



Brick by Brick

Is enough being done in
Salford's housing system to
support mental health?

www.mindinsalford.org.uk

Registered charity no. 1156625

 mind in Salford
for better mental health

Why Housing?

Everyone needs a safe, suitable and secure home to stay well. Unfortunately though, at the moment there are issues across the private and social housing sectors which are making it harder for people to find the housing they need.

At Mind in Salford, we understand the importance of housing to local communities, and regularly come in contact with people whose mental health has been impacted by their housing situation. We know that a suitable home is fundamental maintaining good mental health, and is a crucial part of the recovery process for those who have received support from mental health services.

Informed by Mind's review of mental health and housing, *Brick by Brick*, we will be campaigning to improve housing and services in Salford, with the aim that by doing so, nobody's mental health is compromised by their housing or their ability to access to services.

As a charity, we have identified three key areas of the local housing system that we feel should be prioritised. These are:

- 1) Housing Stock and Quality
- 2) Personalised Care and Communication
- 3) Bidding and Benefits

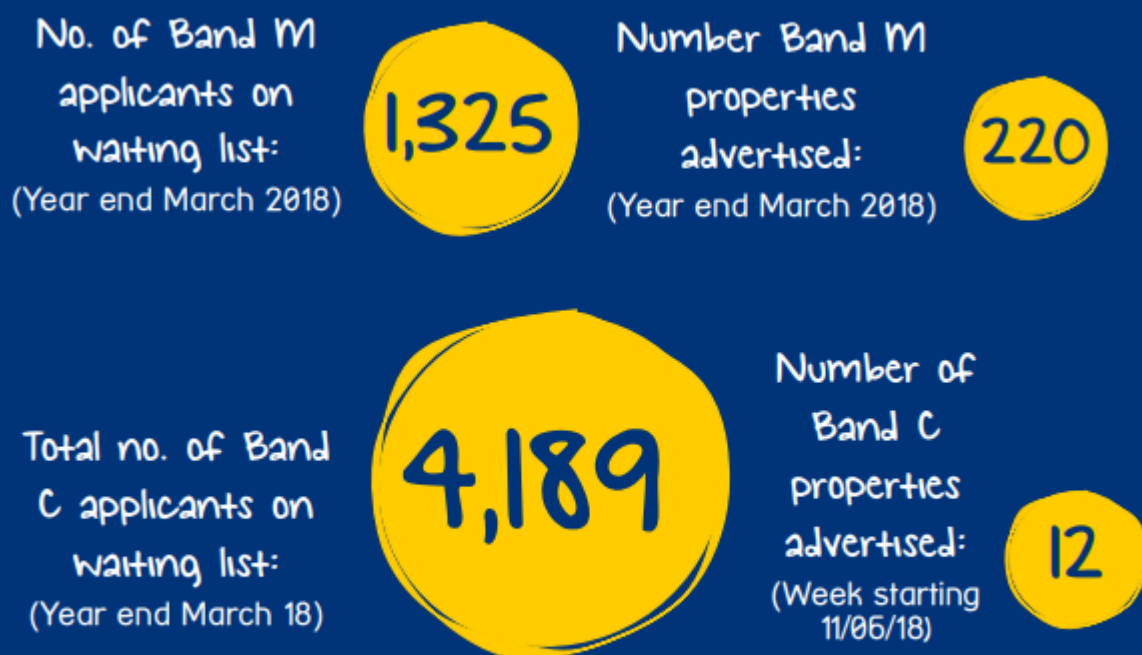
However, this is just the start. Going forward, we want to make sure we're focusing on the most relevant issues by gaining information from people experiencing mental health difficulties, and gleaning insights from people who work in the housing and mental health sectors in Salford.



Housing Stock

We share the widespread concern amongst many housing and mental health professionals that the current stock of housing allocated to individuals experiencing mental health issues is not suitable for purpose.

Our advocates work hard to ensure that people suffering from mental health conditions in Salford find suitable housing, where they feel comfortable and have both a formal and informal support network around them. However, the scarcity of appropriate accommodation in the area has made this a near-impossible task. We have come across figures that highlight the severity of waiting list times for social housing in Salford, especially for applicants in 'Band M' who need accessible homes to suit their medical needs, as well as Band C applicants, many of whom have minor medical and care needs – often relating to mental health.



Source: Salford Home Search (2018)

Given the scale of demand for social housing and local authority support, there can be significant pressure on renters to accept any accommodation that is offered, even if it not suitable for their needs and far away from crucial support networks. The insecurity caused by such shortages is a threat to mental health, and heightens the risk of homelessness for many individuals. This self-inflicting system of social housing allocation is unsustainable, and we believe that steps should be made to ensure that more of the right homes are provided for people in need of supported accommodation.

Quality of Accommodation

Lengthy waiting times or inability to find suitable social housing often draws people towards the Private Rented Sector (PRS), where commonly, added complications can prove unmanageable.

This has recently been highlighted locally in joint study, '[Precarious Lives](#)', conducted by Salford City Council and the University of Salford, in which researchers interviewed tenants who privately rent across the city. Interviewees raised concerns with the local PRS, which in many cases mirrored the sentiments of people we at Mind have spoken to during our Brick by Brick research, particularly surrounding themes of affordability, living conditions and insecurity.

Additionally, studies have argued that many 'slum' rentals as the lowest end of the private rented market tend to target those who are most vulnerable or already have multiple complex needs. It is this web of problems with the PRS that many - including the Homeless Monitor - have attributed the rise in recorded statutory homelessness. Therefore, as well as pushing for more social supported tenancies to be built in Salford, we want landlords in the private rented sector to be held accountable for providing substandard properties to tenants.

Attempts have been made to monitor private rented accommodation quality in Salford, namely Salford City Council's *Landlord Accreditation Scheme*, in which private landlords voluntarily sign up to a code of practice and management standards. The scheme has over 750 members, encompassing around 3,000 properties. However, according to the latest ONS statistics, 22% of people privately rent in Salford, which amounts to roughly 25,000 properties. This leaves a substantial amount of landlords required only by overarching legislation to provide adequate homes, which as [research shows](#), is often hard to comprehensively apply.

Furthermore, although the current [code of standards](#) fervently emphasises the responsibility landlords have to support the wellbeing of their tenants, not once does it mention potential mental health implications, or which mental health services to signpost to should they think their tenants are struggling.

We want Salford to be a leading force in PRS standards, so are calling for more stringent enforcement of private housing standards and further efforts made to empower residents by providing direct information on how to report a problem.

Communication Between Professionals

We recognise that efforts have been made in Salford - as they have across Greater Manchester- to provide collaborative care and better share patient information across different care agencies and support organisations. The inception of Salford's Integrated Care Organisation (ICO), that brings health and social care staff (including district nurses, social workers, GPs, and other care professionals) in 2016 is an example of this.

However, longer-term advice and support is rarely available, and we believe that patient information is not adequately conveyed to local authority housing staff, who often have a limited understanding of mental health considerations. A key objective of this campaign is to raise awareness not only among the general public, but also within local housing staff networks, so that decision-makers can better understand the housing difficulties faced by those experiencing a mental health problems and take the appropriate actions to mitigate them.

We therefore believe it is essential to address the shortage in housing support workers, and to cultivate an enduring culture of understanding amongst housing professionals by developing training and resources, with a particular focus on mental health awareness and local signposting.



Floating support and hospital discharge

There is good evidence that timely, regular floating support helps people to sustain their tenancies, reduces housing management problems (for example, rent arrears, property disrepair, ASB), and can improve physical and mental health. Floating support is particularly important in helping people manage the transition between different forms of housing support – such as the shift from supported housing to general needs accommodation.

Moreover, many people experience delayed discharges from inpatient mental health wards because of lack of suitable accommodation. The period after hospital discharge is high risk for a first or recurrent period of homelessness, readmission, suicide or harm to others. Ensuring that recently discharged patients have access to suitable accommodation and regular support is pivotal for their recovery, and also makes practical, economic sense as it will reduce the chance of readmission and so-called ‘bed blocking’ on inpatient hospital wards.

Regionally, plans are underway to develop the Greater Manchester Hospital discharge protocol, including a homelessness pathway to improve the current strategic links with Salford NHS Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and Salford Royal Foundation Trust (SRFT). We support this development in terms of its step towards collaborative, personalised care, but still feel there is

scope in Salford for NHS bodies to improve information sharing with housing professionals. A truly ‘person-centred’ approach must include housing considerations.

What can be done now?

Through our research we have identified some areas of housing and healthcare in Salford that we believe could make a difference to the hospital discharge process if addressed immediately.

- 1) **Housing to be a more prominent part of patient care plans** i.e. Is the accommodation suitable for the individual? Are they close to formal and informal support networks?
- 2) **Enlist care coordinators at an earlier stage**, not after the individual has been approved for discharge at a tribunal. This thereby enables care needs to be in place as soon as the client is ready to be discharged and prevents further delays.
- 3) **Reviewing the social home bidding process** :
By providing accessible face-to-face support and simplifying the bidding process, we believe time could be saved for both the individuals applying housing staff.

Temporary Accommodation

Permanent accommodation is crucial to effective recovery for many people discharged from hospital. Unfortunately, there has been an upward trend across the country in the number of people – leaving hospital or otherwise – being placed in temporary accommodation. In Salford alone, the use of temporary accommodation has risen by 103% since 2013, and last year the number of households placed in bed and breakfast accommodation increased by 201%.

This reliance on temporary accommodation not only affects those discharged from hospital, but means that people with a lower 'priority of need', such as single men, lodgers and people with minor medical needs can spend extended periods of time in such accommodation. The more time spent in these circumstances, the more tenants are vulnerable to the social risks associated with temporary accommodation, which is why we believe there needs to be a drastic reduction in the usage of temporary accommodation as a solution housing demand.

201%

Increase in the number of households placed in Bed & Breakfast accommodation in Salford

Why can temporary accommodation have a negative impact on an individual's mental health?

Higher rates of alcoholism, domestic violence and relationship breakdown.

Often away from community and support networks.

Insecurity of tenure and lack of clarity over rights.

Housing First

'[Housing First](#)' is becoming an increasingly popular model for supporting people with complex needs, including mental health problems and homelessness. It aims to provide stable and affordable housing as quickly as possible, and provides intensive support for people's additional needs – including mental health. Although the programme will not fix homelessness on its own, there is strong evidence to suggest it can make a substantial difference.

Salford City Council have committed to supporting the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) Housing First programme. We support this announcement and will be anticipating announcements about the progress of the programme.

The Drawbacks:

Although Housing First may have the potential to transform the care of rough sleepers, it does not address more common financial and housing pressures such as:

- Property affordability
- Property quality
- Provision of social housing
- Access to debt and welfare advice

It is therefore important that the Housing First programme does not overshadow the ongoing housing needs of the wider Salford population.



Bidding and Benefits

We find that many people struggle to navigate housing and welfare support systems - such as social housing registration and benefits claims - leaving them isolated, distressed, and at risk of financial destitution.

We often see clients that are not fully aware of their rights in terms of challenging benefits decisions. For example, the appeal system for challenging benefits decisions or backdating missed housing payments can be complex for someone experiencing a mental health condition, meaning they could miss out on further entitlements. Subsequently, tenants are unable to meet housing costs, leading to increased arrears and threat of homelessness. Going forward, local benefits rights should be more coherently explained, and comprehensive information should be readily available.

Nationally, difficulties have been highlighted regarding the transition to Universal Credit (UC), where claiming is done exclusively online. Furthermore, under the new UC system, direct rent payments to landlords have been withdrawn and claimants are expected to manage rent payments themselves. For people experiencing mental health problems - which might affect memory, increased impulsivity and difficulties planning - being able to manage this sum and pay rent on their own could prove problematic. When Universal Credit is implemented across Salford in September 2018, we think it is imperative that there are abundant face-to-face support pathways available to residents,

especially for those with existing mental health issues.

We want the Salford housing system to be easy for people with mental health problems to navigate and understand, with plentiful information and support available to help them do this.

What's happening in Salford?

In April 2018, the council released their 2018-223 homelessness strategy, which outlines key housing and welfare pledges. Amongst them is the plan to set up a Universal Credit task and finish group to prepare for the full UC service rollout in September. We will be monitoring the progress of the report and be lobbying for statements like this be followed with action.



Benefits Sanctions

Information for claimants is of course crucial to nurturing an effective welfare system in Salford that enables individuals to sustain tenancies.

Information alone however, is not remedial for those experiencing severe and enduring mental health difficulties, who often require more assistance to navigate and engage with welfare procedures.

An inherent obstacle to stability for many is the benefits sanctions regime. When someone fails to comply with requirements needed to receive their benefits entitlements - such as attending work-focused interviews with their advisor - they are issued with a sanction.

Sanctions are used in many benefits assessments such as JSA and ESA, and impose restrictions on claimants that prevent them from receiving their entitlements if they do not meet certain criteria. Subsequently, if a person under sanction loses their home, they can be refused housing support by the local authority as they are deemed to be 'intentionally homeless'. The method has come under [strong criticism](#) recently, yet is still likely to play a [core part](#) in the

delivery of Universal Credit, which is due to be rolled out in Salford this September.

Mental health problems can make it extremely difficult to attend appointments and meet other welfare criteria, meaning that those suffering are often issued with sanctions. Claimants are then left with an even more restricted ability to engage with services, therefore reducing their income, aggravating money problems and increasing the risk of worsened mental health or homelessness.

We believe that the deterrent-based sanctions regime is not productive, and is particularly pernicious towards those experiencing mental health problems. We welcome current scrutiny of their effectiveness and believe they should be used with extreme discretion in the Salford area.

Summary of Policy Considerations

- 1) More social homes and supported tenancies to be built in Salford.
- 2) Improved information sharing between housing and health and social care staff — particularly pertaining to hospital discharge.
- 3) Drastic reduction in the usage of temporary accommodation.
- 4) Compliance with GMCA Housing First Programme.
- 5) More face-to-face advice and support for people during the benefits claiming and social housing bidding process.

What next?

Over the coming months, we want to reach out to people in Salford to best understand what can practically be done to improve housing, particularly for those struggling with their mental health. Whether you are a private or social housing tenant, a mental health or housing professional, or have had your mental health compromised as a result of your housing situation, we want to hear from you. To share your thoughts with us, contact, communications@mindinsalford.org.uk.

Help support our cause by sharing our analysis on social media, or to keep up with campaign activities both nationally and in Salford, sign up to Mind in Salford's Brick by Brick mailing list.