**Brent Evictions Task & Finish Group**

**Meeting 1: Tuesday 6th October 2020**

**By Zoom**

**Chair:** Lexi Alafouzo (Housing for Women)

**Co-ordinator:** Sumathi Pathmanaban (Crisis Brent)

**Attendees:** Heather Teeling (Family homelessness, Housing Needs, Brent Council), Alex King (SHPS), Lexi Alafouzo (Housing for Women), Alfie Startup (SHPS), Gusta Glover (Advice 4 Renters), Jacqueline Carr (Citizens Advice Brent), Atara Fridler (Crisis Brent)

**Apologies:**

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|  | **Agenda Item + Discussion** | **Actions** |
| **1.** | **Welcome and introductions**  Lexi welcomed the group and members introduced themselves. |  |
| **2.** | **Purpose and objectives of task & finish group**  Lexi talked through the suggested purpose / objectives of the group.  The group **agreed** to the purpose outlined in the draft terms of reference. |  |
| **3.** | **Additional agencies to engage in the group**  The group discussed other agencies that need to be engaged on evictions:   * Landlords – can approach local landlord contacts and the National Landlords Association * Police – we can approach the Borough Commander around future training. Could also connect to police via Community MARAC * Council’s procurement team * Any legal aid solicitors working on evictions / housing? Council has contract with solicitors to support on evictions – Hodge Jones & Allen. * Local jobcentres – Sherene Williams is the homelessness & evictions lead at Brent DWP   Alex has tried to set up an online landlord forum which has had some limited attendance, and has a contact list for it so can feedback key points from these meetings to them.  The group **agreed**:   * to identify at least one prominent landlord in Brent to engage in the working group as a start? * to send the notes from these meetings to the Homelessness Forum and Jacqueline to send to Advice Thematic group to engage more organisations. | Gusta to check with Jacky P on potential large-scale landlord that can be invited  Alfie and Alex to reach out to their landlord contacts at SHPS  Heather to connect with procurement team.  Heather to check access to free solicitor service (commissioned by council) and feed back  Lexi to reach out to C-MARAC for police contact  Sumathi to contact Sherene Williams (DWP) |
| **4.** | **Sharing intelligence –** collating evidence to underpin the group’s workplan  Group members each gave a brief overview of evictions cases in their service and thoughts about future demand.  Advice 4 Renters: 1 attempted unlawful eviction over the summer, but not many enquiries recently because of ban on evictions. Waiting to see how things will go now that the ban has been lifted.  SHPS: examples of having housed someone but delays in rent payments / UC and landlords put pressure on people indicating that they have to leave immediately. Increase in prevention and relief cases  Citizens Advice Brent: haven’t had many evictions cases over covid period but concerned about demand when restrictions are lifted. Need to think about preventing evictions.  Crisis Brent: have had a couple of cases. An Ealing case, someone evicted from NAS accommodation. Expecting an increase.  Housing Needs, Brent Council: seen rise in illegal evictions, seems to be landlords trying their luck. They have seen some positives though in working with landlords to follow correct procedures.  Housing for Women: North London trend – locks being changed. How to disseminate information about tenants’ rights in this kind of situation?  The group broadly discussed some solutions:   * Share a list of steps for landlords to follow e.g. support services to resolve problems with rent payments * Increase awareness of Brent Council’s Resident Support Fund (covid response grant for residents). Also inform landlords about this fund * Could maybe include advice for landlords in the Brent magazine. Landlords and tenants at risk could approach Hub for further advice and support.   Gusta noted that A4R is currently developing online webinars and training videos for tenants which should be available on the A4R website soon. The first one will look at section 21.  Alfie noted that he has seen quite a few 6 month DHP awards for people (beyond the usual 2-3 month awards) which has helped prevent evictions.  After this general check-in, the group discussed the purpose of collecting / sharing intelligence. They **agreed** to collect and share monitoring data on eviction cases held by each agency so that a) a picture of evictions can start to be built and b) evidence can form the basis of a case for system change / improvement.  **Potential workplan**  The group then summarised the key themes for its future workplan:   * **Gearing up for an increasing level evictions** * First step is to map capacity within the sector to deal with evictions and identify whether legal advice is available * **Upstream prevention** * Raising landlord awareness of support to prevent arrears etc * Raising tenant awareness of rights * **Training and capacity-building for frontline staff** – this should include key activities discussed captured during the training needs discussion below | All group members to bring snapshot of key evictions data to each meeting  Sumathi to draft rough workplan based on this outline |
| **5.** | **Training needs**  Following on from discussion of the T&F group’s workplan, the group talked about the training needs for frontline staff.  Recognising the range of knowledge held by Homelessness Forum members (and other advice & advocacy services), the following training needs were identified:   * Clarifying what possession proceedings look like and changes in law (especially covid-related) that will affect frontline staff * Basic overview of Section 21 steps – simplified and step-by-step description. Practical examples of illegal evictions that would enable staff to identify within their own caseload. * Overview of the legislation that underpins Section 21 procedures * Developing frontline staff’s softer skills, for example how to challenge landlords but maintain good relationships with them? * Ensuring that advisors know how to signpost people to the right support and services in the case of evictions, including where renters can build skills and knowledge about their rights and responsibilities * How to determine housing status so that advisors can identify whether the correct eviction process is being carried out and the legislation around that.   There are several existing local and national training opportunities including:   * National Homelessness Advice Service – lots of free online training * Lexi from Housing for Women is happy to deliver training on housing to the Homelessness Forum for example – she does this already * A4R’s videos for tenants / frontline staff * Homeless Link via its PLUS Project will be delivering six training sessions to the Homelessness Forum and other frontline staff from November 2020 – April 2021. The training themes are to be determined | Sumathi to follow up with Homeless Link  After that develop a training proposal (Sumathi & Lexi) |
| **6.** | **AOB**  Next meeting: likely to be mid-November, after the Homelessness Forum meeting in early Nov.  On feeding back to other groups and forums the group agreed:   * Lexi to feed back to the Homelessness Forum * Jacqueline to feed back to the Advice & Advocacy Thematic Group |  |