

# Future of Supported Housing: Learning from existing literature

July 2026

## Summary

This paper synthesises and draws learning from existing literature exploring how supported housing has been, and currently is, funded in England. These lessons will shape our work on the Future of Supported Housing, ensuring that our proposals for a more financially sustainable sector build on work that has already happened in this area.

Supported housing is accommodation with support which enables people to live independently in the community. There are around 535,000 supported homes in England, including retirement communities, extra care housing for older people, homeless hostels, mental health step-down units, domestic abuse refuges and long-term housing for people with a learning or physical disability and autistic people. However, as set out in the context section, within the current system, demand for supporting housing is rising faster than new homes are being developed.

Part one of the paper draws lessons from previous approaches to funding supported housing since the 1990s, before Supporting People was introduced in 2003, and up to the removal of the Supporting People ringfence.

Part two focuses on what we can learn from existing literature on the current system for funding and commissioning supported housing, drawing together evidence on the system's weaknesses and proposed solutions and recommendations for a more effective and sustainable system.

Finally, the paper reflects on what the findings mean for our work to secure the financial sustainability of supported housing, concluding that the work must:

- Address the fragmentation of the sector both in terms of the complex funding arrangements and division of accountability, creating clearer and stronger oversight.

- Balance the tensions of oversight, cost control and streamlined funding, with local flexibility, space for place-based innovation to grow and tailored solutions that understand and reflect the diversity of the sector.
- Build a cross-sector consensus on the future of supported housing, with solutions that recognise the interdependency of supported housing and other public services and the system-wide value that good quality, properly funded supported housing generates.

## What is supported housing?

Supported housing is accommodation with support which enables people to live independently in the community. It's an umbrella term that includes a wide range of homes for people who need support to live independently, including retirement communities, extra care housing for older people, homeless hostels, mental health step-down units, domestic abuse refuges and long-term housing for people with a learning or physical disability and autistic people. It can be a permanent home or part of a pathway to housing with less or no support. While supported housing tends to mean that the support services are provided together with the accommodation, floating housing-related support is also within scope for our work on the Future of Supported Housing Project. Floating support services are not tied to the accommodation and can be provided in a person's existing or long-term home, allowing them to remain there when they no longer need housing-related support.

Support services help people settle into a new home, maintain their tenancies, stay safe, learn life skills, find employment and training, connect with health and social services, remain active and access their community, leisure and cultural resources. Evidence shows that good quality, suitable supported housing has a significant positive impact on resident health and wellbeing and can achieve life-changing outcomes for the people that it supports. Supported housing also plays a critical role in reducing homelessness and relieving pressures on the social care, health, criminal justice and housing sectors, reducing demands on the public purse. Were it not for supported housing, there would be an increase in core homelessness of around 41,000 people, with a further 30,000 people at significant risk of future homelessness (the cost to the public purse of long-term homelessness has been estimated at over £40,000 per person per year).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Imogen Blood & Associates (2023) Research into the supported housing sector's impact on homelessness prevention, health and wellbeing.

However, too many people who need supported housing are not being well served. Like many public services, the sector faces a very challenging financial environment with funding for support services dramatically reduced over the last 15 years – the National Audit Office estimated funding reduced by 75% between 2010 and 2020.<sup>2</sup> This has rendered many supported housing services financially unviable and has forced a significant number to close, while demand continues to rise.

According to the government's 2023 Supported Housing Review, there were just over 535,000 units of supported housing in England in 2023, the majority (65%) are for older people. The review estimated that, due to demographic changes, we will need almost 130,000 additional supported homes in England by 2040 just to maintain current levels of provision. These homes are primarily to meet the needs of our ageing population, with around 122,000 of those additional homes needed for older people.<sup>3</sup> However, current capital grant levels are insufficient to deliver the homes required, while ongoing pressures on revenue funding are causing services to close and discouraging new development.

Moreover, it is widely acknowledged that current provision of supported housing is insufficient and has resulted in high levels of unmet need. In 2023/24, in mental health inpatient settings alone, there were 109,029 days of delayed discharge due to patients waiting for supported housing.<sup>4</sup> There are currently 2,105 people with a learning disability and/or autistic people stuck in mental health hospitals, many of whom cannot be discharged due to a lack of suitable housing and support in the community.<sup>5</sup> The Supported Housing Review estimated that in 2023, there were between 153,000 and 326,000 additional supported housing units needed to meet unmet need and there may need to be up to 413,000 more units by 2040.<sup>6</sup> Research by Altair, for the National Housing Federation (NHF), estimated that there may be 1.7 million people in need of supported housing in 2040 when considering projections based on the prevalence of support needs within the population, and levels of poverty.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> National Audit Office (2023) Investigation into Supported Housing.

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government (2024) Supported Housing Review 2023.

<sup>4</sup> National Housing Federation (2025) Finding a safe home after hospital.

<sup>5</sup> [www.mencap.org.uk/get-involved/campaign-mencap/transforming-care-homes-not-hospitals](https://www.mencap.org.uk/get-involved/campaign-mencap/transforming-care-homes-not-hospitals)

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government (2024) Supported Housing Review 2023.

<sup>7</sup> National Housing Federation (2024) Supported housing in England: Estimating need and costs to 2040.

If we are to meet people's needs now and into the future, the supported housing system must work better - for residents, local areas and the organisations providing homes and support.

## Part one: Learning from previous funding approaches since 1990

Over the past three decades, funding arrangements for supported housing and housing-related support have been repeatedly reformed, sometimes in disruptive and fragmented ways. Open-ended funding – primarily provided through Housing Benefit as well as multiple other grant streams – lacked oversight, strategy and planning. This led to the establishment of a -ringfenced national programme called Supporting People, and improvements in accountability, oversight and quality. However, escalating costs prompted the subsequent removal of that ringfence, followed by significant funding reductions and declining provision.

### Pre-Supporting People

Prior to Supporting People, housing-related support services were primarily funded through Housing Benefit and the Housing Corporation's Supported Housing Management Grant (SHMG), available to registered social landlords.<sup>8</sup> Capital for supported housing developments was either allocated by local authorities through local social housing grant or by the Housing Corporation with local authority agreement.<sup>9</sup> Other pots of revenue funding were available, such as Probation Accommodation Grants (PAG) funded jointly by the Home Office and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the Hostel Deficit Grant, and the Department for Social Security Resettlement Programme.<sup>10</sup>

The literature suggests this system worked well for housing providers, who preferred to receive income from a variety of sources and felt they were able to make more independent decisions about the development of new supported housing services.

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<sup>8</sup> The Housing Corporation was the national public body responsible for funding and regulating housing associations (registered social landlords) in England. Its responsibilities are now split between Homes England and the Regulator of Social Housing.

<sup>9</sup> Audit Commission (2005) Supporting People.

<sup>10</sup> Department of Social Security (1998) Supporting People: A new policy and funding framework for support services.

Providers also had greater confidence in developing new services due to stronger links between capital, housing costs and revenue funding.<sup>11</sup>

### **Challenges with the system**

In 1998, an interdepartmental review found the current system lacked an overarching strategy, oversight of quality, and ownership of responsibility to ensure adequate support.<sup>12</sup> Fundamentally, this related to the distribution of resources through Housing Benefit service charges, which was effectively open-ended, leading to spiking costs and inconsistencies.<sup>13</sup> The Audit Commission had identified “perverse incentives, failure to maximise Value for Money and inadequate targeting of resources”.<sup>14</sup>

### **Transitional Housing Benefit**

In 1997 a court ruling determined that service charges covering the costs of support to help tenants maintain their tenancy were not eligible for Housing Benefit. In response, the government set up an ‘Interim Scheme’ which allowed support charges to be paid in ‘exempt accommodation’ (a category for Housing Benefit purposes for supported housing, which is exempt from the usual caps on Housing Benefit to reflect higher costs). In April 2000, the interim scheme was replaced by the ‘Transitional Housing Benefit Scheme’ for a fixed period of three years. During this time, ‘General Counselling and Support Services’ were treated as an eligible service charge for Housing Benefit purposes.<sup>15</sup>

## **Supporting People ringfence 2003 – 2009**

Supporting People launched on 1 April 2003 and drew together a range of existing funding streams and services to provide dedicated, ring-fenced funds for local authorities, as well as a strategic oversight and quality framework. The programme was introduced in response to challenges with the existing funding system, namely the lack of strategy, accountability and value for money, as mentioned above.

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<sup>11</sup> Audit Commission (2005) Supporting People.

<sup>12</sup> Department of Social Security (1998) Supporting People.

<sup>13</sup> Riverside (2020) A traumatised system: Research into the commissioning of homelessness services in the last 10 years.

<sup>14</sup> Audit Commission (1998), quoted in Department of Social Security (1998) Supporting People.

<sup>15</sup> Garden Court Chambers (2022) The Proposals to Reform Supported Accommodation.

The government had nine objectives when establishing Supporting People, which included:

- Develop a government-wide approach to a sustainable long-term funding mechanism for support services.
- Clarify responsibilities for controlling, targeting and prioritising expenditure.
- Ensure the funding system can respond to individuals' needs and enable support to be provided in different types of accommodation alongside floating support.
- Encourage coherent and transparent planning, funding and accountability arrangements for support services.
- Encourage the most cost-effective approach across all sectors.
- Give landlords confidence to make accommodation available to people with high needs and to develop new provision.<sup>16</sup>

Responses to the 1999 consultation on Supporting People indicated 82% were in favour of the proposals but with reservations, primarily about the move from a rights-based to cash-limited system, the loss of a link between revenue and capital funding and the need for a national strategy and needs assessment to ensure an adequate level and distribution of funding to meet need, including of “unpopular groups”.<sup>17</sup>

### **Implementation challenges**

Funding levels were derived from spending on ‘general counselling and support’ within the Housing Benefit charge element, which was initially calculated as a Transitional Housing Benefit payment and formed the basis on which subsequent Supporting People grant was calculated. The total cost was estimated to be around £350m to £750m.<sup>18</sup>

However, Transitional Housing Benefit was a locally determined and demand-led benefit, with more liberal interpretation of eligibility in some areas and a lack of public monitoring or cap on benefit increases. As a result, the number of services and cost of the Supporting People programme increased, the cost reaching £1.8bn by the time it was launched in 2003.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Department of Social Security (1998) Supporting People.

<sup>17</sup> Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1999) Supporting People: A new policy and funding framework for support services. Analysis of consultation responses.

<sup>18</sup> For the comprehensive list of objectives see Department of Social Security (1998) Supporting People.

<sup>19</sup> Audit Commission (2005) Supporting People.

In 2004, accountancy firm RSM Robson Rhodes were commissioned to look into the variation in the costs estimated during the transitional period and that of the requested allocation. They were also asked to consider whether Supporting People was meeting its original objectives. The review concluded that £1.8bn was too much for the legacy provision, but not necessarily too much to meet the support needs of people with higher needs. This was due to the uneven distribution of funding, which was initially allocated based on 'legacy' services.<sup>20</sup> The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee reported that this meant there was no national consistency and that providers and areas who couldn't put the facilities and structures in place for drawing down the funding lost out. This also meant that the support needs of some groups of people were not met. The Committee recommended that the ODPM should establish clear criteria as to what money can be spent on, and if necessary ring-fence funding for less "popular" groups.<sup>21</sup>

The Rhodes review reflected that these increased costs were largely inevitable as Transitional Housing Benefit provided a "window of opportunity" to improve existing service provision or develop new services. While the review found that some increased costs were justifiable within the rule of transitional housing benefit, in some cases, they found local authority housing benefit staff did not closely scrutinise or challenge provider claims. They described the combination of demand without control as "unfunded policies chasing uncapped budgets".<sup>22</sup>

In response to this report, Ministers asked local authorities to make 2.5% annual efficiency savings, and for a proportion of those savings to be reallocated to new services to meet unmet need. This also led to the consultation and creation of the Supporting People Distribution Formula (SPDF) to allocate funding based on need rather than legacy services.<sup>23</sup>

The SPDF calculated target allocations for each authority based on the level of need for housing related support, by using various needs data. It was intended that authorities furthest away from their target allocations would receive the largest annual increases and face the largest annual reductions respectively. However,

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<sup>20</sup> RSM Robson Rhodes (2004) Review of the Supporting People Programme: Independent Report.

<sup>21</sup> ODPM Housing, planning, local government and the regions committee (2004). Supporting Vulnerable and Older People: The Supporting People Programme.

<sup>22</sup> RSM Robson Rhodes (2004) Review of the Supporting People Programme: Independent Report.

<sup>23</sup> Communities and Local Government Committee (2009) The Supporting People Programme.

there would be no ‘cliff edges’, meaning the pace of change must not be too fast, particularly for those facing large reductions in allocation.<sup>24</sup>

Support or opposition to the proposed distribution formula from authorities tended to depend on whether they expected to gain or lose funds through it. There were some calls for distribution formula only to ever be used to give out new additional monies. Providers tended to be more broadly against re-distribution, preferring to focus on arguments about better resourcing the programme.<sup>25</sup>

### **Oversight and accountability**

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) held primary responsibility for the programme in England, including allocating Supporting People grant to administering authorities, monitoring performance and advising and approving a Supporting People strategy.<sup>26</sup> Local authorities were asked to develop Supporting People Plans, which were five-year strategies based on client need.<sup>27</sup> However, there is little in the literature about how these were developed in practice or how successful they were.

There were also requirements on local (administering) authorities to review all services during the first three years of the programme. These service reviews were aimed at improving the quality of service, assessing its strategic relevance, and challenging its value for money.<sup>28</sup> According to the ODPM Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee 2004 report, there was a consensus that these reviews could have been highly beneficial. However, concerns were raised that local authorities did not have capacity and were not prioritising them.<sup>29</sup>

A new Quality Assessment Framework (QAF), an annual self-assessment tool for service providers, was also launched and used to assess the quality of Supporting People services. It measured performance against six key objectives:

- Needs and risk assessment.
- Support planning; security.

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<sup>24</sup> Communities and Local Government Committee (2009) The Supporting People Programme.

<sup>25</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government (2006) Creating Sustainable Communities: Supporting Independence – A summary of your responses

<sup>26</sup> Communities and Local Government (2007) Independence and opportunity. Our strategy for Supporting People.

<sup>27</sup> ODPM Housing, planning, local government and the regions committee (2004). Supporting Vulnerable and Older People: The Supporting People Programme.

<sup>28</sup> House of Commons Library (2012) The Supporting People Programme.

<sup>29</sup> ODPM Housing, planning, local government and the regions committee (2004). Supporting Vulnerable and Older People: The Supporting People Programme.

- Health and safety.
- Protection from abuse.
- Fair access, diversity and inclusion and complaints

In the 2007 Strategy for Supporting People, the government announced a Supporting People outcomes set, which was to be collected by service providers and collated and analysed by St Andrew’s University to ensure there were no additional burden placed on authorities.<sup>30</sup> There were five high-level outcomes (based on those in the Every Child Matters Green Paper), with each of those measured through a set of supporting indicators:

1. Achieve economic wellbeing.
2. Enjoy and achieve.
3. Be healthy.
4. Stay safe.
5. Make a positive contribution.

The completion of the Outcomes Framework by providers was not mandatory but was strongly recommended by the Department for Communities and Local Government.<sup>31</sup> Local authorities could access the data quarterly and providers could access their data via the local authority Supporting People team commissioning their service.<sup>32</sup>

The QAF and Outcomes Framework were widely regarded as the greatest successes of the Supporting People programme. The Communities and Local Government committee concluded “The QAF and Outcomes Framework have proven their worth in ensuring quality, promoting effective and consistent local and regional commissioning, and providing an unambiguous evidence base of the value of Supporting People services”.<sup>33</sup>

The QAF and Outcomes Framework were also praised for their emphasis on user involvement, requiring that service users are involved at all levels, from individual

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<sup>30</sup> Communities and Local Government (2007) Independence and opportunity. Our strategy for Supporting People.

<sup>31</sup> Communities and Local Government (2007) Framework and Guidance for completing Supporting People outcomes for short-term services.

<sup>32</sup> Communities and Local Government (2007) Framework and Guidance for completing Supporting People outcomes for short-term services.

<sup>33</sup> Communities and Local Government Committee (2009) The Supporting People Programme.

client engagement to user involvement in service delivery and setting strategic priorities for Supporting People services.<sup>34</sup>

### **Audit Commission evaluation**

The 2005 evaluation found that Supporting People had led to improvements in accountability, regulation and quality; local partnerships between health, probation, housing and social care bodies; and in the involvement of service users. Overall, the evaluation concluded that Supporting People had an impact on service users' quality of life and resulted in value for money.

However, the evaluation highlighted some areas for improvement:

- At the time there was no national strategy for Supporting People, and the programme was not backed by a long-term funding framework. Alongside grant rates that were not linked to inflation, this meant that the focus was on cutting costs rather than on quality or long-term planning. There were also local variations in the application of Supporting People, in terms of quality and type of provision and eligibility. Due to a lack of certainty about future funding, few authorities took the risk of agreeing many long-term contracts with providers, which could have achieved greater value for money.
- Cross-authority provision was inadequately protected, leading to issues meeting the needs of mobile populations such as domestic violence survivors, people with drug and alcohol addiction, travellers and prison leavers.
- The loss of a link between revenue and capital funding led to a significant drop in bids for, and the allocation of, capital for supported housing schemes. While the Housing Corporation amended the criteria to no longer require assurance on future revenue, as long as schemes could be converted to general needs, the Audit Commission highlighted that providers still needed these assurances before investing time and resources.<sup>35</sup>

In response, in June 2007 the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) published its Strategy for Supporting People. The Audit Commission noted in its 2009 report that this strategy addressed many of the recommendations made in their 2005 evaluation. Although funding had decreased since the last evaluation, the Audit Commission found that value for money had continued to improve through

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<sup>34</sup> Communities and Local Government Committee (2009) The Supporting People Programme.

<sup>35</sup> Audit Commission (2005) Supporting People.

better commissioning and procurement of services, as well as analyses of costs and quality of existing services securing efficiencies.<sup>36</sup>

## Value for money

The Communities and Local Government (CLG) Committee<sup>37</sup> and Audit Commission's view that the Supporting People programme provided value for money was also evidenced by the findings of CapGemini's government-commissioned research into the financial benefits of the Supporting People programme. CapGemini found net benefits from the programme of £3.41bn per annum for the client groups considered. This was against an overall investment of £1.61bn. There were only three client groups where the costs of Supporting People were higher than the costs of withdrawing that support: "homeless families with support needs – settled accommodation", "young people leaving care" and "teenage parents". However, the report highlighted that there was still a strong case for housing-related support for these groups and there were long-term unquantified benefits, such as a reduced risk of social exclusion, improved education outcomes for children, and increased long-term health and quality of life. Costed benefits included reduced costs for homelessness, tenancy failure, crime, health and residential care packages.<sup>38</sup>

While a literature review by the Welsh government in 2010 identified a lack of robust, peer-reviewed research evidence exploring the outcomes for Supporting People service users, the report authors found evidence amongst a large body of grey literature highlighting positive impacts and outcomes, such as independent living and quality of life.<sup>39</sup>

## Funding outside of Supporting People

In the 2001 Valuing People White Paper, the Department of Health set out a strategy for learning disability, including a target to enable all people with a learning disability who were currently living in long-stay hospitals to move into more appropriate accommodation, such as supported housing, by April 2004. To achieve this target, the Department launched a new **Learning Disability Development Fund** of up to £50m per annum from April 2002, made up of £20m capital funding and up to £30m revenue funding. As well as enabling people to move out of long-stay hospitals into

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<sup>36</sup> House of Commons Library (2012) The Supporting People Programme.

<sup>37</sup> RSM Robson Rhodes (2004) Review of the Supporting People Programme: Independent Report.

<sup>38</sup> CapGemini (2009) Research into the financial benefits of the Supporting People programme.

<sup>39</sup> Welsh Assembly Government (2010) Literature Review extracted from The Supporting People Programme in Wales.

the community, the Fund could also be used preventatively to develop supported living for those living with older carers. The revenue element of the fund was created from health funding previously used for long-stay hospitals.<sup>40</sup> This fund was subsumed into the Area Based Grant in 2009, along with Supporting People funding as discussed in the next section of this paper.

The Department of Health also launched an **Extra Care Housing (ECH) Capital Fund** in 2004, which was delivered jointly with the Housing Corporation until 2010 when it was succeeded by the Housing Corporation and Greater London Authority's Care and Support Specialised Housing (CASSH) Fund.<sup>41</sup> The fund provided £87m to help create up to 1,500 places between 2004 – 2006, with further funds made in subsequent years. The aim of the fund was:

- To develop innovative housing with care options.
- To stimulate effective local partnerships between the NHS, local housing authorities, social services authorities, care providers, housing associations and private sector and other developers of extra care housing in the interests of older people.<sup>42</sup>

## **Post-Supporting People: Removal of the ringfence (2010 onwards)**

In 2007, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) published its Strategy for Supporting People which announced the programme would be delivered through the new Area Based Grant by 2009, thereby removing the ringfence.<sup>43</sup>

### **Reactions to the announcement**

The decision to remove the ringfence was made following a public consultation on Supporting People in which strong calls were made to maintain the ringfenced grant, particularly for socially excluded groups, at least until a statutory duty to provide housing-related support was established.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Department of Health (2001) Valuing People.

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/ECHScheme/>

<sup>42</sup> Department of Health (c. 2003–04) Developing and Implementing Local Extra Care Housing Strategies.

<sup>43</sup> Communities and Local Government (2007) Independence and Opportunity.

<sup>44</sup> Communities and Local Government (2006) Creating Sustainable Communities: Supporting Independence – A summary of your responses.

Participants of a pilot of 15 “pathfinder” authorities who had the ringfence removed were also concerned about the risk that ‘socially excluded’ groups might be threatened, as well as risks of funding loss and loss of importance and strategic direction. However, overall, they viewed the removal positively and did not argue to keep the ringfence.<sup>45</sup>

The 2009 CLG Committee report highlighted that the decision to remove the ringfence was taken in a different regulatory and economic climate, before the credit crisis hit, which exacerbated demand on services, particularly for people experiencing homelessness and survivors of domestic violence. However, ultimately the Committee agreed with the removal of the ringfence, with a recommendation for transparency on how much money is allocated to councils for Supporting People services within the area-based grant and how much is spent. The Committee recommended that Local Authorities should be required to justify, and account for, any decision to spend Supporting People funding elsewhere.<sup>46</sup> The government were initially supportive of this recommendation, and for the first year of the ringfence removal, funding continued to be identified. However, by April 2011, allocation for Supporting People was subsumed into Formula Grant paid to Local Authorities with no specific budget line.<sup>47</sup>

### **Impact of removing the ringfence**

There is strong evidence that the removal of the ringfence, alongside cuts to local authority funding, resulted in a reduction in funding for supported housing and housing-related support. An Inside Housing Freedom of Information Request revealed that English councils withdrew Supporting People money from 305 services in 2011/12, impacting 6790 people. Out of 150 responding authorities, 79 decommissioned services in their first year of cuts, with 47 of those authorities cutting homelessness services.<sup>48</sup>

This has had long-term impacts on funding for supported housing. The National Audit Office (NAO) found that spending on commissioned support services in England declined by three quarters from 2010/11 to 2019/20 from £1.3bn to £320m.<sup>49</sup> Homelessness services were hit hardest. A Homeless Link survey

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<sup>45</sup> House of Commons Library (2012) The Supporting People programme

<sup>46</sup> Communities and Local Government Committee (2009) The Supporting People Programme.

<sup>47</sup> House of Commons Library (2012) The Supporting People Programme.

<sup>48</sup> House of Commons Library (2012) The Supporting People Programme

<sup>49</sup> National Audit Office (2021) Investigation into supported housing.

indicated a 43% decrease in the number of bedspaces from 2008 to 2024. This was accompanied by a significant increase in the number of people sleeping rough (which in 2024 was 2.6 times the number in 2010) and mounting Temporary Accommodation costs.<sup>50</sup>

As well as a reduction in funding, the 2016 Supported Accommodation Review also identified that the removal of the ringfence resulted in significant variation in the commissioning of supported housing, with differences in how Supporting People teams were restructured and subsumed into other commissioning functions, such as for housing, adult social care and/or health. In many areas, this meant not only the loss of dedicated Supporting People teams but also of a single point of strategic oversight for supported housing.<sup>51</sup>

Since the removal of the ringfence, data about the scale and scope of the sector, as well as quality and outcomes, has not been systematically collected. From April 2011, the Department for Communities and Local Government ended the national collation of outcomes data through the Outcomes Framework by St Andrew's University.<sup>52</sup> This led to a lack of clarity about overall costs, how costs are being met, quality and whether services provide value for money.<sup>53</sup> The CLG Committee had warned against this in 2009, recommending the QAF and Outcomes Framework were mandated for all local authorities, as "any loss of robust mechanisms for assuring quality and assessing outcomes would be a serious threat to the future of housing-related support".<sup>54</sup>

## **Proposed Housing Benefit reforms**

As the move towards Universal Credit began, the government consulted on proposals to change how housing costs for supported housing are funded in both 2011 and 2017. Neither of these proposals were taken forward and housing costs for supported housing remained within the Housing Benefit system, however, supported housing providers were still impacted by years of uncertainty.

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<sup>50</sup> Imogen Blood & Associates (2025) Homelessness and Housing-Related Support Services in a Two-Tier Council System: Findings from a Case Study Evaluation.

<sup>51</sup> Department for Work and Pensions and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2016) Supported accommodation review: The scale, scope and cost of the supported housing sector.

<sup>52</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/collections/supporting-people-client-records-and-outcomes](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/supporting-people-client-records-and-outcomes)

<sup>53</sup> Department for Work and Pensions and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2016) Supported accommodation review: The scale, scope and cost of the supported housing sector.

<sup>54</sup> Communities and Local Government Committee (2009) The Supporting People Programme.

The former consultation stated that the Housing Benefit system for people in supported housing no longer worked. Processing claims was too complicated and time consuming, creating uncertainty and risk for specialist housing providers and making them reluctant to invest in the sector. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) proposed two broad categories with different funding arrangements but were met with concerns that the distinction between these different types was unclear, meaning it was unlikely to result in a simpler system. It was therefore welcomed when Ministers announced in September 2012 that help towards housing costs for those living in supported exempt accommodation would be provided outside of Universal Credit, remaining within Housing Benefit.<sup>55</sup>

Following wider welfare policy changes to impose the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) cap on the level of social housing rent that could be covered by housing benefit and Universal Credit, in 2017, DWP and DCLG announced a new funding model for supported housing. This was intended to respond to widespread concern from the supported housing sector about the impact of restricting rents to LHA rates. The proposed funding model set out three different approaches: for sheltered housing; for short-term and transitional supported housing; and for long-term supported housing.<sup>56</sup>

NHF members were particularly concerned about the system put forward for short-term supported housing, which would have seen housing costs commissioned and paid through local authorities. Members were concerned about the ability of the local system to give long-term security of funding, with short-term commissioning cycles and the risk of funding being withdrawn when services were no longer seen as a local priority.<sup>57</sup> Both the Chartered Institute for Housing (CIH) and NHF welcomed the government's decision to keep Housing Benefit in place to fund supported housing following the consultation.<sup>58</sup>

### **The NHF's proposal for a strong and sustainable future for supported and sheltered housing in 2016**

In 2016, the NHF undertook a consultation with members and wider stakeholders about how to put supported and sheltered housing on a more stable financial footing.

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<sup>55</sup> House of Commons Library (2018) Paying for Supported Housing.

<sup>56</sup> Department for Work and Pensions and Department for Communities and Local Government (2017) Funding Supported Housing.

<sup>57</sup> National Housing Federation (2017) Summary of consultation feedback: Future funding of supported housing.

<sup>58</sup> House of Commons Library (2018) Paying for Supported Housing.

This was in the context of a loss of revenue funding and uncertainty around housing benefit resulting in the availability of specialist and supported housing failing to keep up with demand.

The NHF put forward proposals for the funding of housing and support costs:

- Housing costs – the government should continue to fund actual rents and eligible service charges through the mainstream benefits system, with checks on who can receive this funding via a new approach to registration for providers.
- Support costs – should be funded from a central government budget, which different departments could feed into, setting the outcomes needed for the money invested, for different groups of people.

The proposal recommended a ringfence around this national support budget, which would be distributed in two ways:

- To local authorities, to administer in line with nationally agreed parameters to fund a range of support services in line with local need.
- At a national level for highly specialised services where need is identified nationally.

Since the proposal was published, housing costs have continued to be met through the benefits system, and the new Supported Housing Regulatory Oversight Act aims to provide a check on who can receive this funding, as put forward by the proposal.

However, the recommendations regarding support costs were not taken forward. The funding system for supported housing remains largely unchanged since the removal of the Supporting People ringfence, when funding was subsumed first into the Area Based Grant and then Formula Grant in 2011.

In the 2021 People at the Heart of Care white paper, the government announced a £300m, 3-year Housing Transformation Fund to integrate “housing into local health and care strategies, with a focus on boosting the supply of specialist housing and funding improved services for residents”. However, the fund was omitted from the updated plans for adult social care reform, Next Steps to put People at the Heart of Care, published in 2023.<sup>59</sup> The NHF have called a renewed commitment to the fund

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<sup>59</sup> Department of Health and Social Care (2023) Next steps to put People at the Heart of Care.

which would have increased the supply of supported and retirement housing while also supporting the integration of health, housing and care.<sup>60</sup>

The subsequent chronic underinvestment in supported housing and changes in commissioning approaches led to a range of challenges, as set out in part two.

## **Our reflections on previous funding approaches**

The experience of the past three decades shows how open-ended, demand-led systems created cost escalation and inconsistency; how the Supporting People programme improved accountability and quality; and how the removal of the ringfence contributed to significant reductions in provision and a loss of strategic oversight.

The successes and weaknesses of previous policies presented in this section suggest that a more coherent, sustainable system for supported housing requires a balance of:

- Strategic planning, targeting of resources and robust oversight of quality.
- Control of spending, while maximising value for money.
- Protection of cross-authority provision to meet the needs of mobile populations.
- A link between revenue and capital funding to encourage new development.
- National and local mechanisms to routinely collect data on need, supply, cost, quality and value.

## **Part 2: Challenges with the current approach and recommendations for a better system**

This paper has so far presented what we can learn from how supported housing has been funded in the recent past. This section focuses on what we can learn from existing literature on the current system for funding and commissioning supported housing, drawing together evidence on the system's weaknesses and proposed solutions and recommendations for a more effective and sustainable system, including:

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<sup>60</sup> National Housing Federation (2023) We're calling for a renewed commitment to the delivery of the Housing Transformation Fund.

- Longer-term and ring-fenced funding for support.
- Increased capital grant rates and alignment with revenue funding.
- Changes to the Rent Standard.
- Clarity around Housing Benefit eligibility.
- Improved strategic oversight and planning.
- A more joined-up approach across housing, health and care.

This literature comes from a variety of sources including providers, charities, membership organisations such as the NHF, and government-commissioned research and evaluation.

## Challenges with the current system

### Impact of reduced and short-term spending and rising costs

The decline in spending on supported housing since the removal of the ringfence coincided with rising costs of service delivery, including a sustained period of high inflation (without corresponding inflationary uplifts for providers) and increased costs for energy, insurance, equipment and staffing.<sup>61</sup>

In response to budget cuts and rising demand, local authorities not only cut the value of their commissioned contracts but also the length. According to Riverside, 1-to-3-year contracts became the norm, which works well for cash-strapped and resource-short local authorities but does not provide the necessary security for providers. It affects their ability to recruit, retain and develop good quality staff and makes it difficult for supported housing landlords to decide whether to invest in renovations or replacements.<sup>62</sup> Short contracts and a lack of confidence in future funding also constrains providers' willingness to enter the market and to develop new supported housing due to the risk that it wouldn't be sufficiently long-term to warrant the initial investment.<sup>63</sup>

Short-term commissioning cycles also impact on residents of transitional supported housing. IPPR North discusses how these arrangements deprioritise supported people, as their needs become determined by commissioning cycles; in some cases

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<sup>61</sup> Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government (2024) Supported Housing Review 2023.

<sup>62</sup> Riverside (2020) A traumatised system: Research into the commissioning of homelessness services in the last 10 years.

<sup>63</sup> Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government (2020) Housing Related Support Review.

their support is terminated before they are ready to move on, which can mean they fall out of the system and re-enter it repeatedly.<sup>64</sup>

In their evaluation of homelessness services, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) heard from both local and national stakeholders how these reductions in funding and the short-term nature of that funding have led to a decline in supported housing provision.<sup>65</sup> Research for Riverside also found that some contracts were so financially tight that they could only be viable for a larger provider who can benefit from economies of scale, pushing out smaller, local and specialist providers.<sup>66</sup> This impacts the range of housing options available for supported housing residents, an issue raised by people with learning disabilities and their families.<sup>67</sup>

### **Increasing, and increasing complexity, of need**

Providers spoken to as part of the 2023 Supported Housing Review reported that the complexity of residents' needs is increasing and this in turn requires more funding. For example, the current price ceiling on many commissioned contracts for homelessness services makes it difficult to deliver services for clients with complex needs.<sup>68</sup> This is supported by evidence that nine out of 10 working-age supported housing residents have at least one health condition or disability, including substance misuse, mental ill-health, learning disability/autistic spectrum disorder and physical conditions. Moreover, half of residents are experiencing more than one of those conditions.<sup>69</sup>

At the same time, stakeholders engaged in the MHCLG evaluation felt that the withdrawal of Supporting People funding led to “scarcer and more generalised” services that need to cater to a much broader set of needs, and as a result lose their effectiveness for those with complex needs.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> IPPR North (2020) At a crossroads: The future of transitional supported housing.

<sup>65</sup> Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government (2025) Systems-wide evaluation of homelessness and rough sleeping services: Supported housing.

<sup>66</sup> Riverside (2020) A traumatised system: Research into the commissioning of homelessness services in the last 10 years.

<sup>67</sup> National Housing Federation (2020) Supported housing for people with long-term care and support needs.

<sup>68</sup> Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government (2024) Supported Housing Review 2023.

<sup>69</sup> Imogen Blood & Associates (2023) Research into the supported housing sector's impact on homelessness prevention, health and wellbeing.

<sup>70</sup> Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government (2025) Systems-wide evaluation of homelessness and rough sleeping services: Supported housing.

Increased need for supported housing, particularly homelessness services, is also driven by cuts to other public services including mental health, addiction, the NHS, social care and criminal justice services, as well as changes to welfare provision and the ongoing housing crisis.<sup>71</sup> The Kerslake Commission found that people are presenting to rough sleeping teams with increasingly complex needs because their needs are not met at an earlier stage. A lack of availability of social housing and reduced affordability of private rented housing is driving increased need by creating a “revolving door” of people falling out of the homelessness pathway into unsuitable housing situations and subsequently returning to rough sleeping.<sup>72</sup> These factors all contribute to reduced capacity for supported housing providers to meet the increasing, and increasingly complex, needs of residents with progressively constrained funding.

The wider housing crisis is also contributing to increased demand on supported housing as a lack of viable move-on options, due to limited supply and affordability, has led to people staying in supported housing for longer than they need.<sup>73</sup> 82% of providers of accommodation services for single people experiencing homelessness, surveyed by Homeless Link, reported that the lack of available social housing was a barrier to move-on. 73% reported a lack of housing in the private rented sector with rents at the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate as a barrier to move-on.<sup>74</sup> The Older People’s Housing Taskforce found that private leasehold older person’s housing was unaffordable for the majority of older households in England. Moreover, our ageing population means that we need an estimated 30-50,000 new later living homes per year, while we are only building around 7,000 a year.<sup>75</sup>

### **Spending on crisis relief rather than prevention**

The removal of the Supporting People ringfence led to a shift in commissioners prioritising commissioned services for people with higher levels of need and those services that fulfilled a statutory duty.<sup>76</sup> This resulted in fewer preventative services

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<sup>71</sup> Riverside (2020) A traumatised system: Research into the commissioning of homelessness services in the last 10 years.

<sup>72</sup> Kerslake Commission (2023) Turning the Tide on Rising Homelessness and Rough Sleeping.

<sup>73</sup> Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government (2020) Housing Related Support Review.

<sup>74</sup> Homeless Link (2026) Support to End Homelessness.

<sup>75</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and Department of Health and Social Care (2024) Our future homes: housing that promotes wellbeing and community for an ageing population. Final report of the Older People’s Housing Taskforce

<sup>76</sup> Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government (2024) Supported Housing Review 2023.

and gaps in provision for people with lower-level needs, particularly within homelessness services.<sup>77</sup> In particular, some local authorities have cut back on tenancy sustainment and floating support services which can increase the number of people who become homeless, lead people to overstay in hostels or set them up to fail in unsupported tenancies.<sup>78</sup>

The move away from spending on prevention towards crisis relief was mentioned in several reports, particularly in relation to homelessness services, with providers calling this a false economy as it leads to clients developing higher, more complex needs and requiring more costly, resource intensive interventions.<sup>79</sup> Riverside describe cuts to homelessness services as an “efficiency leading to inefficiency” and the practice of decommissioning services, to later recommission those services, as a “goldfish effect policy”.<sup>80</sup>

The Kerslake Commission reported that a national shortfall of supported housing has meant that people are being inappropriately housed within private rented housing or in unsuitable supported housing, such as hostels. This can result in a period of street homelessness if that housing situation breaks down because it does not meet their needs, again contributing to the “revolving door” of homelessness services.<sup>81</sup>

### **Reliance on Housing Benefit**

Reduced funding for commissioned supported housing services has resulted in providers reprofiling or substituting some support activities as “intensive housing management” tasks. These can sometimes be deemed to be eligible service charges which can then be covered by Housing Benefit. The 2023 Supported Housing Review found that some commissioners had been encouraging this when they were unable to provide inflationary uplifts.<sup>82</sup> In homelessness services, this has created an opportunity for “rogue” providers to fill the void, exploiting Housing Benefit exemptions and charging high rents with little to no meaningful support for vulnerable tenants.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government (2020) Housing Related Support Review.

<sup>78</sup> Riverside (2020) A traumatised system: Research into the commissioning of homelessness services in the last 10 years.

<sup>79</sup> Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government (2020) Housing Related Support Review.

<sup>80</sup> Riverside (2020) A traumatised system: Research into the commissioning of homelessness services in the last 10 years.

<sup>81</sup> Kerslake Commission (2023) Turning the Tide on Rising Homelessness and Rough Sleeping.

<sup>82</sup> Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government (2024) Supported Housing Review 2023.

<sup>83</sup> Emmaus (2026) Rebuilding Lives: Resident and Provider Perspectives on Getting the Supported Housing Act Right.

## **Fragmented responsibility and no strategic oversight**

The removal of the ringfence has also resulted in a range of commissioning approaches, as mentioned in part one.<sup>84</sup> The 2020 Housing Related Support Review identified a move from a standardised to a more diverse and variable commissioning environment, including different local authorities allocating commissioning responsibilities to different teams.<sup>85</sup>

Research into mental health specialist and supported housing in London highlights growing fragmentation in commissioning arrangements, with responsibilities split across different local authority teams and varying relationships between councils, mental health trusts and integrated care functions. While many services remain block funded, there is a shift towards spot purchasing, which weakens strategic planning, reduces oversight of quality and makes it harder for providers to plan services around assessed and projected local need. The research also found that spot purchasing can be more expensive for commissioners than block contracts, while creating greater variation in service quality.<sup>86</sup>

In analysis for the Learning Disability and Autism Housing Coalition, and presented at the Mencap 'Homes not Hospitals' conference in 2026, Bristol City Council highlighted how delivery of specialist housing for people with high support needs has gone from direct local authority provision in the 1980s and 90s to a much more mixed market model with care delivered by private providers and charities and housing delivered mostly by housing associations, and the private sector. There is no coherent framework, and delivery has become fragmented and inconsistent. Given the high costs and complexity of specialist housing, few mainstream housing associations deliver this type of housing, meaning local authority commissioners have become reliant on care providers and private investors to secure homes – there is wide variation in quality and cost, and often poor value for money. The 'system' for people with high needs therefore continues to fund very high revenue costs (through high Housing Benefit costs, stays in hospital or residential care) but struggles to invest sufficient capital in better quality, better value for money homes.

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<sup>84</sup> Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government (2024) Supported Housing Review 2023.

<sup>85</sup> Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government (2020) Housing Related Support Review.

<sup>86</sup> Imogen Blood & Associates (2025) Greater London Authority Mental Health Specialist and Supported Housing: Research & Market Development Project.

As discussed in part one, following the Supporting People programme there has also been a loss of data on supported housing, including data on need, supply, spending, outcomes and the value of services. [NHF analysis of the current funding landscape](#) for supported housing identified barriers to gathering a comprehensive overview of the total amount of funding within the sector. Many funding sources such as public grants have no ring-fenced or dedicated provision for supported housing and data on expenditure for supported housing is not publicly available or recorded in a separate category. This lack of central oversight for supported housing expenditure is a consequence of the removal of a ring-fenced budget for supported housing, and the subsequent diversification of commissioning practices across local authorities.<sup>87</sup> And, more recently, the consolidation of central government grants to encourage flexible and autonomous local authority spending, which may have had implications for how local authorities record spend on supported housing for internal or external reporting.<sup>88</sup> This lack of data and evidence prevents strategic planning at a local and national level. Moreover, the value of supported housing is not recognised, particularly within HM Treasury, meaning the sector is not prioritised for funding opportunities.<sup>89</sup>

## Recommendations made within the literature

### Long-term, ringfenced funding for support

There are strong calls within the literature for **longer-term and ringfenced revenue funding**, which would give providers the financial security and assurances they need to develop and deliver supported housing services. Both commissioners and providers involved in the 2023 Supported Housing Review supported a move towards longer commissioning cycles.<sup>90</sup> Other research reports have also made specific calls for longer commissioning cycles:

- The Kerslake Commission identified a preference towards five-year funding cycles as a minimum for homelessness services, with flexibility to allow interventions to evolve in line with changing needs. The report calls for a paradigm shift in the approach to funding, with greater investment in preventative services, recognising evidence that every £1 invested in

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<sup>87</sup> Department for Work and Pensions and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2016) Supported accommodation review: The scale, scope and cost of the supported housing sector.

<sup>88</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (2025) [Explanatory note on funding simplification: consolidated grants and draft conditions](#).

<sup>89</sup> IPPR North (2020) At a crossroads: The future of transitional supported housing.

<sup>90</sup> Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government (2024) Supported Housing Review 2023.

homelessness prevention services results in savings of £2-11 to the public purse.<sup>91</sup>

- Imogen Blood and Framework Housing Association recommend commissioners maximise the length of support contracts to enable landlords to invest in high quality, self-contained and psychologically informed accommodation services for people experiencing homelessness.<sup>92</sup>
- The NHF and Housing LIN have called for 5–10-year commissioning contracts to become the norm for supported housing for people with long-term care and support needs, including people with learning disabilities.<sup>93</sup>

These longer-term contracts need to be **supported by longer-term financial settlements for local authorities**. The APPG for Ending Homelessness called for “long-term, flexible investment that enables councils to shift from crisis response to prevention”. The report welcomed multi-year finance settlements from 2026/27 and the Transformation Fund. However, it stressed that this should be streamlined, sustained and coordinated with other homelessness prevention measures.<sup>94</sup>

### **Increased capital grant rates, targeted funding and alignment with revenue funding**

Capital grant funding was seen as a means to mitigate risk to providers from short-term support contracts and to boost the development of supported housing. The NHF and Housing LIN have called for **increased capital grant funding** through the Affordable Homes Programme and for **feasible grant rates for supported housing development**.<sup>95</sup> To an extent these calls have been answered by the prospectus for the new Social and Affordable Homes Programme, however, it is still too early to say whether there will be sufficient flexibility within the programme to enable specialist supported housing to be developed at Affordable and Social Rent levels.

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<sup>91</sup> Kerslake Commission (2023) Turning the Tide on Rising Homelessness and Rough Sleeping.

<sup>92</sup> Imogen Blood & Associates (2026) Executive Function and Housing-related Support Research Report.

<sup>93</sup> National Housing Federation (2020) Supported housing for people with long-term care and support needs; Housing LIN (2023) Supported housing for people with learning disabilities and autistic people in England.

<sup>94</sup> APPG for Ending Homelessness (2025) Homes, Support, Prevention – Our Foundations for Ending Homelessness.

<sup>95</sup> National Housing Federation (2020) Supported housing for people with long-term care and support needs.

Housing LIN (2023) Supported housing for people with learning disabilities and autistic people in England.

A few reports also suggested **specific capital funding to boost provision to meet unmet need for specific cohorts**:

- IPPR North suggested piloting an integrated capital funding scheme which would provide a £900m capital injection for frontline support charities to rapidly house people who were accommodated by the Everyone In programme.<sup>96</sup>
- Both the Challenging Behaviour Foundation (CBF) and the LDA Network recommended targets and ringfenced funding to ensure specific development of supported housing for people with a learning disability and autistic people.<sup>97</sup>
- NHF and Housing LIN recommended that commissioners should incentivise housing providers when commissioning bespoke, personalised housing for people with the most complex needs with capital funding and by providing sites.<sup>98</sup>
- The Older People's Housing Taskforce recommends greater incentives for investment, including private and public sector capital support, to increase the supply of affordable older person's housing and later living housing and meet the needs of our ageing population.<sup>99</sup>

There were calls to **better align capital and revenue funding**. A small number of stakeholders who spoke to the NHF and Housing LIN suggested that a single, ring-fenced funding pot for support could be distributed by Homes England or the Greater London Authority (GLA) alongside capital grant funding, with incentives through the grant application process to ensure collaboration between housing providers and local authorities.<sup>100</sup>

## Reform the Rent Standard

Two key recommendations have been made to reform the Rent Standard in relation to supported housing.

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<sup>96</sup> IPPR North (2020) At a crossroads: The future of transitional supported housing.

<sup>97</sup> Challenging Behaviour Foundation (2024) Co-Producing a Lifelong Action Plan: Housing; Housing LIN (2023) Supported housing for people with learning disabilities and autistic people in England.

<sup>98</sup> National Housing Federation (2020) Supported housing for people with long-term care and support needs.

<sup>99</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and Department of Health and Social Care (2024) Our future homes: housing that promotes wellbeing and community for an ageing population. Final report of the Older People's Housing Taskforce.

<sup>100</sup> National Housing Federation (2020) Supported housing for people with long-term care and support needs.

- Increase rent flexibility for supported housing from 10% higher than formula rent for general needs to 20% to reflect higher running costs.<sup>101</sup>
- Remove the no public subsidy clause for Specialised Supported Housing (SSH).<sup>102</sup>

SSH is often bespoke and offers a high level of support for residents who would otherwise be in a care home or hospitalised. Rents are exempt from the Rent Formula, but only if no public grant has been used. Without grant funding, the pay-back period for private finance tends to be much longer. If public grant is used, rents must be charged at social or affordable levels, so the level of grant needs to be sufficient to make the service financially viable on that basis. Removing the public subsidy clause would increase the viability and supply of SSH.<sup>103</sup>

An alternative solution to this challenge has been presented by the ‘Bristol model’, pioneered by Bristol City Council, working with Elim Housing Association and Homes England to develop The Haven, a six-unit scheme for adults with learning disabilities and autism in Bristol. Rather than using the SSH designation, the model sets rents under the Affordable Rent regime, with a RICS (Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors) Red Book valuation commissioned specifically on the bespoke design and function of the scheme. Affordable rent (80% of market rent) is derived from this evaluation, meaning it can reflect the higher costs of developing and delivering a specialist scheme for people with a learning disability and autistic people. Grant funds are then applied to reduce the borrowing requirement, bringing the Affordable Rent into a sustainable position without undermining quality or viability.<sup>104</sup>

### **Guidance to address uncertainty around Housing Benefit**

Supported housing providers have called for **greater clarity and consistency in the application of Housing Benefit eligibility regulations** as they apply to supported housing. For example, providers engaged in the 2023 Supported Housing Review

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<sup>101</sup> National Housing Federation (2020) Supported housing for people with long-term care and support needs; Look Ahead (2025) The future of supported housing – how can we deliver more, faster? Scaling capital funding

<sup>102</sup> Housing LIN (2023) Supported housing for people with learning disabilities and autistic people in England; Look Ahead (2025) The future of supported housing – how can we deliver more, faster? Scaling capital funding

<sup>103</sup> Look Ahead (2025) The future of supported housing – how can we deliver more, faster? Scaling capital funding

<sup>104</sup> Case study shared by LDA Housing Coalition.

were confused by what constitutes “more than minimal” care, support or supervision and by which service charges are eligible.

The Review heard from both providers and Housing Benefit teams that negotiating rents and service charges for Specified Accommodation is one of the most time consuming and resource intensive activities they undertake. While they acknowledged the importance of stringent assessment of proposed rents to prevent illegitimate claims from rogue providers, they also highlighted that this uncertainty - and delays in decision-making - creates risk for them and for tenants, often leaving tenants with rent arrears which they carry to future tenancies.<sup>105</sup>

The NHF recommended **the government publish benchmarking data about rents and service charge data** for long-term supported housing, as well as **guidance to local authorities**, to address variation in local authority-decision making about interpretation of Housing Benefit eligibility.<sup>106</sup>

Recommendations were also made to **address the issue of subsidy loss**, where Housing Benefit rules mean that some local authorities have shortfalls in their funding for supported housing and have to bridge this gap out of their own budgets. This is having a huge impact on local authority financial pressures.<sup>107</sup> The House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts reported that subsidy loss had grown from £53.8m in 2017/18 to £108m in 2021/22. The Committee suggests that the Supported Housing Regulatory Oversight Act will not deal with the problems caused by subsidy loss and recommends DWP consider how to reduce it as part of the consultation and implement solutions.<sup>108</sup>

### **Improved strategic oversight and planning**

There are strong calls for improved long-term planning for supported housing in local areas, underpinned by a better understanding of need and gaps in provision and

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<sup>105</sup> Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government (2024) Supported Housing Review 2023.

<sup>106</sup> National Housing Federation (2020) Supported housing for people with long-term care and support needs.

<sup>107</sup> Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government (2025) Systems-wide evaluation of homelessness and rough sleeping services: Supported housing.

<sup>108</sup> House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts (2023) Supported housing.

setting out robust plans for how these needs should be met.<sup>109</sup> These local strategic plans should also:

- Build provider confidence to invest in and develop new supported housing.<sup>110</sup>
- Create opportunities for better partnership working between commissioners and landlords to utilise existing supported housing and reduce levels of under-occupancy.<sup>111</sup>
- Set out a wider range of evaluation criteria to assess tenders other than price.<sup>112</sup>
- Involve people with lived experience in developing effective local solutions.<sup>113</sup>

Several reports welcomed the opportunity to achieve this through the Supported Housing Regulatory Oversight Act, although panel members at the 2026 National Children and Adult Services Conference (NCASC) warned that success depends on national guidance, adequate funding and capacity to link strategies to local plans.<sup>114</sup> The Kerslake Commission hoped that Local Supported Housing Strategies would help to identify gaps in current provision and provide evidence for calls for more funding.<sup>115</sup>

### **Better integration, co-commissioning and a “whole system approach”**

A strong theme across the literature was the opportunity for stronger partnership working and co-commissioning, which was currently viewed as patchy and of varying success. The 2023 Supported Housing Review recognised the growing involvement of health in commissioning supported housing, particularly in relation to clients with mental health needs. However, the report concluded that without meaningful shifts in budgets, co-commissioning remains an aspiration rather than a reality in many areas.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> National Housing Federation (2020) Supported housing for people with long-term care and support needs; NCASC Conference (2026) Supported Housing: The Missing Link in Social Care Reform. A Call to Action.

<sup>110</sup> Kerslake Commission (2023) Turning the Tide on Rising Homelessness and Rough Sleeping; NCASC (2026) Supported Housing: The Missing Link in Social Care Reform. A Call to Action.

<sup>111</sup> Housing LIN (2023) Supported housing for people with learning disabilities and autistic people in England.

<sup>112</sup> Riverside (2020) A traumatised system: Research into the commissioning of homelessness services in the last 10 years.

<sup>113</sup> Riverside (2020) A traumatised system: Research into the commissioning of homelessness services in the last 10 years.

<sup>114</sup> NCASC Conference (2026) Supported Housing: The Missing Link in Social Care Reform. A Call to Action.

<sup>115</sup> Kerslake Commission (2023) Turning the Tide on Rising Homelessness and Rough Sleeping.

<sup>116</sup> Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government (2024) Supported Housing Review 2023.

**Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) could do more to recognise the role of housing** by ensuring housing is a key component of Integrated Care Strategies and housing providers are viewed as key partners at system and place-level within the ICS Design Framework.<sup>117</sup> There are examples of integration in some areas, such as representation of housing association partnerships on Integrated Care Partnerships and dedicated housing leads within ICSs. However, sector stakeholders have highlighted the need for a clear national framework to ensure this innovation is replicated, with consistent definitions, models and outcomes measurement but also sufficient flexibility for place-based partnerships to respond to local priorities.<sup>118</sup>

There were several calls for **the government to take a greater role in promoting and creating the conditions for more partnership working and co-commissioning**, such as:

- Working with local authorities to support them to join up housing, health and social care.<sup>119</sup>
- Setting national policy to incentivise and support place-based governance models.<sup>120</sup>
- A national framework for the integration of supported housing in wider systems at a place-based level through Integrated Care System
- Publishing resources, such as case studies and toolkits.<sup>121</sup>
- Use every opportunity to integrate housing into health and care guidance and planning.<sup>122</sup>

The MHCLG evaluation of homelessness and rough sleeping suggested **Combined Authorities and other local authority sub-regions also offer an opportunity to incentivise joint commissioning** within the allocation of funding, enabling them to

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<sup>117</sup> Rethink Mental Illness (2024) The long journey home: understanding and improving the supported housing system for people living with mental illness.

<sup>118</sup> Imogen Blood & Associates (2023) Research into the supported housing sector's impact on homelessness prevention, health and wellbeing.

<sup>119</sup> Challenging Behaviour Foundation (2024) Co-Producing a Lifelong Action Plan: Housing.

<sup>120</sup> NCASC Conference (2026) Supported Housing: The Missing Link in Social Care Reform. A Call to Action.

<sup>121</sup> Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government (2025) Systems-wide evaluation of homelessness and rough sleeping services: Supported housing.

<sup>122</sup> Look Ahead (2025) The future of supported housing – how can we deliver more, faster? Scaling capital funding.

benefit from economies of scale and to better meet the needs of mobile client groups.<sup>123</sup>

Arguments for greater involvement of health in funding supported housing are strengthened by **evidence on the financial benefits of supported housing for the NHS:**

- Demos research into the impact of sheltered housing reviewed 52 academic papers and policy reports and estimated that the social value of sheltered housing totalled £483m per year, the majority of which was attributed to a reduction in inpatient stays (£300m) and health and care costs of hip fractures prevented (£156.3m).<sup>124</sup>
- Look Ahead's service models (crisis and recovery houses, rehabilitation services and forensic step-down) produced £5m a year in cashable savings and non-cash releasing efficiencies compared to hospital-based mental health care. Their report states there is capacity in the supported housing sector to scale up the model across England, predicted to generate nearly £1bn of potential savings to the NHS and social care.<sup>125</sup>
- Homes England measured the wellbeing and fiscal impacts of housing for older people, finding that each older person living in retirement living or sheltered housing generated a healthcare system financial saving of £8 per person per year, and an older person living in Extra Care housing or housing with care would generate a saving of £1840 per year.<sup>126</sup>
- The NHF found that sufficient supported housing for people leaving mental health inpatient settings could generate the NHS cost savings in the region of £53m - £65m per year.<sup>127</sup>

Recent research by Imogen Blood, for Framework, also identified a need for better integration, recommending more joint commissioning of housing, care and support pathways for people experiencing homelessness with significant cognitive impairment. The research also calls on MHCLG and the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) to work together, alongside NHS providers, to consider how to

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<sup>123</sup> Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government (2025) Systems-wide evaluation of homelessness and rough sleeping services: Supported housing.

<sup>124</sup> Wood (2017) The Social Value of Sheltered Housing. Referenced in Hall (2021) Rapid scope of UK supported housing research.

<sup>125</sup> Look Ahead (2021) The financial case for integrated mental health services and supported housing pathways.

<sup>126</sup> Homes England (2024) Measuring the Wellbeing and Fiscal Impacts of Housing for Older People.

<sup>127</sup> National Housing Federation (2025) Finding a safe home after hospital: Case study research on supported housing and healthcare partnerships.

increase investment in psychologists and other embedded professionals in housing-related support services or in specialist multi-disciplinary teams working with people experiencing homelessness.<sup>128</sup>

Several reports highlighted **examples of good joint-working between housing and health providers**. Sussex Health and Care Partnership was mentioned by both Rethink Mental Illness and Look Ahead for their strong partnership working, including the development of a mental health and housing strategy.<sup>129</sup> More recently, Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust has been exploring whether repurposing existing NHS stock could support housing providers to meet need for out of hospital services.<sup>130</sup> The NHF's report '[Finding a safe home after hospital](#)' includes further examples of joint working between housing and health to facilitate more timely hospital discharge, demonstrating the opportunities for supported housing to ease pressure on the NHS.<sup>131</sup>

Panel members at the NCASC conference highlighted good practice in Cornwall, where commissioning and housing teams co-lead delivery of the council's supported and specialist housing strategy, and in Bristol, where long-term contracts with trusted providers enable greater market stability, improved outcomes and stronger control over spend.<sup>132</sup>

Within Greater Manchester there is a tripartite agreement between the Integrated Care Partnership, the Combined Authority and Greater Manchester Housing Providers which they published alongside their shared vision for 'Better Homes, Better Neighbourhoods, Better Health'.<sup>133</sup> They also have a Supported Housing Strategic Lead at ICB level who carries out needs assessments, evidence reviews and co-design.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Imogen Blood & Associates (2026) Executive Function and Housing-related Support Research Report

<sup>129</sup> Rethink Mental Illness (2024) The long journey home: understanding and improving the supported housing system for people living with mental illness.

<sup>130</sup> Look Ahead (2025) The future of supported housing – how can we deliver more, faster? Scaling capital funding.

<sup>131</sup> National Housing Federation (2025) Finding a safe home after hospital: Case study research on supported housing and healthcare partnerships.

<sup>132</sup> NCASC Conference (2026) Supported Housing: The Missing Link in Social Care Reform. A Call to Action.

<sup>133</sup> [www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/planning-and-housing/housing/greater-manchester-tripartite-agreement/](http://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/planning-and-housing/housing/greater-manchester-tripartite-agreement/)

<sup>134</sup> Imogen Blood & Associates (2023) Research into the supported housing sector's impact on homelessness prevention, health and wellbeing.

## Accelerate provision of housing-led approaches

Among those focused on the provision of homelessness services there is strong consensus that housing-led models - including Housing First and floating support - are essential to preventing and ending homelessness, with calls for greater government investment in these models.<sup>135</sup>

The APPG for Ending Homelessness recommends a national rollout of Housing First and rapid rehousing models, describing Housing First as a proven model following pilots in England where tenancy sustainment rates are above 90% amongst tenants who would otherwise spend years in and out of hostels and rough sleeping. The APPG report provided examples demonstrating cost savings that can be made, including a Housing First scheme in Greater Manchester which has saved the public purse £15,880 per person per year and the Sefton Families scheme which provides 10 families per year with a furnished home alongside person-centred support and saves £25,000 per family per year.<sup>136</sup>

Homeless Link states that the model works best as part of an integrated strategy. Housing First is intended to end homelessness among people with high and complex needs in a cost-effective way, often working well for people who are “frequent flyers” in fixed-site services. However, it does not work for every homeless person with high and complex needs, particularly where there are challenges around addiction, mental health and social and economic integration.<sup>137</sup>

Imogen Blood’s research identified high levels of cognitive impairment amongst people experiencing homelessness, and a need for more intensive and longer-term support for this group. The research found 44% of people accessing Framework’s services in Lincolnshire have a cognitive impairment, alongside data from national studies confirming high rates of acquired brain injury, memory issues, autism and learning disabilities.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Riverside (2020) A traumatised system; Kerslake Commission (2023) Turning the Tide on Rising Homelessness and Rough Sleeping; APPG for Ending Homelessness (2025) Homes, Support, Prevention – Our Foundations for Ending Homelessness.

<sup>136</sup> APPG for Ending Homelessness (2025) Homes, Support, Prevention – Our Foundations for Ending Homelessness.

<sup>137</sup> Homeless Link (2019) The cost effectiveness of Housing First in England.

<sup>138</sup> Imogen Blood & Associates (2026) Executive Function and Housing-related Support Research Report.

In their evaluation of homelessness and rough sleeping services, MHCLG recognised the value in Housing First being able to flex intensity of support as needed. The evaluation suggested local authorities could run Housing First within their own strategies and funding but also recognised that government input was needed to ensure the model could be scaled up because of a lack of suitable one-bedroom homes.<sup>139</sup>

### Other recommendations within the literature

- Ensure that withdrawal of Housing Benefit does not result in housing being lost while someone is detained in a mental health inpatient unit by introducing ring-fenced funding to cover double running costs of maintaining housing while they are in hospital.<sup>140</sup>
- Future-proof housing for people with a learning disability through guidance and regulations around accessibility and adaptability standards, and through commissioners and housing providers ensuring that housing for people with a learning disability is not developed in areas at risk of flooding (which anecdotal evidence suggests is happening).<sup>141</sup>
- Improved local authority planning guidance for the aging population, including the creation of a new use-class in the planning system to designate retirement communities as separate from either care homes or retirement flats and a national planning framework that incentivises local authorities to allocate more land to building these kinds of schemes.<sup>142</sup>

### Our reflections on the existing literature

There is evidently a large body of literature drawing attention to the range of challenges of the current system for funding and commissioning supported housing, from government-commissioned reviews into the whole sector to provider-led reports focusing on specific types of supported housing. Due to the availability of literature, this part of the paper has tended to focus on the challenges and recommendations for transitional supported housing, particularly for people experiencing homelessness, however it is clear that there are different sets of challenges faced by different parts of the sector, which require different solutions.

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<sup>139</sup> Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government (2025) Systems-wide evaluation of homelessness and rough sleeping services: Supported housing.

<sup>140</sup> Challenging Behaviour Foundation (2024) Co-Producing a Lifelong Action Plan: Housing.

<sup>141</sup> Challenging Behaviour Foundation (2024) Co-Producing a Lifelong Action Plan: Housing.

<sup>142</sup> Damien Green MP, Phil Bayliss, Jeremy Porteus in ARCO (2021) The Housing with Care Grey Paper: Personal stories and policy ideas on strengthening housing with care for older people

For example, the largest barrier to the sustainability of transitional supported housing, is posed by the decline in revenue funding for support and shift towards more financially tight and insecure commissioning contracts, as well as reduced spending on more preventative services, which have resulted in a false economy and contributed to increased levels of need.

On the other hand, challenges with capital funding are stifling development of long-term housing for people with a learning disability or with complex mental health needs, leading to calls for increased and flexible grant rates alongside reform of the Rent Standard.

Different parts of the sector also have varying interactions with other public services, such as health, social care or criminal justice and consideration of those interactions, including mechanisms to promote more joined-up working and the potentially greater role that different government departments can play, will be a key part of the solution.

Our work to secure the financial sustainability of supported housing must, therefore, recognise and seek a range of solutions which meet the diverse needs of the sector, whilst also exploring improvements to oversight and accountability of the whole sector and how the sector interacts with the wider system.

## Shaping our work on the Future of Supported Housing

The sector has been shaped by significant changes in its funding environment and sometimes fragmented policymaking and short-sighted funding decisions over the last 30 years – leading to current situation where there are very high levels of unmet demand, and many schemes struggling to keep the doors open. On the other hand, with the introduction of the Supporting People programme, it has been demonstrated that bold policy making can enable the sector to grow to meet need, improve outcomes for people and deliver good value for money for the public purse.

Looking ahead, this review shows that any sustainable solution must take a whole-system view. Supported housing sits within a complex landscape of interdependent levers, including support funding, housing benefit, social housing regulation and capital investment. A more strategic approach is needed, one that considers total

system costs and enables a shift in funding from crisis response towards prevention by meeting people's needs earlier. This also means establishing the conditions for genuine integration across housing, health and care at national, regional and local levels, and scaling existing good practice where it is already happening. To do this we will need to build a cross-sector consensus on the Future of Supported Housing, with solutions that recognise the interdependency of supported housing and other public services and the system-wide value that good quality, properly funded supported housing generates.

Our work needs to address the fragmentation of the sector both in terms of the complex funding arrangements and in terms of the division of accountability, creating clearer and stronger oversight. We will need to explore the extent to which this can be achieved through the new Supported Housing Regulatory Oversight Act.

However, the challenge will be how we balance the tensions of oversight, cost control and streamlined funding, with local flexibility, space for place-based innovation to grow, and targeted solutions that understand and reflect the diversity of the sector.

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