

Commonweal & Praxis Community Projects

Interim Evaluation of the NRPF Pilot Project

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1. About the NRPF project and the evaluation

1.a. The NRPF Pilot Project

This section outlines the model being tested, the assumptions underpinning it, what it is hoped that this model will achieve and outlines progress to date.

What is the model?

The NRPF pilot project aims to test whether a financially stable and sustainable service can be delivered that is able to provide a number of units of free housing for migrants with insecure immigration status who are trapped in destitution because they are unable to work or access benefits. Destitute migrants with insecure status includes refused asylum seekers, victims of trafficking or domestic violence and human rights applicants.

The model tests whether or not these units of free housing can be secured through rents paid by local authorities for accommodation for destitute migrants to whom local authorities have a duty to provide accommodation¹ under Section 17 of the Children's Act. There are therefore two types of resident in the project: those who are having their rent paid by local authorities under the Section 17 scheme, and those who do not qualify for section 17 funding and would otherwise therefore be destitute with 'no recourse to public funds' (NRPF).

The project was made possible by Commonweal securing funding from a range of social investors to enable the purchase of a several houses. It was originally assumed that the capital would purchase 7-8 houses, probably in Croydon though properties have in fact now been purchased both in Croydon and Redbridge. Commonweal is leasing these properties to Praxis who in turn is letting the properties to families funded under Section 17.

Praxis is providing a supported housing service, immigration advice and access to hardship funds for destitute migrants who are not supported by a public body. The model is therefore testing both the financial viability of this scheme as well as the potential added value derived from the provision of this holistic support, which includes access to immigration advice. It is hoped that by so doing the physical, social and mental wellbeing of clients will be improved, that they will be supported out of destitution, and that their prospects of achieving settled status will be enhanced.

Aims of pilot project

The key aims of the pilot are to test:

- Whether the provision of S.17 accommodation by specialist and expert asylum and migration support organisations (such as Praxis) and the added value they might bring to the service offers an attractive and replicable model for local authorities to use.
- Whether the empathetic support available to S.17 clients has a positive impact on their well-being, confidence and ability to settle in this country.
- Whether provision of specialist support and advocacy with the S.17 accommodation results in faster / better decisions by the Home Office for these households.
- The costs, management and support structures needed to deliver a successful model and its replicability or transferability to other organisations and/or areas.

¹ Because the household contains a child who would otherwise be destitute

- Whether a sustainable business model can be achieved that provides some free accommodation for destitute migrants with no recourse to public funds who cannot access other support.
- Whether the provision of additional support from a secure accommodation base enables those destitute migrants to make successful new applications or appeals whilst building their self-confidence and well-being.

Key assumptions underpinning the project

Over-archingly, the original model assumed that:

- Income derived from the contracted service to local authorities would be sufficient to provide further property or individual bedrooms within the property portfolio (on a mixed household basis) which will be let to destitute migrants where Praxis believe there is a prima facie likelihood of a positive appeal or fresh application if clients are provided with appropriate support and legal advice;
- Properties would be let on a shared housing basis to both groups under licence agreements.

A range of other assumptions underpinned how the model would 'stack up'. These have been articulated in the evaluation framework to observe and test with stakeholders as the pilot progresses. Learning about these assumptions thus far is summarised in Section Two.

Anticipated outcomes

It is hoped that outcomes for residents will be:

- a positive decision on their asylum or immigration application so that they secure leave to remain in the UK with access to the necessary benefits and housing to support their integration and transition into mainstream services as necessary;
- for those in the free housing, acceptance by the Home office that their new application or appeal is under consideration and a transition, as appropriate, into either asylum support accommodation or (for those with high enough needs) community care provision by the relevant local authority;
- a final negative decision leading to an application for voluntary return;
- a range of interim outcomes showing progress towards health and stability deriving from having a home and support e.g. improved confidence, health, school attendance (for children) etc.

For Commonweal, Praxis and investors there are a range of other anticipated outcomes of taking forward this pilot project. Critically it is hoped that learning will be gained about the model and its potential replicability for other groups. For Praxis and Commonweal, it is also hoped that the project will stand them in better stead to make decisions about and take forward further work in this area in a range of ways drawing on the lessons and experience of the NRPF pilot.

Activity to date

The project started in April 2015. This is a brief overview of activity since then.

Property purchase

Four properties have been purchased by Commonweal in Croydon and fully occupied by single families placed by the London Borough of Croydon.

Two properties have recently been purchased for the scheme in Redbridge with residents in two of these from March 2016. A third property is to be purchased soon, and once this has been purchased the investment will have been fully utilised.

In addition, one property which is let to Praxis by a private individual became available in December 2014 and has been used by Praxis as part of this pilot project since it began in April 2015. When a London Borough of Islington mother and baby moved out due to a change in circumstances and Praxis rebudgeted shortly afterwards, it was decided that this house would be made available solely to people with NRPF who cannot access other support but continue to be included as part of this NRPF pilot.

Property occupation

A total of fifteen households have now been housed by the project. Eleven of these were referred and paid for by local authorities (three from Islington, four from Croydon, three from Redbridge and one from Enfield, although this latter was initially referred by an NGO). The other four were referred from Praxis' caseload, Freedom from Torture, Doctors of the World and from the British Red Cross.

Most of the referrals from Croydon have been families with children who have disabilities. Two of these households have status but have been refused housing due to a quirk in homelessness law which should be resolved soon. Both of these households have children who are disabled (and one is a wheelchair user) and may need property adaptations to accommodate the children, which is a challenge to find in the private rented sector. Praxis is working with solicitors to resolve these cases since others in similar circumstances are now being housed pro tem by local authorities.

Local authority promotion and engagement

Marketing the properties and support to local authorities started in earnest once the project was already up and running. As the project has progressed Praxis has recognised that this needs to be more proactive and sustained to maintain high occupancy levels and efforts in this area have been scaled up. A leaflet has recently been created to support the email and phone contact to encourage referrals.

Three local authorities are now referring when prompted (Croydon, Islington and Redbridge) and one other has also referred (London Borough of Enfield in partnership with Solace Women's Aid). Negotiations are also underway with Waltham Forest and it is hoped that Praxis can find a way to get registered as a preferred provider in order to enable referrals from them. Praxis feels at this stage that having four local authorities trusting and referring into the project will provide a sufficient base of potential residents without raising expectations of provision given that there are only seven properties in all and spaces do not often become available.

The type of cases being referred is evolving. Initially there was a mismatch between the high needs cases being referred (in Croydon so far most families include children with disabilities) and the original support and cost assumptions of the service. The high needs of clients have also restricted the viability for shared housing arrangements. However different usage is now emerging in Redbridge with shorter term placements by LB Redbridge, often of domestic violence cases or others who have presented quite recently, often as new immigration cases with assessment needs, and may be moved on into asylum support or refuge provision.

Changes to project

The way the accommodation is provided has changed in the course of the project. Originally it was intended to place single (non S17) residents in sharing with S17 families in the accommodation, but for a range of reasons this was impractical and instead it was agreed to use one house in Croydon (the one not purchased by investors in this project and already used by Praxis) for non S17 cases rather than scattering free beds across all properties.

Staff turnover and changes have also presented challenges to the project's early phase. These have included a the appointment of a new chief executive, the two key instigators of the project leaving and a subsequent restructuring involving a temporary appointment overseeing the NRPF pilot project. The project support worker has been in post throughout the project, as well as a part-time housing management-related role. The restructuring is now in place and roles have been changed and clarified within the new structure.

1.b. Evaluation approach and work to date

The evaluation was commissioned in April 2015. The evaluation team combine an in depth knowledge of the policy and practice landscape around migration and housing issues with specific expertise in evaluation methodologies and practice, with particular experience in evaluating projects for vulnerable migrants.

The purpose of the evaluation overall is both formative and summative. Towards the end of the project the accumulated data collected from client, stakeholder interviews, monitoring and cost review will enable a full summative assessment of the value and the achievements of the pilot.

In this initial start up phase of the project however the evaluation has been mainly preparatory and formative and has focussed on:

Scoping and set up work

This involved meeting with and speaking with all internal stakeholders to scope the project as well as consulting more widely with those expert in NRPF and local authority provision. This enabled some basic groundwork for the evaluation in the form of:

- Comprehensive document review
- Development of client monitoring and feedback systems which were discussed and synchronised with Praxis in order to make them as client-friendly and co-ordinated as possible
- Input into the methods of recording client data and information
- Identification of key elements of the pilot project which were being tested and the articulation of 'key assumptions' of the model
- Development of a full evaluation framework, including assumptions but also outcomes for clients as well as anticipated longer-term learning goals
- Scoping of the context to identify a range of individuals interested in the model who would be willing to contribute to reflections on the changing context and the pilot's replicability
- Agreement about ongoing liaison and regular communication with Praxis, Commonweal and investors
- Production of a scoping report on the project outlining some of the key contextual factors emerging which the project needed to take into account.

Part of the ongoing role has involved regular attendance at investor meetings as well as regular meetings with Praxis to talk through the development of systems and challenges they were meeting in the role of a 'critical friend' to the project.

Client fieldwork

Clients are interviewed by Praxis in an initial interview to a format which has been agreed with the evaluation team. All clients are then interviewed, pending their consent, by the evaluation team 10 – 12 weeks after they move into the properties.

Not all clients passing through the project to date have had information collected in this way. This is due to a range of factors: some clients passed through quite quickly, staff turnover within Praxis and the need to review the model within its first year meant some slipped through the net. There has also more broadly been a limited throughput of residents.

However, Praxis have completed a move in survey (developed and agreed with the evaluation team) with six residents and follow up evaluation interviews have been undertaken with these including four families placed by LAs and two single persons with NRPF. Out of a total of 15 households housed to date in the project:

- Six households (seven adults) have done interviews with the evaluation team (this includes one couple).
- Six have not yet been in the accommodation long enough to be interviewed
- Four have refused consent to be interviewed
- One left too soon to be interviewed (staying only one night)
- Six have done initial resident interviews with Praxis
- One has not yet refused consent but has not been interviewed
- Two need an interpreter for the interview which has yet to be arranged
- One has not been interviewed (slipped through the net).

Interviews have been wide-ranging and discursive following a semi-structured interview format but allowing the clients to reflect on other issues if they wish.

A list of all residents of the project is included at Appendix A.

Contextualising the work

The NRPF pilot is contextually reliant. Keeping an eye on policy and practice developments and what is 'on the horizon' will thus prove critical in gaining any realistic insights into the project's potential replicability. The evaluation is therefore incorporating opportunities for the project to reflect more widely on the broader strategic opportunities and challenges for the model and bring in a range of experts and practitioners who can offer views on current trends.

A Sounding Board was convened and met in February this year. For this the evaluation team produced background papers and highlighted issues to discuss. Commonweal and Praxis were invited as observers. Separate notes of the Sounding Board meeting exist, but essentially it confirmed the need for the service albeit in the context of a fast changing policy environment which has already affected and could further affect the scheme in a number of ways:

- Changes in the policy environment, subsequently intensified with Immigration Act 2016 changes which could result in higher level of family destitution but changes in the roles of local authorities
- Continuing interest from local authorities but a need to make the business case by proving that overall costs are reduced by reducing the time spent in the accommodation or by providing other added value (although this is difficult at this scale since social workers and others are already in employment to provide such support)
- High numbers of single people with NRPF identified annually by the CHAIN data on rough sleepers which is commissioned by the GLA (over 1000 a year) with many more at risk and/or living in overcrowded and exploitative situations.

The Sounding Board group agreed to reconvene again to reflect on findings once the model is up and running. Given the fast-moving pace of the political and social context this is to be welcomed.

Interim reporting

A range of stakeholders were interviewed just over one year after the start of the evaluation to produce this interim report. These included:

- 8 Praxis staff (including those providing immigration advice)
- 2 Commonweal staff
- 6 referral agencies: local authorities, external agencies and Praxis staff referring for places for destitute migrants

Eight advisers and advice managers at Praxis were contacted for their views on the project but four did not get back.

Fourteen invitations to participate were sent to referral agencies but eight did not respond. Of these eight, three were Croydon referrers who it transpired had subsequently left their posts.

Investor views were sought via a meeting. All client fieldwork to date was also considered in the reporting, as well as a review of data gathered to date, including that generated by the Sounding Board.

A full list of those interviewed is attached at Appendix B.

2. Achievements and outcomes to date

2.a. Outcomes for clients

The primary source for this section is the six detailed interviews with residents: the reasons for these being fewer than anticipated are explained above. These interviews are complemented by material from interviews with staff and referrers and the other information supplied by Praxis via monitoring data.

Legal issues and outcomes

A review of some cases accommodated where Praxis has had some involvement on issues of immigration status reveals the range and breadth of the case types they are dealing with.

Few advice organisations now exist able to respond to this level of complexity and take a holistic approach. Cases often straddle different areas of law and require careful guidance to clients who may have to make hard decisions. This is part of the added value Praxis brings to the project.

- i. A couple applying for leave to remain on the basis of long residence and the right to family and private life. They have four children under 9, one of whom has a learning disability.
- ii. Three refused asylum seekers whose cases needed to be reopened:
 - a. a single woman from Uganda who had made applications with very poor legal representation and been refused
 - b. a pregnant woman whose British Red Cross-organised solicitor quite quickly secured Section 4 accommodation in London (having successfully argued against being moved away from her support networks and services);
 - c. a family for whom Praxis successfully advocated for Home Office asylum accommodation a few days after moving in.
- iii. A long residence case involving a young woman who had been brought to the UK as a baby but never had her status regularised. She arrived with a baby and got leave to remain shortly after the birth of her second child (a year after applying) and moved out of the project shortly afterwards.
- iv. Three residents with leave to remain but no “recourse to public funds” (this is the default leave granted to people making long residence or family life claims). Praxis has submitted applications to lift these conditions so that they can access mainstream benefits and possibly housing.
- v. One woman with a disabled child who was housed because, even though she had leave to remain with recourse to public funds, due to a failure of housing legislation to keep pace with immigration rule changes she was not able to apply for help as homeless. With a disabled child private rented accommodation was unlikely to be available. So she received housing benefit but the borough topped up her rent. She then made her own application to renew her leave and was given leave with a “no recourse” conditions which she has applied to lift.

- vi. A complex procedural case has dragged on for over 18 months: a single woman on a work visa who applied for settled status after 5 years. The law had changed and the Home Office refused her application. A fresh application is now being submitted.

Praxis has led on the advice and advocacy support in four of these cases. For others the project support worker has provided support and guidance, for example in helping clients secure supporting letters and documentation. The support worker shows a high level of understanding of this field and is backed up by Praxis' immigration casework team. Even where cases are yet to be resolved some clients' prospects have improved, by providing better evidence to the Home Office or persuading them to engage with better quality advice and representation.

Frustration about the length of time required to progress cases has been a problem in most cases. Reasons for this vary but can be broadly categorised as:

- Home Office delays
- Length of time to secure documents and supporting evidence
- Poor legal advice

Home Office delays were referred to in many of the interviews but often alongside other problems and reasons for delays, such as poor advice. Where Praxis was leading on the immigration advice, Home Office delays were not explicitly referred to, perhaps because a significant period of time to achieve success even if seemingly straightforward cases were regarded as par for the course

In some cases securing evidence took time and may have exacerbated HO delays. This is a known problem in the field: social workers are often reluctant to write official letters confirming destitution or residence in social services funded accommodation, and without these the Home Office will not usually give leave or remove no recourse conditions. One local authority in London (not currently referring to the project) had a blanket policy of refusing to write such letters and as a result has spent hundreds of thousands of pounds on accommodation while non statutory agencies try and resolve the problems so caused. The project worker noted the same problem with one case housed by Praxis.

The pervasive problem of people getting poor advice, often from legal advisers and representatives that are known to their community, features in the back story of a number of cases. This overview of a case Praxis have taken over relatively recently illustrates this:

"Four or five months after moving in the applicant got a negative decision at which point he said he was horrified about the terrible job his solicitor had done. The project support worker arranged for him to meet one of Praxis' immigration advisers but it wasn't a positive meeting. He appeared dismissive of the fact that he was seeing an adviser not a qualified solicitor. A breakdown of the few remaining options was given but he went back to a partner – as opposed to just a solicitor – of the firm he'd used previously and was persuaded by him that he could be successful. Apparently he emphasised that "you're from my country". Praxis requested sight of the file and rationale for the refusal. It was a very poor application and one of reasons given for his negative decision was that he had been working illegally. He was very cagey about this and wasn't prepared to accept talking about it.

Praxis staff felt frustrated because they identified that the solicitor was being exploitative, and was known for this. This was shared with social services who insisted that he agree to work with someone from Praxis to oversee and check the application and that he should get the pro bono commitment made by the solicitor in writing. This resulted in him agreeing to be supported by

Praxis and social services agreeing to provide extra resource to secure an expert witness sourced by Praxis. Praxis also advised that the application go in his wife's name which would have more chance of success (she is also a more cooperative client). The application is now almost ready to go and it is a much better one now as there is the expert evidence plus reports from professionals working with the disabled son plus other elements explained by Praxis" (Project support worker]

There were some issues identified about communication between the project and the advice team which had resulted in some negative experiences for clients in terms of the advice they received. The important point here is that in all cases the difficulties were picked up internally and have been quickly resolved.

Service connection outcomes

The project support worker checks that access to primary services such as a GP and schooling is in place and all are referred as required and given information about local support services such as the local library and leisure centre. Most residents found connections made with services and support networks helpful and had continued to use these.

Social services referrals include detailed information about support needs although a paper based record of the referral is not available for some cases dealt with until towards the end of 2015.

Four of the Croydon households include at least one child with a disability including two with access issues. However, in three of these cases social services have organised relevant referrals. Praxis has made and supported access to additional services and activities including the library, relevant churches, meaningful activities such as drop ins and informal support groups, and financial support and food vouchers.

Religious faith is present and powerful in the lives of many residents and a lot of support, including financial and other concrete support is secured from churches and faith communities. The Praxis support worker is acutely aware of the importance to many residents of these connections and is supportive of them. People seem to find their own way to places they prefer to worship. There are many types of churches in Croydon including a row of black churches in former light industrial and office units running alongside the tram mainly serving the Black African and Caribbean population. In some cases these faith-based networks are a channel to advice and information sources, but this may be of poor quality: for an example of immigration advice see above.

In some cases residents travel considerable distances to continue using services, networks, churches and so on with which they are familiar. Half of the residents hadn't changed their GP for example because they had established a rapport with their previous practice and/or feared change.

"I kept (my GP) because I was using this practice before and have stayed with it. I came to the UK in 2000 and since that time have seen friends move and change GPs then GP wouldn't sign documents because they say they haven't know you long enough."

One of these residents is unable to even contemplate a different future and location and has continued to access services in West London.

At the point of moving X had a lot of emotions about how she'd ended up in Croydon and she laid blame for this on Social Services. She is unhappy that the children are doing well in schools in West London but she can't get housed there: her daughter is in a school (there) and X still takes her there daily, and her son is in a special school there and gets special transport. There are a lot of issues

around that as it's a long journey and the driver's been complaining about him eating in the car but he's non-verbal so he can't manage to communicate). The journey is about one hour so this is difficult. She doesn't believe local schools will be as good. She also goes to a church in that area. Her vision is that she'll get housed in Kensington and Chelsea but even though they might take responsibility for her once her NRPF condition is lifted, it's unlikely this housing will be in the borough. [Interview with project support worker]

The two single women in free bedspaces were both referred by Praxis to the Doctors of the World sessions, some of which are run from Praxis. This is a charity providing health care to people with NRPF who may otherwise find it difficult to access. One had been asked for her passport by her former GP and told she couldn't continue to use the service (which in any case was a long way away whereas the other continued to be registered with a GP practice some distance away, though in South London and Doctors of the World advised her to remain with this practice until she had more permanent residency.

One young woman with a learning disability and new baby was referred to and had used a range of services in addition to the GP and health visitor, including a play group, the local library and leisure centre where she's used the swimming pool as well as literacy support. The project support worker also referred her to Home Start and identified their role as very positive:

"They [Homestart] work in a very client led way....initially to identify what clients want from the service and then support its delivery. They tried to get her to go to mother and baby groups and occasionally she did but in the end their weekly visits & the opportunity to talk to an independent and non- professional person to talk to was the most important thing. In any case she was very reluctant to go to groups and self-conscious about people looking at her and knowing about her problems." [Interview with project support worker]

The library was mentioned by several residents as an important place for accessing information and just sitting in a friendly quiet place. The importance of libraries and free spaces to people with time and few resources is demonstrated in the project support worker's interview:

Most of [my] time spent with her was in finding things in Croydon she could use. I took her to the library and all these years she said she thought you needed papers and residency to use a library. The first book she got out was about Bruce Forsyth - she really loves Bruce Forsyth. It made me think how many free spaces there are in London that are warm, have activities etc but people don't know about. (Interview with project support worker)

Both single women in the scheme had got involved with a range of networks and activities including churches. One has been volunteering with Praxis for quite some time and has been prepared to speak about her experience and the impact of the project. This is widely seen as positive although procedures have had to be put in place to make sure that information about other residents or staff is not accessible or compromised by her presence in the Praxis office where she provides clerical and bookkeeping support.

Praxis had expected to organise activities which would bring residents together in Croydon and/or in specific shared houses. The nature and range of needs amongst the placements plus the geographic spread has reduced the potential for sharing. However there have been three events bringing residents together and mentions of these were positive.

Once there is more of a steady state in the scheme i.e. new properties are occupied and the new structure and staff are in place, the project support worker has plans to develop these connecting

activities. The idea of satellite Praxis activities in Croydon and Redbridge which could be offered to the wider Praxis target population of new migrants has been floated.

Health and wellbeing outcomes

Four of the seven adults had mental health problems – in at least one case this was shared in the referral from Social Services and included a learning disability. In other cases both the project support worker and the residents talked of stress and anxiety induced by worry and uncertainty and in several of these cases the project support worker knew they had been treated for depression. Knock backs and delays in their immigration case were described as having a negative impact.

Each of the four family households have a child with a disability – one with a physical disability, two with autism and one with both autism and a physical disability.

The difference in the health and well-being of families between when they moved in and after several months was marked - both for parents, and especially children. This was largely due to the additional space and sense of greater control over it than in their previous housing situations.

“The most important thing is to have a comfortable roof on their head. Kids can play around. If the kids are happy, I am happy. When they come back - they have a garden, they can play in their room, they feel happy. We feel more confident – not really understand. When you step out, nobody knows who you are. But you know who you are. So when you come to a house, when you come to a good house, you feel comfortable and you feel positive and relaxed

Our children – if you want to get then upset you tell them we are moving out of this place. They love (it). They are concentrating, confident – I have my own room – they are able to say ‘I have my own room’.

“The special needs boy – before we came here we didn’t even know he could sleep on his own – now we know that. When he comes back from school, he goes straight to his room, changes his clothes himself – he likes watching the TV. CBBC – before – he would come back from school – he started screaming – he cried all the day – we don’t even know the reason. He doesn’t talk. He has autism. If you want to drink water. He says water. In that way classified as not talking. He was very very traumatised – we asked every day when jumped down from the school van – he started crying. He did that and we don’t know the reason. Until we moved in here. Now he laughed all day. He smiled. Even when he was scared – we didn’t know”. (service user)

“More relaxed and stress free it was such a small room in bed and breakfast this is such a beautiful place I never imagined living in such a place with my children in the 12 years I was here. The biggest, friends come and see and say wow, children happy and more confident son enjoys the house most he has more space here. “

The single women also described feelings of being overjoyed, released or experiencing a different and more positive perspective on life after achieving the stability and sense of agency that being housed by Praxis provided, especially when compared with the worry, stress and in one case exploitation they had experienced prior to being housed.

“This will sound a bit strange ... do I feel more of a connection more than when I was not in this situation? Yes. Before I was trying to sort things out with the Home Office myself. I was in survival mode. I had friends but the experience I’ve had since, meeting new people and their compassion for other people. It’s really opened my eyes. I find myself looking more at the positive than the negative. Before I was so independent. It was very difficult for me to receive. It’s not bad to accept; receiving is a blessing, also to the person giving to you. If I ever have a spare £20 I’ll give it to

someone as that's what people have done for me. This experience has been eye opening. It's changed me a lot. You can have nothing and still allow yourself to be happy." [MF]

"Yes. The whole night when I moved in I was praying, rolling on my carpet; thanking God. I never thought I'd get like this. Even before I came here [the UK] I was suffering and sleeping on floors, moving around. I feel safe in my own space. I can't believe it. I think they are doing very well. I don't see anything they could improve. There are a lot of others like me needing help. The food money may not be enough. The most expensive thing is transport and I can't put that on Praxis. The house is warm. They provide blankets and everything.

It's changed my life and now when I'm walking out I'm proud. I never thought I'd get a house like this before getting papers. No one in my community can believe it. I was in NASS for a long time. Red Cross told me I should have got Section 4. I wasn't getting good solicitors. I was suffering things from other people. You need someone to direct you and give advice. Some of the help I got from my community was good like collecting money for a solicitor but also people abused me because I had nowhere to go, being made to work, look after children, please the men when the women were out.

I'm so thankful for the work you're doing together with Praxis. Some people don't know about this kind of help. You need to move about and talk to people and you find things out. If you stay quiet you continue suffering. This is the first place in my life I can call home. I had no proper accommodation in my own country. I was living in other people's houses and travelling at night not during the daylight because of fear"

The changes and other indicators of well-being were also noted by other staff

"People from completely different backgrounds ... in very similar circumstances, helping each other. At the moment they are living together and supporting each other. Maintaining the house cleanly, looking nice. I appreciate that. No issues at personal level either. That for me is the real aim of the project – seeing this group of women having the support and a roof to stay, and receiving the service from my colleagues as well."

"So when they find out that they have a roof or a bed – that's amazing how they change. The sense of security they feel in their life, roof, place to stay.... I remember when I brought the last lady to the property in Lebanon. The other lady came down and said 'look at the time, you have had nothing to drink, nothing to eat'... in other words, she offered hospitality in a home for the first time to a newly arriving client.... She could 'give'

"Cleaning the pillow, cleaning all the things for the room for this new young lady who was arriving. We didn't ask them to do that – I was so pleased that they were doing it. That was an indication for me that this project has enabled these ladies to be committed to themselves and also to other people, and feel solidarity with others."

Negative client experiences

The location of the properties has created some difficulties for residents, as noted above some felt they had to continue using services elsewhere at some sacrifice to themselves. There was one case of poor accessibility for a child who had recently got a powered wheelchair following an operation to promote independence but whose Mum needed to pull, push and lift the chair up to street level. Social services would not pay for adaptation in a temporary private sector property. This was the only issue – though a significant one – marring an otherwise positive experience for Mum and child.

A couple of residents reported that over time they had become lower in mood and more dispirited because their immigration cases were dragging on

“The powerlessness they feel whilst waiting for out of their control processes to happen overshadows the home.” (Project support worker)

There were also some poor experiences about sharing accommodation. This came up in the only shared household for which data is currently available. It is one of the reasons for deciding that the model would need to focus on creating the capacity to offer free bedspaces and manage housing for people who are not receiving statutory support rather than pepper-pot free bedspaces throughout the scheme.

The tensions arising from the Lebanon Road arrangement resulted from placing a young woman and baby there. She had a learning disability and had experienced exploitation and a turbulent few years. She shared the house with much stronger older women and also had a partner who could not live in the house but stayed over on occasions. It was a difficult and time consuming situation to manage and caused stress and anxiety for residents including one person who was otherwise thoughtful and stable.

“X felt we were making allowances for Y but that was because we couldn’t give her confidential info e.g. that had given her a warning letter & were working with the social worker to try to manage what was going on....she has subsequently said that homeless people need peace and quiet and shouldn’t take people with needs that distress people.”

“Big problem about Y’s boyfriend being at the house. And it became a vicious circle; the more people complained about and isolated her, the more she depended on her boyfriend and he visited more. By this time social services identified him as a major source of support so it was agreed that he should be able to visit but not stay over. Initially he was working at this time so only came for a few hours to visit but then started staying over.” [Interviews with project support worker about two of residents]

The way the project support worker dealt with these and other problems was impressive and this came across in the interviews with residents. The difficult and at times extremely tense situation was managed reasonably well until the young woman had another baby and needed to move on to other temporary accommodation so as to be able to benefit from the support of the baby’s father.

“One incident stands out. I had to give her a warning. The first part of the discussion she was very angry and said I enjoyed giving her warnings and so on but then we were able to have a useful discussion and she was able to let go of her anger. I was impressed by her ability to do this. It made me think that she’s used to being a passive service user.” [Interview with project support worker]

Sharing arrangements are however in place in Redbridge and future reports will explore experiences and outcomes in different houses and housing different types of cases.

What are client prospects for the future?

The interviews with residents demonstrated that all continued to worry about the future, which, given that they were all seen at stages where their situations were not yet entirely resolved was no surprise. For some, what looked like a successful resolution simply opened up another problem: getting leave but with “no recourse” or getting leave but being unable to apply for help as homeless

(this policy level legal problem is currently being dealt with by the Department for Communities but recent events may have delayed it a little).

The team have not yet been able to interview people who have moved out of the project to allow them to reflect on their own learning and experiences. It is, however, clear to us that most have complex lives in which immigration status and access to benefits and/or housing have been an important factor but by no means the only one.

Interviews with residents raise some important concerns that will have to be explored later in the evaluation. At least one resident had what we believe to be quite unrealistic expectations of what she would be able to do once her immigration problems had been resolved. Project workers had made some attempt to shape these, but the situation was complicated by her very poor relationship with social services and the turnover of staff dealing with her. The mistrust so engendered had created the space for her to develop fantasies about her future housing prospects and this may present real difficulties when she has to move on. Other Croydon families, however, have also found themselves living in good quality housing with space and amenity standards that may not be reproduced in move on offers. So far, most of those moved on have gone into a further stage of their immigration process (usually Home Office asylum support accommodation) or from the shared accommodation in Lebanon Road.

And some residents may not get a successful resolution of their immigration problems and then have to face the prospect of return. Praxis already works well in the area of voluntary return, but it has become complicated by the Home Office's closure of the funded service which has now been taken in-house. Anecdotal reports are that returnees now face long delays, poor service and fewer options. Supporting people through that, especially when social services may take the view that they should no longer be paying for families (and presumably Praxis needing to advocate for them), is likely to be as difficult as managing their immigration applications.

2.b Client case studies

Case Study One: Sarah

Sarah and her baby were placed by London Borough of Islington under Section 17 of the Children in April 2015. She stayed in one of the Croydon houses for nine months during which time she shared the house with between one other and two women.

Background

Sarah was 19 when she moved in following a short stay in a mother and baby unit in Chelmsford where initially her baby had been on a protection order. She had become homeless shortly after turning 18 following the death of her auntie who had brought her to the UK as a child. Her upbringing had been difficult; she describes her auntie as very domineering and says she was beaten a lot, including because of her learning disability – she cannot read or write. Her period of homelessness was marked by exploitative and risky situations. She had limited if any contact with family and community members and sometimes encounters with them were a mixed blessing.

"I was scared where I lived before – before Chelmsford. For the most part I was in Luton. I stayed at a family friends' house. It was a nightmare. Before that I was living in Edmonton. It was hell there because of things happening at that point of my life and in that time and place. I don't get that with Praxis – no one one's going to attack you, hide your food, treat you bad. No one is physical or hurting you emotionally."

Praxis inputs

Praxis supported her to register with the GP and other local services. Referrals were made to the CPN and a local youth counselling service plus a mother and baby group. However she found groups very difficult and was uncomfortable in one-to-one client-professional relationships. A referral to Homestart proved far more successful because they work in a more relaxed and client centred way. She said that they helped with budgeting as well which she'd initially found difficult.

"It's different now. Praxis has made it different. They understand you, don't outcast you. The places I was before I was very outcast."

Praxis also dealt with her immigration application and she was happy with the service:

"Praxis very good at explaining what they need from you and ask how you came to this situation. They're fighting for you. Go out there to get lawyers for you. Take a lot of strain off your back. I like the way they do things.... My auntie had a British passport but didn't formally adopt me....They said [my case] would take up to 2/3 years, possibly less but that what matters is gathering all the info they need and as soon as that is done they will start filing of that. I don't have to stress about it. I can get help with money for the fee and now I know I can relax."

The biggest challenge for Sarah during her stay was in sharing accommodation. At the point of referral Praxis and social services thought that Sarah might benefit from the stability of the two older women living there. In fact initially she struck up a good relationship with one woman. However for most of her stay she struggled. Her upbringing meant she constantly felt she was being blamed and she was not used to negotiating. She also kept breaking the house rules by having her partner stay over at night. The more she isolated herself from her housemates the more she wanted her partner to stay. This was an extremely difficult situation for her, her housemates and the Praxis worker. Perhaps because of these tensions initially she didn't consent to participate in the evaluation. However by the time she was interviewed she was very positive about Praxis and the house and admitted she'd done things that were wrong.

Outcomes and what next

In February Sarah moved into temporary accommodation in north London because she needs the support of her partner, particularly given her unborn child was diagnosed with a rare heart condition requiring specialist care for her and her baby. In fact Safia was coincidentally undertaking a move on visit when her waters broke early so she rang for the Doula (a free birth companion). She got her status shortly after giving birth, sooner than she had been led to expect. .

The other significant outcome is her increased ability to cope with a very turbulent year

She will present as homeless as a family with her partner and the two children, probably in Newham because he has strong connections there. They have a good chance of prioritisation but if they have no advocacy to support them, there is a concern that she might not want to talk about her mental health needs due to worrying that services might worry about her ability to care for her children.

Case study 2: Susan

Susan is 57 and was referred into the project by Freedom from Torture (FFT) in November 2015. The British Red Cross are also involved in her case and found her a solicitor. She is still living in Praxis accommodation.

Background

Susan fled Uganda in 2002 where she had been tortured, raped and lost her three children because of the anti-Government activities of her husband. She still doesn't know the whereabouts of her children.

She has been refused asylum four times and survived through a combination of rough sleeping and staying with people in her community.

"I was staying with people in my community, but doing work like cleaning and looking after the children and sleeping on the floor. I was sleeping in churches. Last time before going to Praxis I was sleeping in a church in Brixton. Also in Queens Pk and Stoke Newington. "

Clearly many of these situations have been exploitative and she is also aware that some of the referrals for legal advice from community/church members were not helpful, although on two occasions her community raised money to pay for fees - £800 and £600. She now has a renowned solicitor but is awaiting the FfT report to back up her fresh claim.

Praxis inputs

Susan is already very resourceful. She outlined a wide range of church and food bank services she has been using to survive. In asking her about her excellent English she told me she'd been attending English classes for years at Women for Refugee Women. She was over the moon about the Praxis service - the accommodation, having her own room and the location:

"Praxis give me £25 a week. Everything is here. I walk to market. I walk to shop. I don't even jump into a bus. Praxis has introduced me to a library. I used to think I had to have papers. Four years ago I went to one and they told me I had to have six years residence. God is great and I'm so thankful.

Apparently the first book she got out of the library was a biography of Bruce Forsyth – she's a big fan. But Susan went on to say that:

"My only worry is that my statement hasn't been sent to the Home Office ... This is the only thing that stresses me. I worry the Home Office might come. Safia tells me I should let her know if I get a letter from solicitor. She says I will have to go to Liverpool to take it by hand.

Outcomes and what next

Praxis is confident that Susan has good legal representation arranged by the British Red Cross and that support from Freedom from Torture will provide the evidence needed for a strong case.

"Yes. I feel really comfortable. I never thought I'd have a key to a house. Most of the time I never got keys. Once I lived somewhere and got a key but 2 weeks later I went back to find she had changed the locks. She said I was eating too much."

2.c. Outcomes for referral agencies

Referrals to the project come from local authorities paying for places for their S17 clients and from a range of agencies looking for accommodation for destitute migrants, including Praxis internal referrals. Overall internal stakeholders feel that local authority referrers are getting a good deal, particularly in relation to the somewhat 'grey area' of practical support to clients which allows Praxis

to anticipate and respond to client issues and needs far beyond that which would be usual in an accommodation provider.

Experience to date reveals different drivers for use of the service by local authorities; it is slightly more expensive than the benchmark for other accommodation options (which is a “secret” figure determined by local authorities in London). Of course Praxis provides added value in its provision of advice and support and a better quality of housing including space standards. However, provision of immigration advice is not necessarily the key advice/support function that LAs want to purchase contrary to the initial assumption which appeared to be supported by the scoping research in 2015.

Local authority referrals

Three boroughs currently refer: Islington, Croydon and Redbridge (Enfield made a one-off referral but this was via a women’s refuge). Islington leads the NRPF Network and is generally regarded as ahead of the game in this field. They are enthusiastic about the project as a policy initiative and have used it as an example of good practice in an intercity collaboration (a report on the collaboration is cited below).

The evaluation interviewed frontline workers from all three boroughs about their experience of the project on the ground. Overall they reported positive experiences of using the service:

“My perspective was they help with housing and were given advice to move them on to become independent.”

“It was straightforward”

“Very good with immigration, got one client leave and we were very pleased, they are very good with services especially GPs.... Overall, they have delivered all they said they would.”

“Praxis was very, very helpful and went above the remit”

Local authorities particularly appreciate:

- Care about risk management
- Access to holistic advice
- Access to immigration advice
- Good quality accommodation
- Flexibility and willingness to negotiate and accommodate
- Presence in the borough (although the other side of that is exemplified by one worker who said: *“We want to fill the rooms because we don’t want other authorities in there”*)

Issues identified in interviews with local authority referrers were

- Most identify the accommodation as particularly suitable for more vulnerable clients (because most other accommodation they use is commissioned from the private sector and offers no other support)
- There are some problems with managing conflict in shared accommodation
- Clients refusing to use the immigration advice on offer
- Clients whose needs are for quite low level immigration advice (changing leave conditions)

- Some inconsistency in communications with Praxis (mirrored by a very high turnover of social workers in at least one authority) and requests for a steady state system of reporting at regular agreed intervals.
- A desire to access immigration advice for other clients. In this regard, one authority was referring cases to Praxis general services already and another said they may be interested in a contract for other advice but found that the arrangement to provide such advice bundled in with accommodation was ideal as otherwise they would have to make a business case for it to get it funded separately.

The frontline workers shared the feelings of Praxis staff that the project could do with “ideal clients” who needed immigration advice and accommodation and would fit in the type of accommodation provided. However, in practice, clients need to be found when spaces become available so this is a challenge.

NGO referrals

In practice it was quite difficult to identify which of the people we interviewed had actually made non S17 referrals to the NRPF pilot project. Praxis provided us with a list of those who had made or attempted to make referrals but the people contacted had little knowledge of how the project worked or the other housing resources available and so some of the data collected is probably about people accommodated in other ways by Praxis. This includes some staff and volunteers at Praxis who were unaware of how the project worked or its criteria.

The ratio of demand to supply is also so high that it is extremely unusual for advisers and other workers to get their clients housed. There were, however, some issues about how the unavailability of accommodation was communicated, and in most cases people told us they got no response to their requests. The fact that demand far outstrips supply, and the administration of the NRPF pilot is unable to keep up with ‘calls’ for the service is not surprising but points perhaps to a need to manage expectations better.

Once clients were in the accommodation communication was good and referrers seemed happy with the service. Any problems after this time related to the criteria for refusing or accepting people not being clear, and it also being unclear that this is accommodation provided as part of a package of immigration support and advice (rather than destitution relief).

2.d. Learning about the model

This section looks at how far the assumptions underpinning the model, as identified in the evaluation framework, are proving to be valid and what lessons are being learnt.

Purchasing suitable homes

The evaluation framework identified four underpinning assumptions around house purchase i.e.:

- i. They would deliver a return for investors financially
- ii. That they would be in a suitable location
- iii. That they would have choice about the type of houses they would get
- iv. That from a revenue point of view it would be cheaper for the project than if it is leasing them

It also identified the desirability of properties being in suitable locations to enable the softer outcomes of the project i.e. those relating to connecting residents into services, to be enabled

- v. Properties enable access to existing services and social and community networks

In terms of properties delivering a return for investors in the long term, the arrangement arrived at between Commonweal and Praxis protects their capital investment in that they are properties in London likely to gain in value. However, this does not materially affect the model. Properties have been acquired as part of a charitable gift to test a hypothesis, and the yield coming to investors from the NRPF pilot as it unfolds is the rent Praxis pays plus a subsidy from Commonweal. This subsidy has recently increased as a result, partly, of Praxis finding that local authorities would not pay the anticipated fee, and Praxis therefore having to reduce this (and thus pay less to Commonweal).

Interviewees noted that there were not a lot of houses on the market and that finding properties which are suitable to share was more difficult than anticipated. Commonweal led on the property specification, and though there were discussions about the emerging unsuitability of some of the properties as shared spaces, the portfolio of properties purchased in Croydon effectively rendered sharing impossible for the first wave of referrals because, for instance, the spare room is too small. The situation was then further compounded by the type of referrals received which were for families with high needs where it was unsuitable for them to be sharing with others. This meant that several of the properties have been effectively 'tied up' as S17 accommodation.

"The issue is the type of properties we were looking for were linked to assumptions around the kind of clients we imagined we would be getting. If we were starting now we would maybe be looking at a different type of property. We bought properties thinking they would be shared but a lot of the demand from social services has been for self contained units. It would maybe have been better to get two bedroom places. As at the moment the properties we bought are being rented as single spaces – so we have lost the free bed in those properties. But that's not to say that we are always going to get those kinds of referrals."

Regarding the location of the properties, these are clearly determined by the houses available which met the specification produced by Commonweal in consultation with Praxis. What we can note here is that Croydon was initially chosen partly because of the property prices, partly because the borough was keen to refer cases, and also because the borough rules on HMO registration were favourable. Redbridge is similarly favoured.

Getting referrals and identifying clients

The evaluation framework identified three underpinning assumptions around referrals:

- i. Local authorities would recognise the value of the service to them
- ii. Enough people would know about service to refer
- iii. Destitute clients (from Praxis) would be identified for referral

The main learning has been around

- how long it takes to establish relationships with local authorities
- the range of difficulties associated with maintaining relationships
- how to ensure timely referrals to ensure there are as few voids as possible
- the need to ensure suitable clients are referred

For Section 17 clients

Some of the specific learning and challenges identified in interviews are:

- i. A wide range of skills are necessary in order to broker successful referrals from local authorities which had not fully been appreciated at the outset of the project. These include communication and marketing, negotiation and contract management, and intelligence-gathering as well as administration and relationship maintenance.
- ii. Some of the timings of changes within the project have created challenges for getting referrals. In particular properties coming on stream at moments when Praxis was dealing with staff changes has been an issue: the Redbridge properties, for example, needed to be filled at such a time which resulted in Praxis cold-calling local authorities to try and get the spaces filled.
- iii. Original assumptions about the properties included the fact that there would be a mother and one child to occupy a single room. However some families have been larger than this, with anything up to five children accompanying single mothers, which has meant that the spaces available did not necessarily fit the clients referred.
- iv. It is an uphill struggle with some local authorities to get them to recognise the value of having wrap around support which costs slightly more. Some local authorities have said during negotiations for instance that the additional expense of getting a client into the more expensive accommodation goes over and above their legal duty. *“Local authorities have much cheaper options they can go with. We are charging £46 per night in Redbridge but they have properties they can go to for £30”*
- v. Getting known takes effort: there is a tendency amongst local authorities to stick with what they know as it is easier.
- vi. Staff turnover within local authorities is high, which makes it difficult to establish relationships with individuals and thus be at the front of the virtual queue when they are thinking of potential places to refer. In addition, in some places it has not been clear where to send information on the service: *“I think Praxis have had difficulties talking to the right people. A lot of the contact information available has been info@, for instance – so they have had to send general emails.”* Praxis reports having to constantly research and renew their contact lists: *“Where we have disseminated information, for instance, we might follow up six months later and the person isn’t there anymore. So they just see us on a list with all the B & Bs, and there’s nothing to differentiate us from those except cost unless we go through the process again of explaining how much more we provide”.* This is particularly the case where there is no dedicated NRPF worker, as in Croydon where Praxis has been working with the social services team which has had a very high turnover of staff. Relationships in Islington and Redbridge have been easier as a result of having that key individual with whom to liaise.
- vii. There are challenges inherent in working as a small provider across the board with local authorities as the contracting and commissioning culture favours larger blocks of provision. The NRPF pilot offers a small amount of accommodation, and its positioning as a small, tailored provider meeting individual need goes against the general tide of wanting to block contract with cheap providers.
- viii. Being a small provider also creates problems for being able to offer what local authorities want when they need it. Spaces have not become available often: *“Sometimes they make referrals for a family and we don’t have anything suitable at that moment, so they find something else, and that means we have lost that link and have to re-establish it when we have another space”.*

- ix. This means that judging the right number of local authorities to engage with has been a challenge given the small number of properties: too many and the project is likely to disappoint (by not having available provision when needed) but too few and the project is not going to have sufficient potential referrals to fill spaces when these are created. Praxis has now settled on trying to maintain relationships with four local authorities as giving it a good spread across London and enabling voids to be filled as they come up: maintaining these relationships will take time, however.
- x. There was an initial setback for the project in Croydon, where originally the pilot had anticipated getting block bookings. It was then found that procurement rules did not allow this which exposed the project to greater risk at the outset than they had anticipated.
- xi. The introduction of local authority caps on what they will spend on Section 17 accommodation was unwelcome and took the project somewhat by surprise. *“When the idea was mooted local authorities were desperate and were paying substantially more and we pegged our costings at the bottom end of what they were paying in the private sector. So we weren’t selling at a high rate, the idea was that we would match the lowest they were paying. But to now discover that they are paying less as they have got it together to agree a cap has been a real challenge.”*
- xii. The criteria for client referrals has been an issue: some of the clients have been extremely high needs (more than anticipated) whilst other clients did not want or need the wrap-around support. In addition, domestic violence referrals made into the project have proved challenging given the individual circumstances of the client and have led to Praxis evolving new criteria for referrals which excludes recently fled clients at high risk of returning as there is not the level of support to ensure their or others’ safety.
- xiii. In Redbridge, the local authority required Praxis to be part of the assessment process itself in order to accept Praxis as a service, which means that they could refer people they were not sure qualified for S17 in order for their eligibility to be determined. This created problems: *“It meant that referrals might be short – for example, we had one woman with an asylum claim who was only with us for two weeks. But we had to agree.”*
- xiv. The practice and preferences of local authorities varies unpredictably. For instance, Croydon are not interested in sending people to Redbridge but Redbridge were prepared to send people to Croydon. Redbridge have the same requirement for contracting with preferred providers as Waltham Forest, but whereas Redbridge found a way to bypass this, Waltham Forest are currently struggling to find out how they can get Praxis on to the list in order to make referrals.

In spite of these challenges, Praxis has established increasingly good relationships with local authorities and those engaged report increased trust and understanding in the model on offer, as outlined in the previous section. **Key achievements and evolutions** have been:

- Praxis’ internal recognition that there is a need for constant promotion over and beyond what had originally been anticipated. This means that it is now dedicating more time and resources to this aspect of the work.
- Developing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Croydon, Islington and Redbridge.

- Ensuring that the MOUs developed cover all relevant aspects of the service. For instance in Redbridge, where the MOU required assessment for S17 eligibility, Praxis has negotiated an MOU which contains clear criteria about Redbridge not challenging Praxis' assessment.
- The development of publicity materials outlining the benefits of the scheme (though these do not include the creation of spaces for destitute migrants in these materials)
- Getting on the approved providers list in Croydon, Islington and Redbridge.
- Discussions are underway to try and get on the approved provider list in Waltham Forest, where this is required. Interest in getting Praxis on to this list is reported as high (though also indicatively the person Praxis has been speaking to internally did not know how services got accepted on to the list!)
- New criteria for assessing clients is being clarified in relation to DV cases as well as other clients
- The employment of workers with strong housing backgrounds and with expertise in commissioning, contracting and selling services has added greatly to the team.
- Persevering, in spite of getting knock backs, having few properties to 'sell' and only having scant information to work with within local authorities in some instances.
- As a result of the relationships being formed with local authorities, there are the first indications that these authorities might also spot purchase other services from Praxis. Redbridge has paid for an NRPF condition to be lifted, for instance, and though this is early days the potential of positioning Praxis as service provider more widely than for just accommodation is there.

Interestingly the project is also gaining recognition at a wider level for its work with local authorities. The NRPF team in Islington is participating in a European project facilitated by the COMPAS research unit at Oxford University, and is using the data gathered from families they have placed in the properties to inform this.

"The Praxis Community Project provided an opportunity to investigate the business case for supporting new models of provision by:

- *Working with Islington Legal Services and the housing department to ensure LB Islington could formally procure accommodation from Praxis;*
- *Actively participating in the formal evaluation of the Community Project in terms of sustainability (supply chain of accommodation) and the effectiveness of Praxis' embedded legal advice provision;*
- *Work with Praxis to help promote the model to other local authorities and demonstrate successes to the Commonwealth foundation that had funded the Praxis project.*

Three families were placed in Praxis properties throughout the year and the NRPF Team is continuing to contribute to the formal evaluation of the project. Placements are best suited to particularly vulnerable families who have not yet sought immigration advice; the tenacious approach taken by Praxis in finding routes out of destitution was proven. Praxis presented on their work at the second meeting of the City Working Group hosted by Islington in February 2016."

In terms of the model overall, it is not clear the degree to which the added value provided by Praxis is an incentive to local authorities to purchase the service. Perhaps predictably local authorities seem more concerned to meet urgent legal obligations for now, though some also are experiencing the value of the service (in terms of, for example, Praxis providing move in support for their more vulnerable clients which private providers would never do) and so as time goes on this might encourage greater engagement. In addition, the value to local authorities of having clients move through their care more quickly has yet to be demonstrated by the service and costings on what this

might mean for them, and their savings over time, will then be possible. For now however, with the exception of Islington, who play a wider, national role in this area, the cash-strapped local authorities seem to be responding to immediate demand and juggling crises rather than planning strategically and being driven by the promise of future financial savings, as summed up by one internal stakeholder:

"I suspect they are not seeing the service in the bigger picture – they are seeing it as 'I have a desperate need to house this family, what alternatives do I have for me today? It doesn't feel yet that they are buying into the supportive and supported and empathetic service that Praxis offers. Praxis will therefore have an ongoing difficulty of getting the offer under the nose of those day to day social workers trying to make the placements..... overall, I'm a bit wary that this is a product and if the pressure continues on price then Praxis will need to drive the price down if we want it to continue. There's clearly a finite limit to how far they could afford to do that."

For destitute (non Section 17) clients

There is no shortage of destitute clients wanting to take up the available spaces within the project. A recent review of the project and financial model by Praxis means that these spaces are now provided at Lebanon Road, which was not one of the properties purchased and 'gifted' to the pilot but which forms part of the overall model. Issues raised regarding the referrals of destitute clients were:

- i. Praxis has got far more referrals for men than women but this project only accepts women. Even taking into account other accommodation possibilities for men within Praxis there are only two or three beds in total, in spite of the higher demand.
- ii. The turnover of non-Section 17 clients is low, relating in part to the long delays with the Home Office
- iii. Internally, Praxis is dealing with destitute clients on a daily basis, many of them desperate. The scarce availability of beds through this project has been somewhat frustrating for those advocating for clients internally and the fact that they have to go through a referrals and assessment process can feel like colleagues are 'gate-keeping' a service which creates some cultural tensions within the organisation.

In terms of the achievements and evolutions in the project:

- There are issues about sharing which are beginning to emerge. At present there are no Section 17 clients sharing with non Section 17, but theoretically this is possible in Redbridge. However issues about placing individuals who may not have been screened or assessed with S17 clients with children raise difficult issues which Praxis is beginning to think through.
- Praxis is in a Lottery funded partnership with the Red Cross to take referrals, and the housing budget takes into account this money which allows Praxis to take up three more bed spaces through hosting and also top up the hardship fund for clients. So though Commonweal only pays for NRPF bed spaces at Lebanon Road, in reality by doing this they are unlocking funding from the Red Cross which then allows more bed spaces to be taken up. Praxis is also currently working on an MOU with Housing Justice in which they will clarify how many more hosted spaces they can take on and provide hardship funds for.

Clearly to date the number of bed spaces created for destitute clients is not great, but this expanded model of enabling more spaces to be developed by pulling in other types of support has potential for

the project as it progresses. If more than the bed spaces in Lebanon Road are thus 'counted' as part of the knock on effects of the NRPF pilot the impact of funding this model is likely to be greater.

Providing a wrap-around package of support that clients want and need

Various types of support were envisaged through the project. Regarding the provision of holistic support to help resolve immigration status, the evaluation framework identified two underpinning assumptions, namely:

- i. Clients want and need this service
- ii. Praxis advocacy and advice can make a meaningful difference in the timeframe

Regarding the provision of support to access services and connect to social and community networks, the evaluation framework identified two underpinning assumptions, namely:

- iii. Clients want and need help in identifying and gaining access to key services such as health, schools etc.
- iv. Clients want and need support to access community and social networks

Finally it was also assumed in the model that non-Section 17 clients would be able to have their basic needs met by Praxis, and that for those at the end of the road Praxis would be able to offer meaningful support to help them move beyond their current impasse and make informed choices. It was also assumed that there would be an element of move-on support offered which would be useful to clients once they left the properties.

For some of these assumptions it is too early to say whether or not the project has the potential to deliver. Findings thus far are as follows.

- i. Legal outcomes for clients is considered above in 2.a, but broadly Praxis has been able to help clients both by gaining status, improving their prospects and, in one case, persuading a client to abandon a lawyer who was clearly not acting in the client's best interests as a result of which the couple concerned have lodged a new claim with far greater prospects of success for regularising their status.
- ii. However, fewer clients than anticipated have needed legal advice and approximately a third already had lawyers.
- iii. Generally the support needs of clients have varied greatly, and some have needed much greater support than others. Many have been in the UK for a long time and thus have roots and connections, others are isolated. Part of Praxis' strength is that it has a highly client-focussed and adaptable model of support which takes its lead from the client directly, as one stakeholder noted: *"The project itself is quite organic. No client seems to have the same pathway. [Praxis] seems to tailor their support to individual people which goes with the ethos of Praxis and the caseworkers they employ. So I don't mean this in a bad way but there's less structure, they are more reactive to the changes of what the clients are going through."*
- iv. Part of the difficulty of finding the clients who match the support provided has been the model itself, and the inability of the project to dictate too closely which clients they take on for financial reasons. As a result of this some of the cases have been either lower or higher needs than the project was set up to meet.
- v. Some support required by the clients or social services has been at a significantly higher level than originally envisaged which either has or may create difficulties.

- Generally the referrals from Croydon have been coming from the Children in Need service (which caters for children with protection or disability needs) rather than the NRPF team, and have been for children with special needs. This has had an impact on the project in terms of both support and the move on process.
 - Child protection issues were also not anticipated at the level they have occurred in the project and in one case Praxis has ended up with a child resident under a supervision order which effectively makes Praxis part of the monitoring process for social services. As yet they do not know how this will affect the relationship with the client.
 - Another client with high support needs was the domestic violence case Praxis took on: this proved to need highly specialised input, as it involved a woman who had recently left her partner and effectively needed a safe house which Praxis was not set up to provide. This case taxed the ability of the project worker who had to quickly learn the best routes for support in difficult circumstances.
- vi. Some clients have definitely benefitted from the package of support Praxis offers which connects them to services (libraries, GPs). They have also benefited from the less obvious background, social support which is provided through residents meetings and regular presence of caseworkers. Part of the support on housing management, for example, has involved a Praxis worker who combines both housing management and key worker roles, and he reports that some clients welcome the chance to 'chat' about their issues in the more informal setting of a visit to fix a light fitting.
- vii. Some of the sharing arrangements have been problematic: others have also been, as was originally hoped, sources of support in and of themselves with residents gaining greatly from the presence of the other resident. In relation to sharing more generally, it is becoming clearer that in order for this to happen successfully there will need to be both more systematic discussions with clients about the rules of engagement plus regular residents meetings.
- viii. Some move-ons happen when the client becomes eligible for Section 4 accommodation, and the project had hoped to offer them move-on support. However the reality has been more messy than this: one client went to her Section 4 accommodation only to return to the project and be told she could not return which was distressing for her and the project workers.
- ix. Generally there is a growing awareness that the limited resources of the project combined with, in some cases, the difficulties of staying in touch with clients are going to make move on support very challenging and the support worker is worried about this, particularly with the more vulnerable clients. *"The whole moving on thing is unbelievably difficult –for S17 as well as non S17 clients. It isn't as obvious as we thought. So for instance Croydon is refusing housing assistance to some people even with leave: how do we support people in those circumstances?"*
- x. It was hoped that some of the support offered to destitute clients would be to help them think through voluntary return. Realistically this is not happening as Praxis is assessing people before they go into accommodation and are not placing people if there appear to be no options for regularisation.

Overall therefore the support provided is empathetic and appreciated by clients. However two points emerge at this stage. Firstly, the need for clients to take responsibility for some of the running of the house was noted and the resident manuals which are currently being produced will reinforce

this. And secondly, as properties fill and the client base both increases and diversifies there is an emerging need for Praxis to consider what the parameters and limits of its support are in relation to this model, and how sustainable is the type and level of support provided to some clients to date. Commonweal notes that this situation (of having to review support levels) was mirrored in another Commonweal project (the Peer Landlord project) where:

“The staff of fantastically committed workers needed to take a long hard look and they stepped away from their traditional support model. It took people the best part of a year or 18 months to realise that they could reduce the level of support and the sky wouldn’t fall in.”

Housing management

Regarding housing management, the evaluation framework identified two underpinning assumptions namely:

- i. Praxis able to do this within resources of project
- ii. Building Management is delivered to expected standard

Praxis had limited experience of property management and so it has been learning on the job. This was a known and accepted factor from the outset, and Commonweal had sufficient trust in Praxis to know that it would take care of the properties. All the same the learning curve for Praxis has been relatively steep. A housing manager was appointed in April who now takes this forward, though their role is combined with being a key worker for residents. The key issues mentioned were that:

- i. Praxis reports the defects which Commonweal are liable for at meetings: the communication is regular and this is welcomed.
- ii. Initially much of the housing management tasks got covered by informal ‘systems’ within Praxis e.g. the original project worker carried a phone with them to provide 24 hour cover and a friend of his kept the gardens tidy. Such systems were highly individual and unsustainable however, and as the project has gone on, and new workers with housing experience have come in and informed the how the project runs, the systems have got more formalised.
- iii. Some housing management functions have been out-sourced: this has been the case with the provision of 24 hour cover with St. Mungo’s now providing the required first line response required by local authorities.
- iv. To date, housing management has responded to issues which normally it might be reasonable for clients to sort out themselves. One of the drivers for this has been an extremely committed worker who has responded to numerous resident requests for help even if these were not urgent: *“Sometimes he was going to Croydon in his own time on a Saturday to change a light bulb.”* In addition, housing management checks were being completed weekly which was unnecessary and potentially intrusive for clients (though some clients also report welcoming the chance to talk to the housing manager who doubles as a key worker at this point in the project). This has been scaled back and the project is now doing health and safety checks once a month on a specific day.
- v. Housing management procedures have been drawn up, and further manuals are being produced to help clients take more responsibility for the running of properties. *“We need to strike a balance – yes, we need to manage the risks, but also important to help the clients manage their own risks. Ultimately they need to know how to keep themselves safe – it might be the first time they have encountered certain appliances for instance. So [Praxis is]*

developing a comprehensive handbook to help clients who may have no experience of property or services.” A service user is helping in the development of this.

- vi. One of the interesting ‘by-products’ of having an intensive involvement in the properties and their management has been the building up of networks of local providers who are committed to and interested in the project. For example, in order to source a cheap electrician locally the housing manager contacted a range of services, found a supplier, and explained the project to them. This resulted in a lower rate for the project, and a locally based provider who was prepared to go and sort out problems quickly because they were interested in and liked the project and what it is doing.
- vii. The appointment of two workers (Marteka and now Maria) with extensive experience in housing has enabled a more systematic approach to the housing management elements of the work.

Property occupancy

The evaluation framework identified a number of assumptions around property occupancy in the original formulation of the model, namely that:

- i. House sharing would be made possible by suitable properties and clients
- ii. Clients want to and accept house sharing model

Property occupancy and some of the challenges arising from this has been mentioned already and the key lessons emerging are that:

- i. Managing client expectations about the fact that they will need to share a house needs to happen early on
- ii. There have been some positive as well as negative client outcomes which are linked to house sharing with some residents benefitting from sharing
- iii. Praxis has recognised the need to develop manuals detailing information for clients about running the house
- iv. Praxis has recognised the need to invest in residents meetings to enable constructive house sharing

Financial model

At this stage in the project the costs are still getting clear and the budget has recently been reprofiled to take account of this. A range of issues or changes have come up in relation to the financial model thus far which include:

- i. The fee which Praxis charges local authorities for units has had to be reduced as a result of an unexpected cap on local authority payments for S17 clients. This has not had an impact on Praxis’ budget per se as Commonweal has (for this and other reasons) increased its subsidy to the project (thus decreasing the rent Praxis pays to Commonweal). However in terms of the model overall the cap on payable rents will need to be factored into longer term projections of sustainability.

- ii. That said, the rents charged by the project seem to have been relatively competitive: the original rents were set at £46 per night and the cap was set at £39 (this is a secret figure but was 'discovered' by Praxis digging around). This 15% differential would obviously stack up over time.
- iii. Take up on the properties was slower than anticipated and voids, particularly at the beginning of the project, were higher than the 85% factored in, partly because Croydon had given strong indications that they would block purchase all bedspaces. As a result there was some financial slippage at the outset.
- iv. The advice team support was never included in the project budget and this has been recently confirmed in the new budget.
- v. The true management costs of the project have yet to be calculated. A combination of this being a new project, and Praxis being new to housing management, means that the start-up costs (in terms of staff time, certainly) have been greater than anticipated. Getting clearer about the true cost of the time being spent by managers and project workers will be more possible as the project is up and running and as all elements of the work needed to make the project successful (for example, the time needed to market and promote the project to local authorities) is clearer. Generally Praxis now feels that the staffing models set for the project were quite conservative, and that scaling up the model to include all properties is therefore challenging.
- vi. There have also been additional 'extra' costs identified, such as the provision of 24 hour cover, and bringing in an independent surveyor to look at properties before they are taken on.
- vii. For local authorities, there is a potential need to disaggregate the housing costs from the support and advice costs. Though the advice costs are separate, the support costs are not at this stage and it is not clear that this would be possible or ultimately desirable.
- viii. There are financial, practical and cultural tensions created by the advice work not being funded. Financially it means that Praxis needs to find resources to meet the often complex cases being presented by the project, not all of which they would normally field. Practically the project has produced more work for advisers to add into their existing schedules and requires Praxis internally to prioritise the NRPF pilot clients. And because the advice is being provided under a service level agreement, cultural issues arise because clients who are in the pilot project accommodation, but who are not necessarily the most urgent cases needing Praxis support, gain 'privileged access' to advisers which can and does feel, to some advisers, uncomfortable and not in line with Praxis' core values.
- ix. This cultural tension needs to be monitored in terms of its organisational impact, and is mentioned in this section as it is essentially a product of the financial modelling which requires local authority purchase of units of accommodation which are linked to service level expectations.
- x. Generally there is a sense of the budget 'just adding up' at present and of very tight margins. A figure of £3,000 was quoted as being the current margin of error on the project, which obviously allows very little room for manoeuvre.

A more in depth examination of how a sustainable budget might be built which takes into account the moving goalposts of the context and the emerging lessons about full cost recovery is now needed as the project moves into its next phase. At the moment, whether or not it stacks up financially is still unknown.

Contribution of learning (evaluation) to the project

It is hoped that the formal evaluation will contribute to shaping the project and enabling lessons to be extracted quicker which can inform the development of future projects. The following issues were raised in interviews about the role and experience of the evaluation thus far:

- i. The focus on learning feels extremely positive to those involved. *“That’s been the positive thing about working with Commonweal. From the beginning, there’s been the ability to try something and great if it works but not dreadful if it fails. Obviously we are learning from it – it’s just having the encouragement to think and not just run around doing.”*
- ii. Commonweal is used to contracting with academic institutions to evaluate their project and this non-academic evaluation is therefore somewhat different in feel. The focus is less about the quantity of data generated (which with this type of project is inevitably limited) and more about the qualitative nature of what is being gathered and learnt. *“So far what I’ve found with this evaluation is that it doesn’t feel defensive. It feels helpful. It feels like you want to evaluate the project and the people and what is going on as well as keeping an eye on the wider area.”*
- iii. The evaluation input feels ‘rounded’, with the team having a relevant range of complementary skills and expertise.
- iv. The evaluators’ input is enabling Praxis staff, Commonweal and investors to learn to a certain extent. Staff welcome the chance to take a step back and think critically about what is going on. *“Especially when I’m drowning in my own little bits of chaos, having the evaluation check in has really refocused me on other aspects of the project. It has helped us pull out things to think about, and given us a kind of enforced space to think internally.”* Commonweal also is appreciating the reflective process, and at input at investor/strategic meetings has added new perspectives. *“[The evaluation team] has asked questions which have stopped people in their tracks and said ‘Oh yes, we didn’t think about that.’ And the discussions with the Steering Group have produced useful information.”*
- v. The engagement of the Sounding Board as a mechanism to reflect on the context for the project was welcomed. *“It was hugely useful and interesting, and I got the impression that this was second nature to [the evaluation team] whereas we have not had this in other evaluations.”*
- vi. Contact with key stakeholders outside the project has also led to the project – and the evaluation – being included in a piece of research being taken forward by COMPAS in collaboration with Praxis and the LB Islington (Action for Inclusion in Europe: see above for more detailed description). This research focuses on helping to *“evidence an invest-to-save approach which can be used by Praxis to determine whether the model can be up-scaled”* and they have committed to *“actively participating in the formal evaluation of the Community Project... and the effectiveness of Praxis’ embedded legal advice provision”*. This will clearly provide another strand of enquiry and analysis which can, in turn, feed the evaluation being taken forward by the NRPF pilot evaluation team.

- vii. That said, there is a slight concern that the evaluation may focus slightly too much on the analysis of the policy environment and general reflections about the model rather than focus on the primary tasks of collecting and analysing primary data emerging from the project. This is largely because two of the evaluation team are experts in housing and migration and aware of and interested in the wider and unfolding policy landscape. But: *“Don’t get too excited about the policy. This isn’t about writing policy position papers.”*
- viii. The evaluators must also keep an eye on not influencing the project too much and make sure that the role of critical friend does not merge into feeling like a part of the Praxis or Commonweal team.

Overall it was stressed that the evaluation needs to be collecting and analysing all data there is as Commonweal is reliant on this to produce not only evidence about the impact of the project but conclusions and recommendations for investors in the future. *“Fundamentally the investors want to know what is sustainable”*. At this stage in the project data is limited but the evaluation team must ensure that the model remains the primary focus of scrutiny.

2.e. Overview of progress to date

Key stakeholders were asked their view on how the project is doing overall: the greatest achievements and challenges.

Key achievements

The main achievements identified to date are that:

- i. **It has got ‘up and running’**, and established as a working model. There is a general view that the first rocky stages have been successfully navigated, lessons learnt, and the model is now available to be genuinely tested.
- ii. **Good local authority relationships** have been established and progress in this area has been better than hoped for at one point
- iii. **A suite of policies and procedures** have been drafted which are in line with good practice: these had to be developed in full as Praxis is new to housing provision, but are now nearly all drafted, and will enable a more efficient functioning which is better able to manage risk.
- iv. **Accommodation and support have been provided** to destitute and vulnerable people who would not otherwise have accessed this.
- v. The project has proved itself **highly responsive to client needs**
- vi. The model being trialled feels **genuinely innovative** as well as in line with Praxis’ values and core priorities of homelessness and destitution. *“We are doing something nobody else is doing, thinking outside the box and taking action. That’s commendable”*
- vii. The **evidence and learning** emerging from the project is of use to **Praxis**. *“It is giving us evidence of what is happening on the ground. We have been able to gather stories and evidence about what is happening to people and how you can resolve their situations. That is enabling us to have some influence. And I would hope, as we have appointed a communications manager, we will be able to increasingly use some of that information and knowledge.”*

- viii. The project is also **enabling learning for Commonweal and investors**, ranging from the discussions happening through the formal evaluation, to the insights which a Praxis service user was able to provide to Commonweal trustees.

Key challenges or setbacks

The main challenges or setbacks identified in interview were:

- i. Some vital areas of **the original model have not yet been tested**, notably sharing properties (which means the originally anticipated benefits of doing this have not been tested)
- ii. **Finding referrals** has also been a key challenge as well as maintaining relationships with the relevant local authority departments.
- iii. **Failure by the local authority to follow through on an informal agreement to block contract.** Croydon indicated strongly a commitment to block contract bedspaces which did not materialise once bedspaces were available and led to a high level of void units initially.
- iv. **Clients with higher or different needs than those the project was set up to meet.** As a result of the need to fill voids, clients were taken on who did not fit the “model”, and in some cases did not need immigration advice. It also appears that at the start of the project clients were not necessarily assessed for suitability in terms of sharing etc, nor were these issues raised with referrers or clients themselves.
- v. Finding the **right complement and balance of staff** (both in terms of time and skills) has been a challenge and as yet Praxis is still working out what the best affordable combination might be. At present it does not feel to be the optimal balance, even though staff resourcing has evolved considerably for the better over the project. For example, there are some tasks which are being undertaken by the Project Manager which could be more usefully delivered by administration or support workers.
- vi. The project has been subject to **considerable staff churn** at Praxis. None of the staff involved in developing the project initially (Chief Executive, deputy director, project manager) now work at Praxis, and staffing has been subject to several gaps. However, the full team are now in place and functioning very well and Praxis staff are to be commended for adapting and accommodating these unforeseen changes whilst continuing to deliver and develop the service and attract skilled, experienced and committed individuals to join them.
- vii. The **complexity of the cases** taken on has been a challenge for the project and to date involved more resources for some clients with high support needs than originally anticipated. Clients have just taken more time and this needs to be addressed in some way.
- viii. The **amount of time needed to liaise with statutory authorities**, including referral agencies but also social workers and midwives has been more than anticipated. The project is client-focussed and holistic which is a good thing, but from the point of view of service provision this means that various services are using Praxis as the key broker for passing on client information. This takes time as relevant workers are often difficult to get hold of, and there may be several of them for some of the more complex cases. This is not time which Praxis had anticipated / factored in.

- ix. There is really **no capacity for move on support** as originally envisaged. This means that Praxis is in some cases releasing clients into a world where they know that they will continue to struggle, and this raises questions for client outcomes which it will only be possible to investigate 'down the line' once clients have been outside the project for a while.

Main risks identified to date

The main risks identified to date are that:

- i. **The model does not deliver on its original promise of creating bed spaces for destitute migrants.** This could be because of a range of factors: the clients stay longer than anticipated, cost more money than anticipated and the type of properties being managed do not allow for any meaningful provision for destitute clients.
- ii. **Referrals stop coming from local authorities.** This could happen for a range of reasons, including local authorities no longer having a duty to provide for this client group, or local authorities ceasing to refer into the project because there is so little provision that their experience is that requests are rarely able to be met, and they go elsewhere.
- iii. **Local authorities refuse to fund any support.** Some local authorities like the fact that immigration advice is bundled in (because otherwise they find it difficult to argue for paying for it separately) but some say that they would prefer a menu approach to services and costs. Such an approach however may pose a risk that authorities will simply choose the cheapest option.
- iv. **Residents do not move on quickly and there is a much lower turnover to test the hypothesis.** There has been a lower turnover than originally anticipated already, and given that cases are taking a while to be processed clients are staying longer than originally projected.
- v. There is an emerging **tension between objectives** of resolving immigration status as quickly as possible and the project also improving resilience, health and well-being. The latter are longer term outcomes which are likely to require time to both produce and evidence, but there is a driver to get immigration cases resolved more quickly (and clients moved on and out of support) to make the 'case' for the model stronger from a financial point of view. The risk is that one effectively undermines the other: this can be mitigated by getting clearer about wellbeing aims and not promising or expecting too much which is to do with longer term changes for clients.
- vi. **Encouraging move on may be difficult.** The properties are comfortable and of a high standard, and there is some evidence that residents may have unrealistic ideas about how long they can stay for and where they might be housed in future (and the quality of the accommodation they go to).
- vii. **Safeguarding issues arise which damage the reputation of the project.** This is of particular concern for shared properties where 'unscreened' residents share with families with children. Praxis is particularly concerned as they are aware that the referrals information they get from local authorities varies: *"Islington is open about information sharing but with other boroughs we get the information and wonder if there are other things they have not told us. With some there are, but we only find out afterwards."*
- viii. **Safeguarding issues (or fear of them) inhibits original aspiration to promote house sharing.** Safeguarding issues have not come up thus far because of the decision not to pepper pot units

of accommodation through the project, and this risk may mean that keeping both client groups separate is desirable anyway in the longer term. This would undermine an original aspiration of the project, which was to get clients from different backgrounds supporting one another 'across the S17 divide', but this may be necessary.

- ix. **The model does not stack up financially.** At present there is a tiny margin of error in the budgeting which allows very little room for any slippage. It is only now that the real level of project inputs and costs are becoming clearer that it will be able to see whether or not the project effectively washes its face financially. This is a risk to the model rather than the project as a whole: the learning will still be useful.
- x. **Risk for investors.** This is regarded as very low given the London property market, the fact that there are a number of ways for investors to protect their investment in the event of the project ceasing to operate and in terms of percentage paid to them on their investment which is currently 4.3%. Subsequent projects have been set up with a sub 4% yield.
- xi. **The project pulls Praxis in directions it does not want to go.** There are already some slight cultural tensions between Praxis' traditional role as advocate and its new role as a housing provider and manager. Overall the organisation will need to be mindful of whether the project is helping Praxis to meet its mission, or whether it is creating an imbalance internally which is pulling the organisation out of shape. The learning and evidence generated through the work will be helpful come what may (for policy and development work), but Praxis will need to keep a weather eye on how far the NRPF project, its procedures, demands and culture end up dominating the internal landscape rather than enhancing it.

What changes would people make to the design knowing what they know now?

With the benefit of hindsight interviewees said they would change, or might think about changing (pending further evidence) the following at this stage in the project:

- i. Conduct more substantial market research prior to the project which takes into account current practice in relation to placing the relevant client group, housing residents outside borough, explores their attitude to funding additional support such as legal advice as well as the 'subsidy' element of the model to inform a more targeted marketing campaign from the off.
- ii. Vary the property portfolio away from having all houses. Most felt that the optimal combination would be a combination of houses and flats which they felt would be easier as an offer to local authorities who in some cases are reluctant to pay for a whole house. Part of the reason why only houses were bought was to enable the shared housing model.
- iii. Consider getting a different grading of financial options for local authorities in order that they can purchase differing levels of service if needed. N.B. a menu is being suggested but there are risks associated with this (local authorities might pick and choose). The key point was that there needed to be a more thought through strategy of communicating around the elements of the service which are not 'pure' housing provision and the benefits of these.
- iv. **Revise expectations for house sharing across the project.** This is clearly more challenging and complex than originally envisaged and both the number of beds and the type of sharing are now being reviewed.

- v. **Allow a start up period for the project** prior to renting out the properties which enables marketing and negotiations with local authorities before rents started to be paid and voids started to happen.
- vi. **Build in time to research and create the range of policies, procedures and templates** necessary both for housing management and client monitoring rather than trying to develop this as time went on.
- vii. **Build in specialist skills from people with housing experience** from the beginning.
- viii. **Consider whether or not entering into a partnership** with an organisation which does housing management might be a better way of ensuring quality and proportionate management input whilst enabling Praxis to focus on its core skills of client support and advocacy.

3. Context for project

This section considers the context for the project, and specifically how this context may help or hinder the delivery of this or similar projects in the future.

The year since the project started has been tumultuous, seeing a general election followed by the EU referendum and a subsequent change of government. No one knows how these changes will pan out, but it is reasonable to surmise that many of the changes and the ripples out from them will affect the project.

Contextual changes

The following gives an overview of some of the more salient changes that are generally agreed to have happened or be likely.

House prices

- i. Most commentators say that there is likely to be an effect on house prices, particularly in London and at the higher end. The difficulties of property companies post Brexit (seven of the largest commercial property funds halted trading in the first week of July according to the FT) may indicate that the rising market on which the project's investment base is predicated will slow or end.

Migrants in the UK

- ii. The situation for all migrants (and people perceived as migrants) has undeniably got worse during and after the referendum campaign which was infested with racist discourse. There has been a recorded increase in racist attacks and incidents and a lot of anecdotal evidence of migrants considering return
- iii. The negotiations prior to the referendum and the general climate of opinion during and after it have affected many organisations' willingness to provide services to migrants, to such an extent that illegal refusals of, for example, benefits and housing services had been reported anecdotally. This is likely to affect both migrants needing accommodation and section 17 families needing to move on into mainstream support and housing.
- iv. A substantial body of research in the UK and elsewhere shows that "crackdowns" on immigration generally lead to more undocumented migrants and also usually to more presentations to local authorities as people lose accommodation, employment or other support

Local authorities

- v. As a generalisation, inner London authorities had lots of cases when the project was first designed and were assumed to be likely enthusiastic users. They are now seeing fewer presentations (the effect of the housing market on driving poorer people out of inner London) and have also developed their own responses which include "toughening up" and buying in their own immigration advice.

- vi. Outer London authorities have seen presentations rise, but some have worked to reduce spend in similar ways to inner boroughs (in particular a group of 6 mainly outer London boroughs working with Lewisham and the Home Office). While this is unlikely to affect the project directly (there will always be enough new cases to fill places) it may affect the options for rolling out or replicating. The project, however, is likely to find itself working more with authorities with less experience of providing S17 accommodation, and potentially less political sophistication. Such authorities are less likely to sympathise with the wider aims of the project, and may even find it difficult to contract with an NGO that finds itself in oppositional roles at times.

Immigration Act 2016

- vii. The Immigration Act 2016 provisions on what is currently S17 are due to come into effect in April 2017. Regulations (which will contain much important detail) are yet to be laid. Alongside the Act is the further restriction on most appeals, which means that fewer families will be able to appeal a negative decision from within the UK. What is clear now is that after April 2017:
 - there will be much closer working between the Home Office and local authorities
 - some cases currently getting support might not under the new regime
 - the Home Office will expect local authorities to refuse support to cases where the application has come to an end, although it is likely that some local authorities (maybe encouraged by legal action) will continue to do so while any challenge to the Home Office decision is pending
 - levels of support and decisions about them may become more uniform
 - most importantly: local authorities will have no statutory responsibility to support families where no application is pending

Potential implications for the NRPF Pilot Project

There are a range of implications for the NRPF Pilot Project which may flow from these changes:

- i. The greater involvement of the Home Office at all stages may make working with users much more difficult. It will certainly make it imperative that Praxis is clear with them about its role and the limitations of that
- ii. Local authorities will expect to be able to terminate support arrangements without any obvious way forward for families who have had final negative decisions. Praxis will then have to decide what to do in those cases.
- iii. At present Praxis does not screen applicants in relation to the relative strength of their claim to stay. In the light of the point above, it may be worth considering limiting cases taken on to those with good claims, to avoid the difficulties attendant on ending support.
- iv. There is an assumption (not necessarily borne out by previous practice) that this closer working will result in quicker decisions. This will thus limit the time available to improve health, welfare, resilience and general wellbeing and therefore potentially undermine the project's ability to make these 'softer' gains for clients.
- v. Although voluntary return has always been a part of the work Praxis does, the project may have to consider how it would work with families who need to return as a result of negative decisions, especially given the anecdotal evidence that since the Home Office took the voluntary return service back in-house from Refugee Action it has become slow and difficult to access.

4. Findings and next steps: for the project and the evaluation

This section summarises the key findings from the work thus far.

It should be noted that all of these need to be viewed through the lens of the evolving political and social context outlined in Section 3. We will need to review the model's positioning and viability in the light of these as and when they begin to bite.

4.a. Lessons and next steps for Praxis

- i. **Ensure sufficient market research for new projects.** The evaluation raises questions for Praxis about how projects are developed, planned and agreed internally. It was clear that the initial research could have been more extensive and involved more than one borough. In addition, discussions (with LB Croydon) around a block contract did not materialise. A block contract obviously would have minimised voids and meant there was less or no need to market to other boroughs but no pre-contract undertaking was agreed. When the informal commitment was reneged on the project experienced some turbulence from the outset.
- ii. **Note and accept rapid pace of change within local authorities.** However, it is impossible to plan for all eventualities even with extensive market research: the context for this project has developed significantly since the project's inception and even if more authorities had been initially consulted their needs have now changed.
- iii. **Establish and maintain monitoring systems from the start.** Initial record keeping and monitoring seems to have been somewhat ad hoc, and the evaluation has had difficulty getting hold of information from the very early stages. For future projects it is worth designing such systems more carefully from the off. For this project, the monitoring has now improved significantly but must be developed and sustained.
- iv. **Joint working and communication between the housing and advice teams needs to be sharper.** Various findings underpin this recommendation:
 - The cost of providing immigration advice, a central offer of the project, is not in the total project budget. There is however an expectation that the advice team will pick up on cases.
 - Communication between the housing and advice teams in some cases was not as good as the project would have liked in terms of being timely and focussed. Though this has been dealt with internally there is a need for ongoing monitoring to ensure this continues.
 - Some local authorities report referring clients to the advice team outside the project. The potential caseload increase plus the reputational risk if cases cannot be taken on need to be considered. Praxis has, however, started to charge for this work and is taking advice on a charging structure.
 - Referring local authorities clearly expect their accommodation clients to get priority advice within Praxis' advice provision. However, it is not clear that all advice staff at Praxis do give priority to cases from the project. There are implications for service delivery that need to be thought through and translated into policies if necessary.

- v. **Internal cultural tensions need to be acknowledged and worked through.** This builds on the last point, but is a deeper cultural observation about how the housing work fits alongside Praxis' existing work. Praxis is founded on an ethos and principles which always unfailingly places the needs of clients first come what may, side-stepping procedures if possible and necessary to get the best result for them in the moment. The way in which non S17 people are accommodated within the NRPF project has caused some confusion internally, with advice staff unclear sometimes who gets housed in what accommodation (and who does not), and what the criteria for assessment are. Changes made recently requiring a 48 hour referral/assessment process (to assess risk and suitability) mean the advice team is not able to make emergency referrals. This has created some tensions as advisers have experienced the housing workers as 'gate-keeping' services, but there is a broader cultural point for Praxis to keep under review as the advocacy culture bumps into the necessarily more ordered and risk averse procedures of the housing work and its requirements under service level agreements.
- vi. **Strategically review the role and implications of providing housing services.** Getting housing management right has involved rapid learning and been time consuming. Though the project is now on a more even keel, Praxis needs (and intends) to address at Board level the question of whether it develops further housing and if so, how. Learning from this pilot will enable this, and enable Praxis also to address what other options might be available to run the housing management other than in house. When the project first started there were no other options than to provide this in house, but there may now be some that are more cost and time effective, particularly if Praxis does not intend to scale-up significantly. Above all Praxis needs to be clear that the project is enabling it to fulfil its mission and meet the needs of single, homeless migrants.
- vii. **Factor in more time for a range of emergent needs both in this and future projects, particularly:**
 - **Ongoing marketing and negotiation.** Generally relationships need to be built and maintained with local authorities, and more time needs to be built in to enable this given all the emerging lessons of local authority liaison detailed in Section 2.
 - **Monitoring and administration.** Partly as a result of staff shortages when there were 'gaps' in staffing, administration has fallen heavily on the Project Manager and it would be good to think through ways in which this can be lessened or supported.
 - **Dealing with clients with higher levels of need than anticipated.** This happened as a result of a range of factors which have been detailed in Section 2, and this needs to be addressed either by ensuring there is adequate time to support clients with higher level needs, through better assessment processes or a combination of both.
- viii. **Publicise the emerging benefits of the project to local authorities.** For example show how getting people to dump poor quality or exploitative advice saves time and money in future negotiations and publicity with local authorities.
- ix. **Specialism in high risk clients was not planned, but could be a selling point.** Much of the accommodation used by local authorities is sub-standard so they tend to prioritise more vulnerable clients for the Praxis accommodation (Croydon, for example, sent cases from their Children in Need team not their NRPF team). Since the capacity has now been developed to work with these cases it may be worth using it as a selling point.
- x. **Consider how 'move on' can happen more smoothly within the project.** Negotiating with referring authorities about likely future housing options may be required to ensure that clients make informed decisions about their next steps.

- xi. **Pursue the possibility of offering other services within borough.** The possibility of Praxis offering some services in Croydon and Redbridge to save clients having to travel to Praxis has been discussed, and such services could possibly be open to others in the area. Decisions about this should be balanced against the fact that some residents like to come to Praxis to participate in wider activities, the resource implications of outreach provision and the importance of encouraging use of local services where appropriate. There is also the possibility of local authorities 'spot purchasing' specific pieces of support or advice: this has happened with Redbridge, for instance, where they have paid to get an NRPF condition lifted.
- xii. **Clarify peer support expectations.** The expectation of peer support needs to be included in sign up, the emerging residents' manual and checklists for key working
- xiii. **Develop clearer expectations for residents for improving their own wellbeing (and monitor this).** The development of clearer house rules and information and a manual for residents to enable greater autonomy is welcome and should be key to occupants taking more responsibility for their wellbeing. This may need to be regularly reviewed with new residents to ensure a sense of ownership. This also responds to some extent to the 'risk' of there being a slight conflict between the objective of wanting to move the client quickly through the legal process, and wanting to improve wellbeing mentally, physically and socially. The latter will perforce be limited and not have to entirely rely on Praxis delivering intensive, one to one support.
- xiv. **Create a more regular reporting mechanism for local authorities** who feel they would benefit from this. This would, ideally, be two way, exchanging information e.g. monthly on a series of headings.
- xv. **Clarify referral criteria and develop clearer procedures for referring destitute migrants** for external referral agencies and Praxis staff. This is particularly important for partner organisations.

4.b. Lessons and next steps for Commonweal

- i. **Consider a longer lead in time for projects** during which Commonweal and partners draw on collective experience and pay particular attention to:
 - Specification for the property, and time to think this through in relation to the suitability for the requirements of the project, in this case around sharing, disabilities and access needs but also HMO and hostel registration requirements.
 - Conducting more extensive questioning and modelling to check out, for example, initial presumptions of block contracting.
 - Allow a longer lead in time for creating relationships with referral agencies and publicising the project, and factor this into the model as it unfolds as this will be an ongoing need.
- ii. **Note that the model is changing and is likely to evolve even more.** Changes have been both in relation to services and costs partly in response to external circumstances and new information (although there is a question as to whether that information should have been available before, as explored in other points here) and partly because the project seems to have been under costed from the outset.

- iii. **Consider what Commonweal values as learning.** Both the project and the evidence collected through the evaluation raise questions as to how Commonweal is using the information and learning it is generating through other projects. Commonweal is the expert in this type of innovative project development, but strikingly there were a few instances where the parallel experience of the Peer Landlord project was brought to bear on the project; the links did not seem to be fully considered or utilised. The need for a long lead in time, and greater realism about costs and initial voids, for example, were highlighted in other projects but the lead in time for the project here appears to have been spent essentially adjusting and correcting for assumptions made at the start that maybe could have been challenged before operations started. Often the activity itself is the learning that needs to be disseminated, and most importantly put to work on future projects.
- iv. **Commonweal could consider trialling a funded ‘dialogue period’ for future projects** in which action research enables a testing of key assumptions and draws on previous lessons of projects. This sort of robust conversation needs to happen once the project and Commonweal have agreed on the essential need and idea, but before operations start. At present projects are likely to feel under pressure to exhibit knowledge and expertise they do not have before they get the nod from Commonweal, and then to deliver afterwards.
- v. **Revise fee expectations from local authorities.** Rents were set at 4% which it seems were higher than other Commonweal projects. These have been reduced recently to varying rates of 2.5/3% which is worth noting for future projects.

4.c. Lessons for investors

- i. There is a need to explore **how investors will react to changes in the London property market** and also how potential investors in other property markets can be made to feel more secure
- ii. **Investors need more direct and simple information** about progress and changes, including about:
 - Significant changes in the model
 - Respective contributions of the investments made
 - How far the investments have impacted on Praxis’ capacity to manage more bed spaces and housing
- iii. **Differentiating the start up phase from the fully working phase of the model is necessary**, as only the latter will yield information about whether the model is, in the long term, sustainable. The start up phase does of course yield information about the costs needed to do this. The fully functioning stage is only really beginning to happen now as the last property comes on stream.
- iv. **Viability levels in delivering a suitable rate of financial return and as well as social returns** is a question to be explored now that the project is getting into its stride.

4.d. Lessons for potential replicators

At this stage lessons are only just emerging, but the following can be noted:

- i. **Cost is the main driver for local authorities unless they have a specialist interest.** Although local authorities like the project, few are supportive of its wider aims, which they see as outwith their remits. Their main concerns are cost and suitability. However Islington is a

notable exception and has highlighted the project as an example of good practice and another borough values the bundling in of immigration advice as a way of getting this past their finance people.

- ii. **Local authorities vary making a single offer difficult.** Local authorities have diverse priorities and drivers when purchasing accommodation for S17. This makes the provision of a simple “one size fits all” service more difficult and might point to better marketing via a menu of services.
- iii. **Inverting the model.** This model adds housing capacity to an existing advice service, which is replicable but may limit it. It could be looked at through another prism, where housing organisations develop or enhance their offer with advice and support. Housing Associations are now more interested in this area of work. Some BMER led associations have signed a “migrant pledge” to do more practical things to improve their work with new vulnerable migrants, particularly those who are destitute. This may open opportunities to approach them about replicating this work as part of their services, especially if they are already providing temporary accommodation to local authorities.
- iv. **Potential for support from Housing Associations.** Some HAs may also be willing to offer housing management services to migrant focused projects (Arawak Walton, a BMER HA in Manchester has just started doing this for the Boaz Trust) which could be a cost effective way of acquiring expertise in an area that has proved difficult for Praxis. But the costs and trade-offs need to be explored further
- v. **Focus on the advice offer and costs.** The model currently is based on the idea of an existing and experienced advice agency developing the housing capacity to support its work (and using its advice strengths to enable its funding via supporting S17 clients). It is thus predicated on the advice service existing (and largely not funded via the model). If a housing organisation decides to develop a similar service to extend its housing offer to destitute migrants it will need to develop or acquire the advice capacity to support this (possibly by partnership with an advice agency). This needs to be explored once the model is stable enough to be examined in more detail, and in particular the advice elements of the service need to be costed or explicitly excluded (in other words, state that the model can only be replicated if advice is available funded from elsewhere).
- vi. Few agencies outside London can deliver the range of services provided by Praxis to such a widespread client group. This means that partnerships may be required to replicate the approach in some areas. On the other hand, London has a particularly diverse migrant population, and some other areas may find that the range of knowledge and services destitute migrants in their areas require is not so great.

4.e. Strategic questions for the next phase of inquiry

This final section poses the strategic questions as the evaluation team sees them at this stage, and which the evaluation will seek in some way to address over the next phase of the project. In some cases we indicate ways we might do this but in the main we wish to clarify that these are the questions that key stakeholders would like us to explore.

1. *Is this model now delivering benefits for destitute clients? Could it deliver more? How?*

The project currently employs two people full time and funds a significant proportion of the Head of Housing and Service Development worker's time. It manages seven houses in order to accommodate four destitute migrants. Now the model is approaching "steady state" the team will look into the range of options which might help Praxis increase the number of destitute migrants housed and supported through the project. It will explore these in consultation with Praxis, Commonweal and the investors essentially looking at how far the much further the project can build Praxis' capacity to expand the accommodation offer.

2. Do S17 clients get enough from this project and could that be improved?

Over the initial period, it has become apparent that the group, the S17 families cannot simply be seen as a secondary client group or simply a 'means to an end'. They too are affected by a social injustice which needs both a housing and wider holistic response.. Given the appalling accommodation offers made to some families is it legitimate for Praxis to focus on providing better conditions and support for the most vulnerable. But that also needs evaluating both of itself (is the support etc working, how and why?) and in comparison with the service provided to other destitute migrants who do not get statutory support.

3. Does the cross subsidy model work? What helps and hinders it working?

It has been a struggle to get to this point, and the model still appears frail. A huge amount of learning has been done. But we now need to be able to interrogate the data and pose questions about the relationship between the possible return on investment and the services provided. We need to know what the crunch points are for investors, including Commonweal, and Praxis as the provider as well as beneficiaries.

4. Are there other cross subsidy models that might work better?

The evaluation could also look to comparator models to some extent to explore other ways of configuring resources and services. How else could accommodation for destitute migrants be created? Would this play to Praxis' strengths? Which organisations might that be more suitable for other types of configuration?

5. Is the project building Praxis' capacity to manage housing and does Praxis wish to develop this further?

In the next phase the evaluation will look more at the impact of this project overall on Praxis and see whether and how it is developing its capacity, what this enables it to do and the implications of this. By choosing to do much of the housing management in-house it is in effect building its own capacity. Is it doing this well? What will it be useful for? Can the organisation actually use this?

6. What needs to be included in any cost benefit analysis work?

The next stage of the evaluation needs to revisit the financial model for the project, chart how this has evolved and then gather costings around service provision. To date the evaluation has not looked at this in any detail as the project was still setting up but we will have discussions as to how to start this with Praxis and Commonweal.

7. How much of the support Praxis is providing is needed and yielding results that are appreciable?

The demands of this project (filling voids, getting new local authorities on board, supporting households with high needs and managing various difficult situations) have meant that levels of support and other inputs required have generally been high. Equally, given the small numbers housed, the support has been available. But to replicate or to scale, we need to take a step back, look at how far it is possible to predict client needs with better referral criteria (thus far it has not been) and then draw a more realistic picture of what needs can be provided for within this financial model, what else might be desirable were there to be additional funds or what the minimum provision might be if there were no subsidy.

8. How could the model work without Commonwealth?

Social investors may be prepared to accept a lower rate of return for significant social good. How can the project identify the 'sweet spot', and how can the return be evidenced to investors' satisfaction? Or will some level of subsidy always be necessary, and if so, what?

9. Can we tell a story about longer term benefits to users?

We have yet to interview most people who have moved on and the next phase of the project may enable us to do this. This may begin to enable a projection of at least estimated cost savings to local authorities by virtue of having used the service.

Appendix A: Overview of clients in NRPF project up to 1st June 2016

Client	Household size	Local authority client referral form	Other (non LA) referral	Immigration status	Move-in date	Move-out date	Praxis initial Resident interview	Evaluation follow up interview	Interview w Project support Worker
PROPERTY 1: LEBANON ROAD									
MF	W		Praxis drop-in	Insecure	21/12/14	-	Yes	Yes	Yes
SO	W & baby	LB Islington (LBI) – Tel. referral		Long residence	27/4/15	12/2/16	Yes	Yes	Yes
JA	W		FfT referral form	Refused asylum seeker	23/11/15	-	Yes	Yes	Yes
SB	W		BRC/DoTW/Praxis (DoTW referral form)	Refused asylum seeker	22/2/16	7/4/16	No	N/A	Yes
GB	W		BRC	Refugee status	21/4/16	22/4/16	No –1 night stay	N/A	No
PROPERTY 2: WARBANK									
J&GN	Couple & 4 children	LB Croydon (LBC) – Tel. referral		Art.8 – right to private & family life	29/4/15	-	Yes	Yes	Yes
PROPERTY 3: MARKFIELD									
MS	W&2	LBC Tel. referral		-	12/6/16	-	No consent	N/A	N/A
PROPERTY 4: ROWDOWN									
MO	W&3	LBC Tel referral		Leave to Remain with NRPF	29/7/15	-	Yes	Yes	Yes
PROPERTY 5: NEWLANDS									
LS	W&1	LBC Tel referral		Awaiting change in housing regs	24/9/15	-	Yes	Yes	Yes
PROPERTY 6: HALL									
AO	W&2	LB Redbridge (LBR) – referral form			14/3/16		No consent	N/A	N/A
AS	W&5	LBR – referral form		-	24/3/16	14/4/16	No consent	N/A	N/A
MA	W&1	LBR – referral form		-	29/4/16		Need consent	-	-
PROPERTY 7: THURLOW									
OF Thurlow	W&1	LBI – referral form		-	5/4/16	-	No consent	-	-
RE Thurlow	W&1	LBI - referral form		-	8/4/16	-	Need interpreter to discuss consent	-	-
DD Thurlow	W&1	LB Enfield / Solace Women's Aid - referral form		-	12/4/16	-	Need interpreter to discuss consent	-	-

Appendix B: List of those interviewed for interim report

The following people were interviewed in the course of researching this interim report:

Amy Doyle	Commonweal
Anne Marie Harrison	Praxis (Advisor)
Ashley Horsey	Commonweal
Bethan Lant	Praxis (Advisor)
Carlos Gomez	Praxis (Housing Management and Key Worker)
Chloe Desbenoit	Red Cross
Curtilice Bristol	LB Islington
Fissaha Tesfagabir	Red Cross
Henry StClair Miller	LB Islington
Maria Iglesias	Praxis (Head of Housing and Service Development)
Marjorie Simpson	LB Croydon
Mel Steele	Praxis (Head of Advice)
Pete Whiting	LB Redbridge
Safia Mun	Praxis (Project Manager for NRPF Project)
Sally Daghliah	Praxis (CEO)
Sean Macneil	Praxis (Advisor)

In addition to those listed above (who were specifically interviewed for the interim evaluation), this report also took note of:

- Interviews done for the scoping report
- The meeting with investors in April 2016. Investors were offered individual interviews but responded that they felt the meeting had covered the necessary ground. Investors at the meeting were:
 - Tim Wilson, City Bridge Trust
 - Douglas Gunn, Trust for London
 - Freddie Waite, Big Society Capital
- The sounding board meeting (list of participants below)

Sounding Board attendees

Ashley Horsley	Chief Executive, Commonweal Housing
Ceri Hutton	Evaluation team
Heather Petch	Evaluation team
Henry St Clair Miller	LB Islington/NRPF Connect
Irmani Smallwood	Evolve Housing

Jacqui Broadhead	Ops Manager for NRPF team at LB Islington
Jean Demars	Was the Housing Lead worker at Praxis
Jonathan Price	Researcher, Oxford University.
Michael Bates	Lawyer, Birmingham Law Centre, part of Central England Law Centre
Michelle Fuller	Praxis volunteer and resident of project
Sally Daghlia	Chief Executive Praxis Community Projects
Simon Sandberg	Consultant working currently for Lambeth Social Services
Sue Lukes	Evaluation team
Zaiba Qureshi	Director of Ops, Housing for Women