ellie Childs**

Ellie analysed the experiences of refugees accessing long-term housing in the UK and the Netherlands, focusing on how the housing systems can perpetuate and reproduce harmful outcomes for refugees in host countries.

### **Lily Soaper**

Lily investigated the structural, policy and resource-related barriers that domestic abuse services and users face securing alternative housing in Birmingham.

#### Emma Bull

Emma examined the exploitative representation of homeless people in charity advertising and fundraising in the UK, focusing on the stereotypes and attitudes that inform these portrayals.

### Precious Oladimeji

Precious explored how the global health crisis of Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) – when bacteria, viruses, fungi, and parasites no longer respond to antimicrobial medicines – adversely affects BAME communities due to poor housing conditions and underlying socioeconomic inequalities.

Students presented their dissertation findings at a celebration event attended by Commonweal staff, Trustees, and friends at the University of Birmingham in May 2025.

# Governance

Commonweal Housing is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity governed by its memorandum and articles of association, the Directors of the charity and its Trustees for the purpose of charity law.

#### **Honorary Patrons**

Sir John Mactaggart Bt The Rt. Hon. Baroness Jean Corston The Rt. Hon. Fiona Mactaggart

### **Company Secretary**

Gary Medazoumian FCA

#### **Directors/Board of Trustees**

Jack Mactaggart (Chair until 11.12.2024, appointed 2016)
Amarjit Bains (Chair from 11.12.2024, appointed 2020)
Russ Edwards (Vice-Chair from 12.03.2025, appointed 2017)
Gary Medazoumian FCA (appointed 2004)
Prof. Jonathan Portes (appointed 2017)
Sheldon Shillingford (appointed 2020)
Dr Elanor Warwick (appointed 2022)
Aphra Mactaggart (appointed 2023)
Gerald Kelly (appointed 2024)

The Board has signed up to the Charity Governance Code and regularly assesses its governance and oversight structures in line with this recommended practice. The Board reviews the length of service of Trustees and has agreed that the current and ongoing tenure of long standing members is of benefit to the charity.

#### **Bankers**

Barclays Bank PLC, 7th Floor, 180 Oxford Street, London W1D 1EA

#### Solicitors

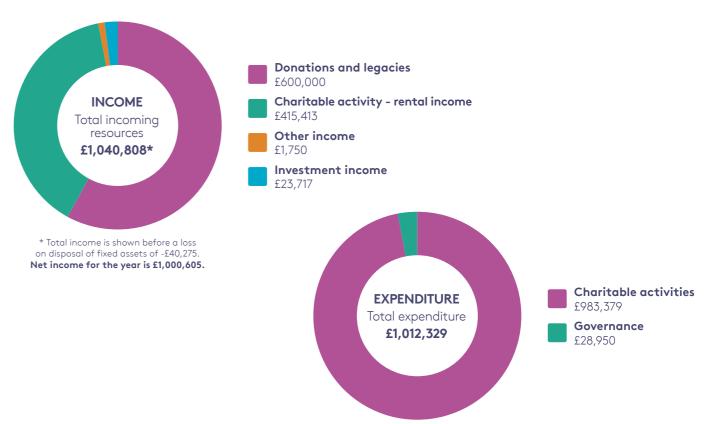
Broadfield LLP, 1 Bartholomew Close, London EC1A 7BL

#### **Auditors**



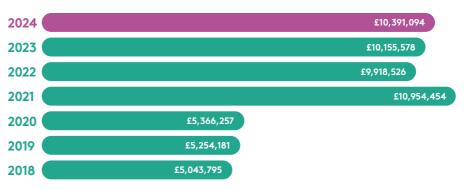
# Financial reports for year ending 31 December 2024

Summary figures



#### Balance sheet at 31 December 2024

Net assets



The Trustees of Commonweal reviewed the property revaluation and depreciation policy and agreed all fixed assets of the same class, (i.e, properties) to be revalued each year. 2021 was the first year where the new property revaluation policy applied in the accounts for all properties, hence the figures reflect these changes and the property market at present. The Trustees also reviewed the policy on the treatment of depreciation on properties and agreed not to depreciate properties.

#### For further details you can find our audited accounts here:

https://www.commonwealhousing.org.uk/about-us-our-accounts

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# Our partners



## Thanks to our funders











#### **Commonweal Housing**

Office No. 521, Spaces, 35 New Broad Street, London EC2M 1NH 020 7417 1766 / info@commonweal.org.uk / www.commonwealhousing.org.uk