

Appendix 4: Community Engagement – MIND Focus Groups

A focus group with Mind service users via Zoom was held to have an open discussion on the questions below:

- What has your experience of supported housing been?
- What changes, improvements would you like to see made in supported housing?

What has your experience of supported housing been?

The group were split into three different breakout rooms lead by peer support volunteers to have an open discussion on the above question.

Feedback from breakout rooms:

- General feedback was that communication between professionals such as housing officers, key workers and mental support was poor- need for better joint up working.
- Some people were accommodated in Supported Housing outside of the borough they were currently in. Lack of support from staff in this transition was said to have been poor.
- Being moved from the area you had a support network caused added stress and anxiety which had a direct impact on peoples wellbeing as change can be difficult, loss of support network, lack of help to access services in a new and unfamiliar area so feelings of isolation and being left to just get on with it has been unhelpful
- Lack of support for ex-military veterans, not enough support or communication between the MOD and other housing agencies and lack of signposting when discharged and in need of supported housing due to for example PTSD, often end up sleeping rough or sofa surfing. There needs to be more joined up partnership service between agencies to help veterans in need.
- Poor support and a lack of training for people going from supported living arrangements to independent living. A need for people to be helped in this area was raised in order for them to be able to function independently in society and maintain, tenancy, finance and other skills to continue recover and independence
- No contact or call back from support workers when called upon.
- There are long waiting times to get in touch with someone for mental health support.
- Specific needs are not being met e.g. some flats have no lifts as some participant cannot use stairs due to mobility issues
- Since the second lockdown, there has been no communication from Key/Case Workers.
- Some concerns surrounding what Supported Housing is and how to get on the system, what the requirements are.
- Some places were initially staffed well from Monday – Friday – 9am to 5pm, this worked well. Then suddenly cut to 2 hours a week, this caused massive problems.
- Some people felt they didn't know how to deal with benefits and budgeting etc. so when moved on to independent living it became challenging affecting mental health
- Fights breakout in the house, so police are called out – people get so scared that they cannot leave their room.
- When moving to independent living no transition, help or support given.
- Experience of female only supported housing for mental health for 2.5 years: when Staffed well it was good but when not, men would come in the house; there would be alcohol and drug use. There were no security which would compromise some women's safety
- Friend in alcohol and drugs supported housing. This worked well with opportunities to get involved with the service. When moved to independent living no support at all. He died alone in his flat a few months later.

What changes, improvements would you like to see made in supported housing?

- A clearer understanding of the three pathways into supported housing and the different levels.
- Improve access to information and advice on how supported housing works – i.e. how to applying, what is the eligibility criteria – pathways to get in the system
- More transparency on time frames
- People want training and more support when moving onto independent living
- Having Support workers visible and available during stated hours and approachable
- Need access to support at weekends
- Waiting times for repairs are not great, leaving people to live in poor conditions often not having water, heating, gas, electricity and damp walls causing other health issues.
- Improved training on working with and supporting people with mental ill health
- Understanding people's needs to stay in an area that is familiar and safe for them.
- More involved around discussion when having to be placed in another Borough as this can seriously impact a person's mental stability and can often lead to suicidal ideation
- Better communication between agencies working with individuals in supported housing and also the council
- An overall feeling that mixed needs settings can be quite problematic, need to take into account the impact on people's wellbeing as certain settings can cause severe stress to those with mental health issues.
- People may have different needs that could cause other residents to have triggers, it was raised that sometimes safety becomes a real concern, prompting safeguarding issues within these mixed settings.
- Drug and Alcohol dependency could maybe be better accommodating in a setting of its own
- Under 25 age group tend to be very noisy so placing them together may reduce noise issues that are raised as a problem
- Women Only units, this would also have advantages on cultural and religious reasons as well as helping give certain people a far greater feeling of safety
- Mental health better trained staff in how to relate to people struggling with mental ill health
- More support in some facilities – especially on weekends.
- Feeling more valued as a resident of Lewisham Council for over 15 years.
- More information about entitlements and requirements about supported housing.
- More support in services like counselling and more community advisers like financial adviser.
- Regular forums that give feedback and advise to service users about their concerns mentioned previously.