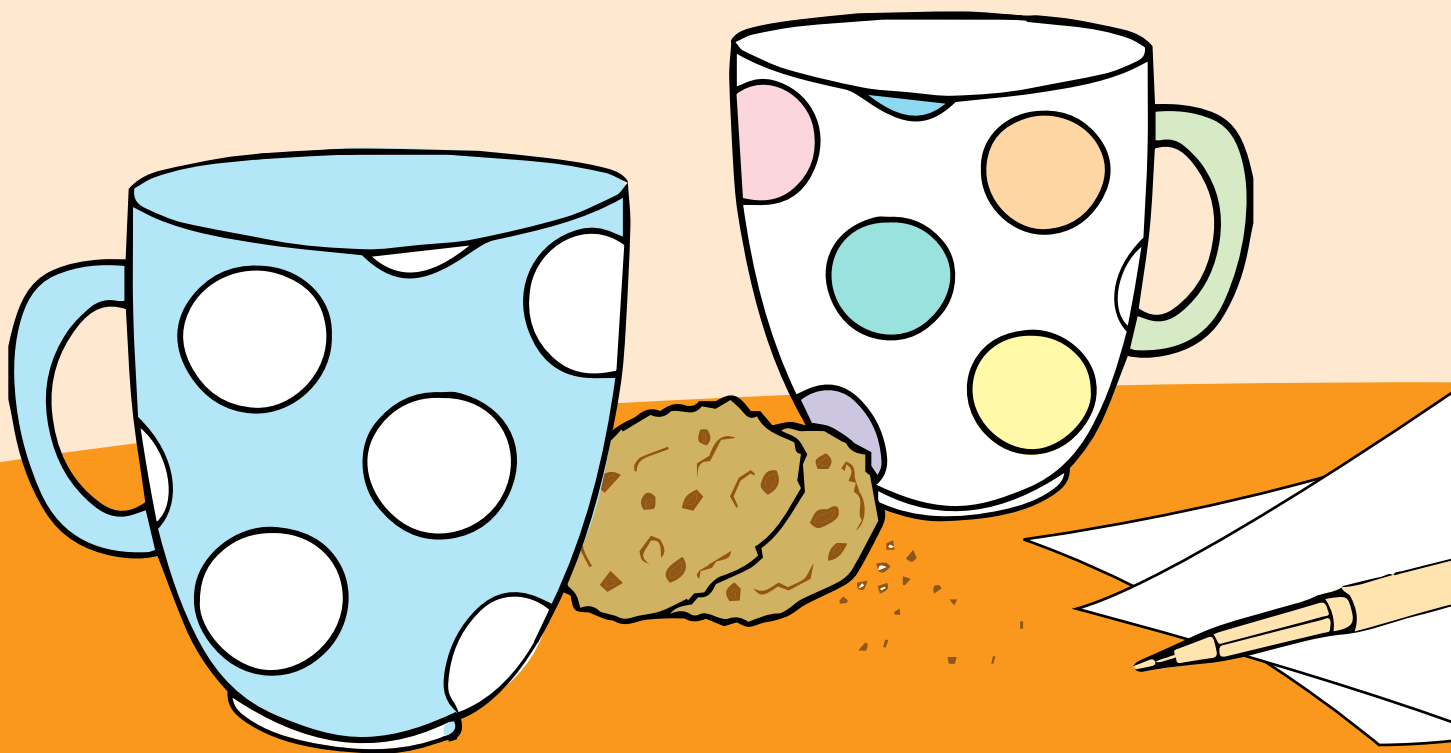


Evaluation of the Sharing Solutions programme

Elaine Batty, Ian Cole, Stephen Green, Lindsey McCarthy
and Kesia Reeve
March 2015



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About Crisis

Crisis is the national charity for single homeless people. We are dedicated to ending homelessness by delivering life-changing services and campaigning for change.

Our innovative education, employment, housing and well-being services address individual needs and help homeless people to transform their lives.

We are determined campaigners, working to prevent people from becoming homeless and advocating solutions informed by research and our direct experience.

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Acronyms

AST	Assured Shorthold Tenancy
CAB WHABAC	Citizens Advice Bureau & Worcester Housing and Benefits Advice Centre
CIH	Chartered Institute of Housing
CRESR	Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research
DBS	Disclosure and Barring Service
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
DHP	Discretionary Housing Payment
GLA	Greater London Authority
HB	Housing Benefit
HMO	House in Multiple Occupation
IFS	Institute of Fiscal Studies
LA	Local Authority
NHF	National Housing Federation
NLA	National Landlords Association
NPSS	National Practitioner Support Service
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
PRS	Private Rented Sector
RLA	Residential Landlords Association
RSRS	Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy
SAR	Shared Accommodation Rate
SYHA	South Yorkshire Housing Association

Executive summary

Introduction

The Sharing Solutions programme began in October 2013 and concluded in March 2015. It was funded by a grant of £800,000 from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and was administered by Crisis, the national charity for single homeless people. The programme consisted of eight schemes throughout England set up to pilot, develop and promote new models for establishing successful and sustainable sharing arrangements for single people in housing need. Each scheme received £90,000 for a 15 month delivery period, and Crisis retained £80,000 towards its staffing and administration costs. The programme was targeted mainly at the private rented sector (PRS) and at individuals who were receiving Housing Benefit and only eligible for the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) of the Local Housing Allowance (LHA). However, the programme also encompassed partnerships with social sector housing organisations and individuals for whom sharing could be a more viable financial option.

A review of the literature on sharing in the private rented sector

This analysis of the available evidence indicates that experiences of sharing differ markedly according to the group in question. It can be a starkly different experience for students, young professionals, low-income tenants and those from more vulnerable groups. This review has primarily highlighted literature relating to the increased number of individuals under the age of 35 in shared accommodation under the SAR. Private rented sector tenants are already at a disadvantage, given their occupation of an increasingly crowded, competitive and expensive property sector in most parts of the country. Evidence suggests that access to the private rented sector for those claiming the SAR is still more restricted by the insufficient amount of suitable, or in some cases any, shared housing

available at an affordable cost.

Within the SAR group itself, a growing body of evidence points to the unsuitability of shared accommodation – in its current state – for vulnerable and other groups (such as parents with non-resident children) who are not exempt from the rate. Some have suggested that the exemptions should be extended (Unison, 2014). Although this review has unearthed more challenges than benefits in terms of sharing accommodation under the SAR, in some cases sharing can be a viable housing solution. Indeed, some evidence paints shared living environments in a more positive light if managed in the correct way, especially if it takes full account of tenants' needs and devolves some of the decision-making and micro-managing processes to the tenants themselves.

Research has, however, only skimmed the surface of examining the diverse experiences of sharing accommodation, especially when this is the result of constraint rather than choice. More work remains to be done on the availability and suitability of shared accommodation and the actual experiences of living in these circumstances for tenants from a range of mixed-needs groups.

Managing the programme

The Sharing Solutions programme has been delivered and managed effectively by Crisis. The programme model - ostensibly seeking an experienced intermediary to manage the project - had significant benefits for the manner in which £800,000 of public funds was spent. Crisis was successful as an intermediary fund holder (and significantly contributed to the success of the programme) in the following ways:

- Its broad knowledge of the private rented sector;

- Its linkages with a range of stakeholders, particularly its close association with PRS access projects throughout the country;
- The ability to employ a dedicated and experienced programme manager, supported by an experienced and knowledgeable team; and,
- Successful management of its triumvirate role as fund holder (commissioner), campaigner and service provider.

Overall, the programme was on course to meet its original targets for clients housed. It is worth bearing in mind that the ability to meet these targets was not by any means the sole criterion for judging the success of the programme. Sharing Solutions was, above all, a learning programme. However, the process of learning has been robust and grounded, simply because the pilot projects managed to house (or re-house) a significant number of clients.

By using the *Making it Count* tool (Rugg and Preece, 2013), the Sharing Solutions programme demonstrated significant savings for public services. For every £1 of grant funding, savings of £5.21 were accrued in the first quarter of the second year of funding of the programme, by virtue of taking people out of homelessness.

Evaluating sharing solutions models

The Sharing Solutions programme has provided some important lessons about the effectiveness of different delivery models. The first point of note is the broad and ambitious nature of the programme that these models attest to. It is fair to say the Sharing Solutions programme has not played it safe. Rather, it has decided to trial some genuinely innovative, and very difficult, models.

Training tenancies are a useful way of introducing tenants to sharing and managing a tenancy in a safe way. Intensive tenancy support, training and thoughtful matching

supports tenants and equips them better for the future. A number of factors which stand out as contributing to the success of training tenancies are:

1. The type of tenancy agreement used was believed to be important to allow flexibility in training tenancies
2. Training tenancies are successful when linked to training courses
3. Sustainment of tenancies requires intensive support, particularly for clients who have never held a tenancy or lived in shared accommodation
4. Careful matching of clients is critical to ensuring that they have a positive experience of sharing
5. Smaller numbers of sharers in training flats makes sharing easier for clients to consider, but market conditions dictate how a shared house 'stacks up' financially
6. It is important to ensure that clients have adequate support to move on from a training tenancy into more permanent accommodation

Lodgings, as a model for increasing shared accommodation for single people struggling to access housing have a role to play. Schemes that aimed to link up with social housing tenants had limited impact, due to the negations of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy (RSRS) by Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) and the unwillingness of social housing organisations to get involved. The evidence suggests that owner occupiers are often better placed, and more willing, to take a lodger. While it was apparent from the pilot schemes that establishing lodgings required a significant investment of time and effort, it would be worthwhile where there was a need for shorter-term, less secure, but affordable accommodation. Several factors were identified as important for them to operate successfully:

- Partnerships with social housing providers and local authorities were critical for promoting the scheme
- Providing support for the lodger *and* the host was important
- Ensuring that the lodging agreement was fair to both parties was a key role for the pilot schemes
- For hosts, it was important to fully understand the financial connotations of collecting rent, particularly its impact on the host's benefit claims

Providing **shared accommodation for fathers with non-resident children** was one of the most challenging aspects of the Sharing Solutions programme. The success of this model hinged on the ability to find the right kind of accommodation. One project Worcester Citizens Advice Bureau & Worcester Housing and Benefits Advice Centre (CAB WHABAC) found a property that was ideal in its form and function, and also was owned by a charity who offered it to the scheme at a reasonable rent. These circumstances will be difficult to replicate, and there is a case for PRS access schemes (in partnership with landlords) to develop appropriate properties rather than seeking them out. However, CAB WHABAC's experience suggested that once this hurdle is overcome, sharing is a viable solution for this particular client group. It can generate positive outcomes for fathers' continued contact with their children, and provide some support and security after a relationship breakdown that stabilises their lives.

There is significant potential to **increase shared accommodation by using former student accommodation**, particularly where more 'traditional' student renting markets have altered in favour of purpose built student accommodation. However, the key obstacle to overcome was convincing landlords to rethink their lettings strategies. Although this was challenging, these could be

overcome by providing 'professional' services to landlords to offset the risks they perceived. This included: intensive support for sharers, thorough matching, and (where necessary/practical) management and guaranteed rental income. However, projects should be aware that accommodation must be suitable for the target client group. Larger, more difficult to let houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) may be more readily available, but may not always be the best sharing solution.

Lead tenant models have merits in different sharing scenarios. Where it had been successful:

- It enabled better communication between the sharers and the project, allowing personal and practical issues to be identified quicker;
- It enabled better relationships between the tenants and the landlord; and
- Houses tended to be kept tidier, and were more 'harmonious'.

The Crisis Housing Coach Service demonstrated that volunteer **Peer Mentors** can deliver positive outcomes for the volunteer, the organisation and clients accessing a PRS access service. The peer mentors thrived because there was a well-resourced programme of support for them and individual staff who could dedicate time to their development and training needs. Recruiting people with the right skills and knowledge was important, but the key lessons from the Crisis Housing Coach Service were that communication skills were equally important, and volunteers required support to make the transition from 'client' to 'advice provider'.

Making sharing work

There are a number of cross cutting issues relevant to all Sharing Solutions schemes. Such issues act as key determinants of schemes' success and 'make sharing work'.

The supply of suitable accommodation:

access to affordable and suitable accommodation formed the basis of the Sharing Solutions schemes' success and varied by local housing market contexts. While the barriers faced by different schemes were never exactly identical, there were common threads that grouped a few schemes together. Great Yarmouth and Gateshead struggled with a lack of supply of shared accommodation, whereas other areas (London, Ryedale and Worcester) had plentiful supplies of shared accommodation but excessive demand and competition. Sharing tended to 'work' more in areas where student property markets were changing, where schemes could tap into ex-student housing.

Cultures of sharing: these varied across areas and local housing market contexts. Sharing Solutions schemes could 'get off the ground' more readily in areas where sharing was culturally accepted. Expectations endured of being able to access social housing or self-contained flats in the PRS, and the lack of choice around sharing inherent in the SAR reforms was understandably a bitter pill to swallow for many clients. All schemes reported the necessity of working towards an attitudinal shift in terms of sharing amongst wider society.

How sharing is 'managed': schemes succeeded by managing shared accommodation from both a 'supply' side (landlords) and a 'demand' side (tenants). Schemes had a series of considerations to negotiate to ensure that each side worked in tandem and 'what was best' for the client also met the needs of the landlord. Such management issues revolved around deciding on the best type of tenancy agreement; the best party to manage the property; the project's staffing; and how to match, support, and assess tenants.

Supporting tenants to sustain tenancies: intensive tenancy support was crucial for the sustainment of tenancies and outcomes of

schemes. Although the 'type' of support on offer varied, the high level of support was consistent across all schemes and it was made evident that this was essential both for tenants' wellbeing and landlord retention.

Landlord engagement: schemes took advantage of existing landlord relationships and this gave them a head start; and taking steps to incentivise landlords also proved successful (whether sourcing, vetting, matching and supporting tenants or paying Housing Benefit (HB) directly to the landlord). Getting landlords on board was nevertheless still a time consuming and resource intensive process.

The role of partnerships: partnerships with other organisations proved vital in order to secure appropriate client referrals, as well as to make referrals in the other direction where necessary. Good relationships with stakeholders from partner organisations made a vast difference to the operation of the scheme, and where there was a sense that these relationships were at risk of breaking down (for instance with local benefits teams) this was a cause for concern. The partnership between Nomad and South Yorkshire Housing Association (SYHA) was given as one example of good practice.

Outcomes for tenants

Although it is difficult to clearly assess what in particular contributed to **tenants' outcomes** in sharing without tracking tenants in the long-term, it is evident that sharing as part of Sharing Solutions was a largely positive experience, and provided tenants with stable and secure housing in a supportive environment. Specifically, tenants benefited from Sharing Solutions in the following ways:

- The acquisition and development of skills necessary for independent living and tenancy maintenance
- Increased confidence as a result of the above

- The space and support to focus on and improve other aspects of their lives
- Having a 'safety net' of support to cope with issues that might otherwise put tenancies at risk
- Being financially 'better off'

There were a number of ways that schemes helped to make the experience of sharing more successful for tenants:

- Offering intensive support packages tended to work better when staff could go to tenants (offering regular house visits, for instance) rather than when tenants were expected to seek the support themselves
- Tenants were happier when sharing with a smaller number of people, and contrasted this with their experience of sharing at hostels
- Including bills in one rent payment meant that tenants could manage their finances and budget more effectively
- Employing a cleaner for communal areas helped to prevent potential conflicts over cleaning responsibilities and to keep the property in good repair

Outcomes for Landlords

Landlords benefited from tenants being supported and trained: supported and knowledgeable tenants were more likely to pay rent, look after their properties, and have a good relationship with their landlord. In this case, what worked for tenants simultaneously worked for landlords. As Section 5.6 demonstrates, landlords were attracted to schemes largely by non-financial incentives: because schemes acted as a trusted mediator who could 'micro-manage' any issues. The majority of outcomes were not specific to sharing necessarily, but revolved more around working with a trusted

PRS access scheme and the support they provided in terms of management, tenant support, and financial help. However, this support was only viable for schemes to carry out through being part of the Sharing Solutions programme. The way that landlords benefited through their involvement with Sharing Solutions is summarised below:

- Landlords saved time and averted risk if tenants were referred by schemes who took responsibility for finding, assessing, vetting and matching potential tenants
- Supported tenants meant more sustainable (and less risky) tenancies as problems could be resolved before they got out of hand. Having access to expert support/project workers meant that landlords did not have to spend time supporting tenants or carrying out conflict management themselves
- Landlords benefited directly from the specific landlord support/advice on offer at CAB WHABAC and the Crisis Housing Coach Service
- Landlords' properties were kept in 'good repair' by schemes' use of a cleaning service and regular house visits where project staff could conduct informal property checks
- Landlords received some financial gain through more stable rental yields, a reduced propensity to be forced to evict, and pre-payment of deposits and the first month's rent

Conclusions

The increased pressure on housing markets across the country, as the result of lack of supply, patterns of new household formation, persistent affordability pressures, and reductions in housing and other welfare benefits make it inevitable that more people will move into shared accommodation as the most financially viable solution to

their housing needs. However, there is also a reluctance to enter into sharing with ‘strangers’ rather than family members or friends, and these concerns are highlighted for many members of vulnerable groups facing challenges such as living with others, gaining access to the PRS, and then sustaining a tenancy. In terms of supply, landlords are also often reluctant to take on shared accommodation due to the management complexities (and costs) that can arise (for example on termination of tenancy) and because they fear returns may be lower than in self-contained accommodation. In this context, Sharing Solutions is an opportune programme which has been able to test out various ideas for making shared accommodation a more attractive option for tenants and landlords alike. The evidence in this report suggests that a number of the potential barriers to developing more, and better, shared accommodation can be overcome, if additional support, effective partnership working and the dissemination of good practice are to the fore.

The Sharing Solutions programme has demonstrated that shared accommodation can be made to work effectively for low-income tenants who are in receipt of welfare benefits, given intensive support and training. This in turn requires both additional funding and expertise of working in the sector, which is at a premium in many local areas. This review of the eight pilot schemes indicated that staff, volunteers and stakeholders all understood the needs of the client groups involved and had experience of engaging with, and intervening in, the private rented sector. However, their capacity to develop sustainable networks and ways of working is inevitably hampered by their reliance on grant funding. The specific funds for the programme made available by DCLG had a very positive impact. The programme provided assistance for around 200 clients over a 15 month period. By January 2015 it had provided accommodation to 172 clients

and at the time of writing only 19 of these tenancies had ended for negative reasons.

But in the current (and future) spending climate, it is essential that any new scheme can produce savings as well as meet housing needs. The use of the Crisis’ *Making it Count* tool showed that there was a total gross saving (through reducing homelessness) of £625,000 per quarter, against a cost of £120,000. For every £1 of grant funding, £5.21 of savings was generated. The positive outcomes for tenants and landlords discussed in this report indicate that investment in PRS access projects to promote sharing solutions is a worthwhile and cost effective policy. But it requires the funds, and the political will, to kick-start schemes, and intensive support is required to sustain tenancies in the long-run - both to assist the tenant, and to incentivise landlords to rent their properties to vulnerable people. This comes at a price; but this report shows that the eventual benefits of programmes like Sharing Solutions will soon outweigh these costs, if they can thereby prevent an increase in homelessness among this ‘at risk’ group on the margins of the housing market.

Recommendations

Recommendations for private rented sector access schemes

- Extend the use of training flats, especially in partnership with the housing association sector, and with detailed prior client assessment, compulsory training and regular contact with a support worker
- Develop 'lead tenant' schemes, with appropriate incentives, especially in areas where there is little culture of sharing
- Promote pre-tenancy training, and ensure that courses consider issues around shared accommodation
- Provide worked examples of possible financial gains for landlords letting at the SAR as opposed to self-contained accommodation (e.g. stability of rental yields, reducing the propensity to be forced to evict, pre-payment of deposits)
- Provide examples of possible management gains for landlords participating in schemes similar to Sharing Solutions (e.g. undertaking more comprehensive tenant vetting on their behalf)
- Extend the range of options for prospective tenants - e.g. lodgings in the social housing sector - coupled with vigorous host recruitment and training and written lodgings agreements; this will be more applicable in tighter housing markets
- Work with local universities to develop links with larger landlords who specialise in the student market to encourage broadening their offer to HB/LHA tenants, especially where purpose-built student accommodation is planned for expansion
- Encourage private landlords to apply for Empty Homes grants to use properties subsequently for sharing
- Undertake a 'health check' of tenancies in shared accommodation at least every two months
- Further develop the peer mentor scheme piloted by The Crisis Housing Coach Service. This received positive feedback, as clients responded well to peers who had experienced similar difficulties and hardships, but a well-resourced programme of support needs to be in place to ease the transition from service user to volunteer

Recommendations for local authorities

- Fund or provide match funding for a range of options for prospective tenants - e.g. lodgings in the social housing sector - coupled with vigorous host recruitment and training and written lodgings agreements
- Promote wider use of the Rent-a-Room scheme by owner occupiers
- Use Discretionary Housing Payments to ease access to shared accommodation (through paying deposits etc.)
- Use Discretionary Housing Payments to support groups and individuals that struggle to access shared accommodation
- Prioritise Empty Homes grants for landlords to use to renovate their properties to shared houses

Wider recommendations for organisations working with (young) people accessing shared accommodation

- Appraise all applicants of their realistic chances of being rehoused - to concentrate minds on other options and manage expectations
- Offer support and financial advice to first-time sharers prior to gaining tenancies - through workshops, and on-line support

- Housing associations should consider taking on tenant matching and tenancy management responsibilities in shared accommodation from private landlords

Recommendations for government

- Provide additional funding for PRS access schemes to set up, trial and establish sharing schemes
- Promote sharing to local authorities as a viable housing option but in doing so recognise and highlight the additional resource, staffing and support capacity which is required to make schemes successful
- Promote existing good practice across all Government departments whose work impact on those subject to the SAR
- The government should review the operation of the Shared Accommodation Rate and consider in particular, a) whether it is working adequately in all housing markets, and b) whether exemptions from the SAR are adequate to meet the needs of under-35s with specific housing needs

Recommendations for Crisis

- Promote the success of the models trialled by the Sharing Solutions Schemes elsewhere to allay some of the specific concerns about sharing from this group of tenants
- Promote the use of landlord/property sharing protocols to areas with a large PRS outside London

- Promote Practitioners' Forums in larger PRS housing markets (for example, Greater Manchester, West Midlands) following the London example
- Work with local authority associations, the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH), the National Housing Federation (NHF), the Residential Landlords Association (RLA) and the National Landlords Association (NLA) to promote good practice in the management and development of shared accommodation

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the programme

The Sharing Solutions programme began in October 2013 and concluded in March 2015. It was funded by a grant of £800,000 from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and was administered by Crisis, the national charity for single homeless people. The programme consisted of eight schemes throughout England set up to pilot, develop and promote new models for establishing successful and sustainable sharing arrangements for tenants in housing need. Each scheme received £90,000 over 15 months, and Crisis retained £80,000 towards its staffing and administration costs. The programme was targeted mainly at the private rented sector (PRS) and at individuals who were receiving Housing Benefit and only eligible for the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) of the Local Housing Allowance (LHA). However, the programme also encompassed partnerships with social sector housing organisations and individuals for whom sharing could be a more viable financial option (for instance, those who are eligible for a self-contained one-bedroom flat but who, for financial reasons, choose to share), or a more preferable social option (for instance, where sharing could bring increased social interaction).

Since the mid-1990s, Crisis has made an important contribution to improving access to, and sustainment of, PRS tenancies for single people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. In 2010, Crisis received funding from DCLG for its Private Rented Sector Access Development programme (see Rugg, 2014). This has provided funding and support to PRS access schemes throughout England, which help homeless or vulnerably housed single people to access and sustain private rented accommodation. Evidence suggested that the PRS access schemes were struggling to assist under-35 year old single people who were only eligible for the SAR rate of LHA. Crisis identified this as an

area that required a dedicated programme of support, as well as extending knowledge and understanding of the needs and circumstances of this group. Crisis worked with DCLG to secure grant funding for the Sharing Solutions programme.

The housing needs of single people under the age of 35 in the PRS are of growing significance, given the rapid expansion of the sector in the past ten years, and the recent extension of the SAR threshold to 35 for those receiving Housing Benefit (HB). The proportion of households in England living in the PRS has nearly doubled from just over ten per cent in 2003/4 to 19 per cent by 2013/14. In London the proportion has increased from 14 per cent in 2003/4 to 30 per cent by 2013/14, making it as large as the mortgagor sector in the city (DCLG, 2015: paras 2.6, 2.9). Among households aged between 25 and 34, the proportion living in the PRS increased from 21 per cent to 48 per cent during this period (para 2.14). Nineteen per cent of single person households under the age of 60 in the PRS were in receipt of HB (para 2.40). The age threshold below which the SAR applied to single adults with non-dependent children in receipt of HB was increased from 25 to 35 for all new claimants in January 2012, and during 2012 for existing claimants. Some of the early impacts of this measure are discussed in more detail in the following chapter; the changes have raised concerns about the consequences for those affected by extending the SAR (Work and Pensions Select Committee, 2014). The need to develop schemes that can mitigate some of the negative impacts of sharing on this group is therefore paramount.

The objectives of the Sharing Solutions programme were to:

- Develop eight PRS access schemes for sharers in a range of housing markets across England;

- Provide in-depth support and advice, from proposal development through to set up and delivery, including support with data collection and quality checking;
 - Research, publish and disseminate a framework for developing sharing schemes based on the experience of the pilot schemes funded and other relevant projects and with relevance to different housing markets and client groups;
 - Ensure that all eight schemes will have proved their worth and be in the best possible position to be sustained beyond Crisis funding;
 - Communicate findings regularly through variety of means and through two specific events to share best practice with wider audience; and,
 - Establish Crisis as a national lead for information and expertise on successful sharing in the PRS, through the projects it supports and more widely through its activities.
- *Accessing former student shared accommodation:* so that this could be used for clients in receipt of HB
 - *Improving the quantity and quality of shared accommodation:* by offering support to private landlords
 - *Developing pre-tenancy training schemes:* in order to achieve better sustainment of shared tenancies

Table 1.1 outlines the eight pilot schemes, and the models employed, and Figure 1.1 shows their geographical location.

The fund was held by Crisis, and distributed to the eight successful applicants (see Table 1.1). The programme included a number of distinctive models to be tested, such as:

- *Training flats:* where clients would receive intensive support in their tenancies for a maximum of six months before moving on to more independent shared accommodation, having been equipped with skills to sustain a tenancy
- *Peer mentors and lead tenants:* schemes where more experienced tenants provide peer support and advice to new clients
- *Lodgings with households affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy (RSRS):* where clients are housed with households who have a 'spare' room

Table 1.1: Sharing Solutions evaluation: case studies

Organisation (Location)	Scheme model / characteristics
Foundation (Ryedale)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lodgings scheme primarily focusing on accessing rooms with social sector households affected by the removal of the spare room subsidy • Enabling and encouraging landlords to access grants or loans from empty homes funding
PATH (Plymouth)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lodgings scheme primarily focusing on accessing rooms with social housing tenants affected by the bedroom tax
Shelter (Great Yarmouth)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accommodating single parents with non-resident children in shared accommodation
CAB WHABAC (Worcester)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accommodating single parents with non-resident children in shared accommodation • Working with a local charity to source and lease accommodation
Elmbridge Rentstart (Esher)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training flats • Lead tenant scheme • Offering non-financial incentives to landlords to improve property standards/aid procurement
Crisis Housing Coach Service (London)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated pre-tenancy training workshops for shared accommodation • Peer mentor model • Hosting a pan London practitioners forum to share good practice and discuss common issues surrounding sharing • Developing the landlord/property sharing protocol between London schemes
Nomad Opening Doors (Sheffield)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training Flats • Bringing empty student accommodation back into use for sharers.
Oasis Aquila Housing (Gateshead)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using Empty Homes Grants - to purchase properties with an aim to use for sharing • Training flats • Lead tenant model

Figure 1.1: Geographical coverage of the Sharing Solutions programme



1.2 About the evaluation

In December 2014, Crisis appointed the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (CRESR) at Sheffield Hallam University to undertake an evaluation of the Sharing Solutions programme. The objectives of the evaluation were to:

- assess the extent to which the project met its aims and objectives;
- provide evidence of successful sharing models and lessons learned from the pilot schemes;
- provide evidence of how the pilots were successful;
- provide evidence of the additional value given by Crisis to the pilot schemes, through support, advice and dissemination of best practice;
- provide evidence of the additional value given by the programme to the wider environment and external sharing schemes through the dissemination of best practice;

- explore the broader implications for policy and practice so as to inform the future development of shared accommodation options in the private rented sector.

1.3 Methods

The evaluation was carried out in three key stages.

Literature review: A brief review of the key academic and policy/practice literature on sharing in the private rented sector was carried out, and this is presented in Chapter 2.

Interviews with Crisis staff and Advisory Group members: Interviews were carried out with three Crisis officers directly involved in the programme and five members of the Advisory Group for the programme. These interviews explored the funding process, the nature of support, assistance and expertise Crisis provided to the programme, the operation of the advisory group and the perceptions of the programme's achievements.

Pilot scheme case studies: Research was carried out in each of the eight pilot projects. This involved:

- Interviews with project workers;
- Interviews with tenants supported through the schemes;
- Interviews with key representatives of other organisations involved in the programme (including landlords and supporting local authorities); and,
- Analysis of local monitoring data and other available information gathered by the schemes.

1.4 Report structure

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature on sharing in the private rented sector. In Chapter 3, the administration of the programme is examined, looking specifically at the central role played by Crisis. In Chapter 4 the key models that were explored by the programme are evaluated and in Chapter 5, overarching sharing issues are explored. Chapter 6 then shines a spotlight on some of the specific outcomes for tenants and landlords who have engaged with the programme. Finally, Chapter 7 offers some conclusions and makes recommendations.

2. A review of the literature on sharing in the private rented sector

2.1 Introduction

The availability and quality of shared accommodation in the private rented sector (PRS) has been problematic for many years. While regulation of houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) and other measures to improve standards have been implemented, one unintended consequence of this intervention has been to reduce the number of landlords willing to provide shared accommodation. The scarcity of decent shared accommodation is especially acute for those people who are in vulnerable situations that make sharing with others difficult. Particular groups are poorly provided for, such as young women seeking female-only accommodation.

Such problems have intensified since 2011 due to changes to the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) system of Housing Benefit (HB) in the PRS which have: a) reduced the amount of HB available to claimants; and b) amended the rules relating to the shared accommodation rate (SAR), extending it from the under-25s to under-35 year old claimants. The latter measure is particularly important as it is likely to both increase the demand for shared accommodation and confront individuals from an older age cohort with the often difficult prospect of sharing. At the same time, the PRS is increasingly being relied upon to address the housing needs of homeless people, as the social rented sector contracts, and the Localism Act 2011 gave local authorities (LAs) the right to discharge their homelessness duty into the private rented sector, close waiting lists and prioritise allocations to people in work.

The recent evaluation of the impact of the LHA reforms undertaken by CRESR for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) (Beatty *et al.*, 2014) highlighted the effects of changes to the SAR rules. The evaluation found:

- The HB caseload for single 25 to 34 year olds with no dependent children increased in the two years leading up to the change in the SAR age threshold (January 2012). Once the SAR age threshold was raised, the number of claimants in the 25-34 age group fell by 13 per cent between the end of 2011 and June/August 2013. The reduction was especially pronounced in the high rent areas of London where the 25-34 caseload fell by 39 per cent in central London and by around 25 per cent in outer London.
- In analysis undertaken by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), the average reductions for existing claimants in this age cohort who were affected by the SAR changes was £13.06 per week. This resulted in higher rental shortfalls for tenants of £8.25 per week. Contractual rents had been reduced by landlords, on average, by £4.80 per week, indicating that the incidence of the reduction in LHA was 63 per cent on tenants and 37 per cent on landlords.
- In wave two of the research project, a significantly higher proportion of landlords in inner London (29 per cent) compared to the sample as a whole (17 per cent) said they no longer let to the under-35s. The proportion of landlords in wave two who planned to expand the shared accommodation they let increased from five per cent in wave one to 13 per cent by wave two; in Inner London it increased from one per cent to 22 per cent.

There was considerable concern beforehand about the potential impact of the SAR changes on young people (Rugg *et al.*, 2011) and this has intensified since the measure was introduced (Unison, 2014; Work and Pensions Select Committee, 2014). There are

two main sources for these concerns. The first focuses on the lack of available shared accommodation in the PRS, especially for low-income groups (Rugg, 2008). The second concern focuses on the actual experience of sharing for the individual, and whether it is a suitable housing option, especially for vulnerable groups. It is not, however, possible to provide a robust review of evidence in terms of this latter concern, given the scarcity of qualitative data on the experiences of 'enforced' sharing in the PRS, specifically for low-income and vulnerable groups. This review covers what evidence is available on the SAR and the experience of sharing in the private rented sector. Overall, the review underlines the gaps in knowledge about this topic, as well as the need for further research to explore the appropriateness and consequences of the SAR for single claimants under-35 previously living in self-contained accommodation

2.2 Experiences of sharing in the private rented sector

Little research, to date, has focused on sharing amongst young people. Moreover, a significant part of this body of work is preoccupied with sharing either as an exercise of choice by relatively affluent single young people or 'young professionals' (Heath and Kenyon, 2001; Kenyon, 2000; Kenyon and Heath, 2001), or as a temporary stage in the housing careers of students (Kenyon, 1999). With a few exceptions (Kemp and Rugg, 1998; Rugg *et al.*, 2011; Kemp, 2011; Unison, 2014), relatively little research has focused on young sharers within the PRS who are on SRA. This is despite claims by some writers (Kenyon and Heath, 2001) that shared households are typically represented as products of economic constraint rather than choice.

This section focuses on the existing literature that analyses residents' views on their shared housing environment in terms of 'what works' and 'what doesn't work' - especially for a

range of groups requiring support (in the fields of mental health, learning disability, domestic violence, young people, single homeless, ex-offenders). The following themes were identified from the literature (based on both stakeholder perceptions and residents' experiences) as reasons why shared accommodation may not be appropriate for certain groups, given their different characteristics and vulnerabilities.

Reduced choice

Kemp (2011) emphasises the difference between the main groups of sharers (students/young professionals and low-income tenants) in terms of choice and constraint. Focusing on the routes into shared accommodation, Rugg *et al.* (2011) found that a lack of choice about where to live was a common thread that drew respondents together. Choice was limited because of the lack of shared accommodation – and geographical variations were evident in this, with more affordable areas of London attracting more competition – and this was narrowed down even further by *“the fact that any available property might present a shared arrangement that is simply not suitable”* (Rugg *et al.*, 2011: 11), and compounded by additional fees charged by many letting agencies.

The 'lived experience' of shared accommodation is likely to be starkly different for both students/young professionals and low-income sharers too: *“sharing a flat or house with friends or other young professionals is often very different from living with strangers in a dingy HMO [House of Multiple Occupation] at the bottom end of the private rented sector.”* (Kemp, 2011: 1025). This idea of sharing with strangers is mentioned by Rugg *et al.* (2011) who make a distinction between 'stranger shares' – sharing a property with people who were unknown to tenants at the start of the tenancy – and 'friendly shares' – where two or more individuals share accommodation who were already known to each other. As

long as it was a ‘friendly share’, many young people related that they preferred sharing to living alone as it satisfied desires for companionship, and a need to economise on their rent and living costs (Kemp and Rugg, 1998). Tenants were much more likely to experience difficulties with shared accommodation when occupying a ‘stranger share’. This finding was echoed in a study by Kemp and Rugg (1998): younger people preferred sharing flats or houses with friends as opposed to renting a room in a large house with strangers, and often experienced feelings of loneliness and insecurity when sharing with strangers. In both of these studies, tenants only opted for sharing or experienced it as positive when it was a *choice*. Vickery and Mole (2007) found that a tenant’s attitude is greatly influenced by whether they had a choice to live in shared accommodation or whether they were forced to live there because it was the only accommodation on offer. In terms of the SAR, it will be interesting to note if the top-down requirement to rent a room in a shared property will have a bearing on tenants’ feelings towards the accommodation.

Young people are similarly constrained in the choice of accommodation. A growing body of evidence points to the decreasing supply of suitable accommodation available to those on the SAR. This group is in competition with other, more affluent or (perceived as) favourable groups of sharers such as students and young professionals. A study by Clapham *et al.* (2014) of the housing pathways of young people found that some young people had tried to access affordable shared accommodation but reported that it was solely for student use. Research by Crisis (2014) found that less than 2 per cent of rooms in shared houses are available as well as affordable to those on the SAR, and an earlier study by Crisis (2012) found that out of the 4,360 rooms advertised on Gumtree and SpareRoom.com, only 13 per cent were priced within the SAR and just 66 (or 1.5 per cent) had landlords who were

willing to rent to people receiving benefits. As well as the lack of physical stock, landlords are also increasingly unwilling to let their accommodation to under 35s on the SAR (Unison, 2014). The LHA evaluation carried out by Beatty *et al.* (2014) found that, in certain areas, landlords were reluctant to rent shared accommodation due to the perceived management challenges it presented, were turning away single under 35 year olds due to experiences with previous tenants (who could not keep up with their rent payments), or were unable to rent out shared accommodation due to planning restrictions designed to limit the number of HMOs in the local authority area.

Health and poverty

As a whole, private tenants are just as likely to be in poverty as social housing tenants, and much more likely to be in poverty than owner-occupiers (Kemp, 2011). It is difficult to distinguish in Kemp’s (2011) research an accurate comparison with private renters in shared accommodation, due to the homogeneity of the socio-economic characteristics within that group, simultaneously occupied by students, young urban professionals and low-income tenants.

The relationship between health/well-being and housing is well established in the literature (Page, 2002; Evans *et al.*, 2003). The Department of Health (2011), for example, identified suitable housing as a key component for mental health, citing factors such as overcrowding, room size, and high-rise buildings as impacting on the mental health of residents. Although previous research has highlighted the relationship between HMOs and poor mental health – noting that HMO residents are eight times more likely than the general population to suffer from mental health problems (Shaw *et al.*, 1998) – there is a lack of robust research specifically on how living in shared accommodation as a result of the SAR impacts on tenants’ health and well-being. However, both HMOs and shared accommodation in the SAR category pose

similar challenges for residents. Barratt (2011) found that HMOs may pose a greater threat to the mental health of residents because of greater insecurity, less control, and poorer social networks, and it is likely that this link may also exist in other types of shared accommodation. In fact, research by Rugg *et al.* (2011) highlighted particular tenants' concerns about the environment of shared accommodation around noise and cleanliness of communal areas - factors that may have a detrimental effect on well-being.

Several studies report on the poor quality of the existing stock of shared accommodation in LHA markets, with landlords unlikely to see the financial benefits of investing more in shared accommodation for under-35s (Unison, 2014). The Work and Pensions Select Committee report (2014) includes a statement by St. Mungo's, which affirms that the majority of PRS accommodation available to those in the SAR group is near the 'lower limit' of minimal standards of accommodation. Physical standards are a concern in the PRS as a whole – with 37 per cent of properties classified as 'non-decent' (Crisis, 2014) – so those people on the SAR have an even more restricted choice (Unison, 2014). Of course, there are significant overlaps between the themes in these sections, and it is possible that each challenge might impact on a tenant's mental or physical health (for instance, feelings of insecurity or a lack of control over one's space may impact on health and well-being of residents).

Family relationships and parenting

Due to the nature of shared accommodation, a recurrent theme in the literature is the difficulty of maintaining relationships with family members and non-resident children. Unison (2014), for example, refers to the poor quality of shared accommodation and how the nature of sharing with strangers puts visiting children at risk. In addition, a lack of privacy in shared accommodation impinges on the time parents can spend with non-

resident children, and '*may prevent parents from building close intimate relationships with their children*' (Barratt *et al.*, 2012). The same study by Barratt *et al.* (2012) notes the restricted 'play space' for children in shared accommodation, which might feature as an additional source of stress for parents. One source (Rugg *et al.*, 2011) draws attention to the potential conflicts that might arise between parents in the same shared properties, who want their children to be able to stay overnight. Plans always had to work around other parents, and child contact often had to be rearranged, due to the unpredictability of other tenants in the accommodation. Other issues included the unsuitability of the environment of shared accommodation for children, with concerns around noise, cleanliness, and the unknown backgrounds of other tenants (Rugg *et al.*, 2011).

Unsuitability of shared accommodation for vulnerable groups

Serious concerns have been raised about the suitability of shared accommodation for vulnerable groups – and, as the report by Unison (2014) found, this has become more pressing recently, with higher numbers of vulnerable people accessing shared accommodation. Fitzpatrick told the Work and Pensions Select Committee (2014) that vulnerable younger people and women fleeing domestic violence might now be expected to share accommodation with older people with mental health or drug and alcohol problems, or be placed in an insecure environment where they feel unsafe. The report by Unison (2014) concurs: for young women who have experienced domestic violence, living among males who may be disposed to act violently or aggressively, might put women at further risk of harm and put further strain on their mental well-being.

Living in shared accommodation might also impact those with mental health problems – as noted in the 'Health and Poverty' section, poor quality environments and other tenants'

behaviour may exacerbate feelings of stress and anxiety (Crisis, 2014).

Ex-offender sharers, especially those in 'stranger shares' where criminal activity is taking place, are at risk of reoffending if placed in this kind of unstable environment (Rugg *et al.*, 2011). Likewise, tenants who are recovering from addictions are also placed at extra risk if they end up in an environment where drug-taking activity is common (Rugg *et al.*, 2011). A final question concerns the suitability of shared accommodation for formerly homeless people who may have a range of support needs. The possibility of feeling the need to escape from unsuitable shared accommodation contexts may lead to repeat episodes of homelessness. Indeed, this issue has been identified as an area that demands further exploration (Rugg *et al.*, 2011).

On-site management difficulties

Shared accommodation might either be arranged as a joint tenancy, where all tenants are liable to meet the rent payments, or as a number of separate tenancies where tenants pay separate rent payments but share the same facilities. Rugg *et al.* (2011) found that some tenants experienced difficulties in managing joint tenancies. Some tenants faced problems when other tenants (on the joint tenancy) did not pay their share of the rent. This problem also arose when relationships ended and the party who was left in the accommodation could not afford to cover the rent, given the change in circumstances. In the case study outlined in the Rugg *et al.* (2011) report, the respondent exited the tenancy, owing money to the landlord.

Inherent to the experience of sharing, and evidenced in several sources, are the conflicts that might arise between tenants and the difficulty of coping with low-level anti-social behaviour. This tension is inevitably heightened when it involves two strangers, who may find it more difficult to arrive at

a compromise, or where one party might even be afraid to broach the subject if they are unsure about the reaction of the other to criticism (Rugg *et al.*, 2011). Barratt *et al.* (2012: 41) summarise this issue succinctly in relation to HMOs, suggesting that shared accommodation offers significantly less control than other types of housing: '*HMOs by their definition, include some element of shared space, which instantly reduces the control that individual residents have over the space in which they live*'.

Examples of good practice, where residents felt that managing shared tenancies 'worked', were reported in properties where landlords took a more active role in 'generic property management', and dealt with problems promptly. One such property had a security officer and rules in place to disallow overnight visits from adults while allowing visits from non-resident children with the permission of the landlord, as well as rooms set aside for that purpose (Rugg *et al.*, 2011). Instances of good sharing practices from other studies cite the importance of 'fair cleaning rotas' (checked by staff, where possible), and the encouragement of resident involvement in management. This may include, for example, the opportunity to have input in the selection of new tenants or in setting criteria or requirements for the prospective tenant to meet (Vickery and Mole, 2007).

Insecurity

Poor quality housing, in particular, has been shown to lead to insecurity through problems with maintenance and other potential dangers from the accommodation, or simply having to live with other tenants' behaviour (Barratt *et al.*, 2012). Previous research has indicated that problems of crime – including anti-social behaviour, theft and violence – may arise in shared accommodation (Harvey and Houston, 2005; Rugg, 2008; Shelter Scotland, 2009). This will inevitably exacerbate tenants' feelings of unease and insecurity about where they are living. In Rugg *et al.*'s (2011) report, for example, tenants related concerns over

the strength of locks on rooms and on the front door to the building. This evidence is reaffirmed in the report by Unison (2014), which noted their concern over the poor quality of shared accommodation with broken locks, many keys in circulation, people wandering in and out of the property, and residents not knowing who they were sharing with.

Respondents in the Rugg *et al.* (2011) report were similarly anxious about the anonymity of other residents, especially given the high turnover of tenants in shared accommodation. In one case, a female respondent felt that her personal safety was directly at risk after having her door 'kicked in' during a rowdy party whilst living at a men-only house. Rugg *et al.* (2011) found drug-use to be prevalent in the shared accommodation visited as part of the research, and acts of minor theft (such as stealing food from the fridge) all added to tenants' feelings of insecurity in their shared properties. As mentioned earlier, these kinds of insecure environments are even more unsuited for particular groups: those with non-resident children; those with mental and physical health problems, past dependency or offending problems; and for people escaping domestic violence.

2.3 Summary

This analysis of the available evidence indicates that experiences of sharing differ markedly according to the group in question. It can be a starkly different experience for students, young professionals, low-income tenants and those from more vulnerable groups. This review has primarily highlighted literature relating to the increased number of individuals under the age of 35 *forced* to share accommodation under the Shared Accommodation Rate. Private rented sector tenants are already at a disadvantage, given their greater likelihood of being financially insecure than social housing tenants and owner-occupiers, and their occupation of an increasingly crowded, competitive and

expensive property sector in most parts of the country. Evidence suggests that access to the private rented sector for those claiming the SAR is still more restricted, by the insufficient amount of suitable, or in some cases any, shared housing available at an affordable cost.

Within the SAR group itself, a growing body of evidence points to the unsuitability of shared accommodation – in its *current* state – for vulnerable and other groups (such as parents with non-resident children) who are not exempt from the rate. Some have suggested that the exemptions should be extended (Unison, 2014). Although this review has unearthed more challenges than benefits in terms of sharing accommodation under the SAR, in some cases sharing can be a viable housing solution. Indeed, some evidence paints shared living environments in a more positive light if managed in the correct way, especially if it takes full account of tenants' needs and devolves some of the decision-making and micro-managing processes to the tenants themselves.

Research has, however, only skimmed the surface of examining the diverse experiences of sharing accommodation, especially when this is the result of constraint rather than choice. More work remains to be done on the availability and suitability of shared accommodation and the actual experiences of living in these circumstances for tenants from a range of mixed-needs groups.

3. Administering the Sharing Solutions Programme

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the way in which Crisis has administered the Sharing Solutions programme. As stated previously, Sharing Solutions was funded by a grant from DCLG which was administered by Crisis. Of the £800,000 grant, £720,000 was provided for eight pilot schemes (£90,000 each) and £80,000 was retained by Crisis. This included staffing, project support, best practice materials and event organisation. The full programme ran for 18 months between October 2013 and March 2015 with schemes funded and operational for 15 months.

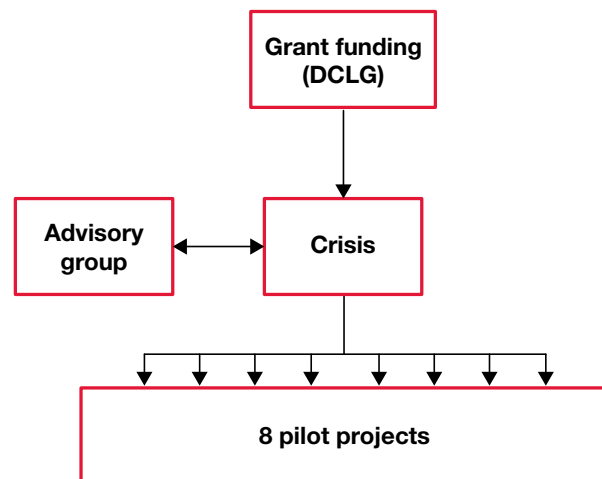
Crisis established an Advisory Group to oversee the project. Members came from a range of different organisations including DCLG, Homeless Link, National Practitioner Support Service (NPSS), Greater London Authority (GLA), St Basils, and South London YMCA. The Advisory Group was initially tasked with tendering the project and deciding which projects to award funding to. Application was restricted to projects that Crisis had worked with previously under its Private Rented Sector Access Development programme. The Advisory Group has been responsible since then for monitoring the project and offering advice and support to Crisis officers.

A dedicated Sharing Solutions Officer was appointed by Crisis to deliver the programme. This role has involved monitoring the performance of the eight pilot projects, providing them with advice and support, organising conferences, disseminating good practice and (latterly) producing a good practice toolkit.

3.2 The programme model

This section will spotlight the effectiveness of the programme delivery model. Figure 3.1 provides a simplistic overview of the programme delivery mechanism - one which gives Crisis an intermediary role. This would be in contrast to a programme model in which the grant funder (DCLG in this case) would fund pilot projects directly.

Figure 3.1: The Sharing Solutions programme Delivery Mechanism



There is strong evidence that this model provides significant benefits. This stems from:

- Crisis' expertise in the private rented sector
- The role of the Advisory Group
- The selection of pilot schemes
- A dedicated Sharing Solutions Officer

3.3 Crisis' expertise in the private rented sector

Since the mid-1990s, Crisis has been involved in debate and practice towards improving access to, and sustainment of, PRS tenancies for single people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless (Rugg, 2014). In 2010, Crisis received funding from DCLG for its Private Rented Sector Access Development programme (see Rugg, 2014) which provided both funding and support to PRS access schemes throughout England, which help homeless or vulnerably housed single people to access and sustain private rented accommodation. By this initiative, Crisis has successfully developed expertise in the field and important contacts and linkages with other organisations working to improve access and conditions in the PRS (Pleace and Bretherton, 2014). Crisis, therefore, was very well positioned to deliver a pilot programme to promote sharing accommodation for low income groups. Indeed, Crisis used its knowledge and expertise to identify that PRS access projects were struggling to assist under-35 year old single people who were only eligible for the SAR rate of LHA, and that this issue required a dedicated approach and an improvement in knowledge. It worked with DCLG to secure grant funding for the Sharing Solutions programme.

Interviews with Crisis staff and members of the Advisory Group underlined Crisis' position at the forefront of efforts to improve conditions in the private rented sector and make it more suitable as a route away from homelessness. Several respondents commented that Crisis had gained a significant amount of knowledge and expertise about the PRS via previous grant funded programmes. This had been constructed on a core team of Crisis staff members working specifically with private sector housing issues.

Furthermore, Advisory Group members and Crisis staff pointed out the importance attached to Crisis' ability to disseminate

information widely. They recognised that Crisis had established a strong network of contacts with a broad range of organisations - local authorities, government departments, other charities and support organisations - and had a good reputation for using these linkages to both disseminate good practice and campaign/lobby for improvements.

Advisory Group members and officers from the pilot schemes also highlighted the important linkages that Crisis has established with clients through its practice-based work. The organisation, it was reported, understands the needs of its client base and has developed effective ways of supporting them directly (such as through its Skylight projects).

Respondents also discussed Crisis' increasing engagement with private sector landlords via its practice-based work, its dissemination of good practice and its engagement with landlord forums.

3.4 The role of the Advisory Group

Interviews with Advisory Group members, Crisis staff and DCLG staff provided evidence about the effectiveness of the Advisory Group. All respondents believed that that group had been successful, and that it represented a useful model. Crisis staff reported that the group provided useful input at all stages of the project, responding to requests for assistance both at regular meetings and more sporadically, via email exchanges.

One of the key tasks that the Advisory Group undertook was commissioning the pilot programmes. The group assessed the shortlisted bids and decided on the eight that should receive funding. This was done against a number of criteria, including:

- Evidence that the scheme was innovative;
- Diversity of housing market condition; and,

- The ability to deliver.

Crisis had previously made the decision to only invite applications from organisations that had been funded by Crisis in the past. The objective of this was to determine that applicant organisations were sufficiently established in their local areas and know to be capable of delivering outcomes. It was also believed to be important that they had a ready-made relationship with Crisis, all of which provided greater opportunity to ‘hit the ground running’.

This decision appears to have been an asset to the programme for a number of reasons:

- It ensured that the pilots were run by experienced organisations with a track record of successful delivery and engagement with Crisis; and,
- It ensured that ‘Sharing Solutions’ schemes were located within an organisational structure that provided other ways of supporting its clients.

For example, CAB WHABAC reported that Sharing Solutions worked well within their overall structure:

“It could be that someone can’t sustain a tenancy in one property, so we move them to another one. ... if there are issues [with tenants], it’s not ‘we can’t deal with that’, it’s ‘how can we deal with that’.”

Similarly, for Nomad – who had previously received grant support to further establish their Smart Renting service – Sharing Solutions provided an opportunity to build upon previous success. Nomad reported that they had a core group of clients who they felt ill equipped and resourced to help (they were not priority need on the affordable housing register). Their needs were also ‘too high’ to move them straight into the PRS as they would struggle to sustain a tenancy. Sharing Solutions, therefore, provided funding to

operate training flats and intensive support in partnership with a local housing association.

One other important benefit of having an independent Advisory Group was the ability to appoint Crisis Housing Coach Service as a pilot scheme and remain fair and impartial. Respondents from Crisis, DCLG and Advisory Group members believed that this scheme’s application had been treated in the same manner, and against the same criteria as other proposals.

3.5 A dedicated Sharing Solutions Officer

Unanimously, respondents from the eight pilot schemes valued the appointment of a dedicated Sharing Solutions Officer. The officer was responsible for the day-to-day running of the project and offering support and advice to pilot schemes.

“[Name] always got new things that we can try that might help. The support is invaluable.”

“You don’t feel like it’s just ‘here’s your money, hit your targets’. ‘It’s good in this pilot that it isn’t your.... your targets are important but they aren’t the ‘be all and end all’ and that’s been quite clear from the beginning.”

All projects reported that they had regular contact with the Sharing Solutions Officer throughout the span of the programme. This included regular reviews, discussion of individual clients/cases, progress made, and challenges encountered.

This intensive supervision created the opportunity for flexibility and rapid decision-making for schemes, and that was critical to ‘getting the most out of an 18 month pilot’. For example, Nomad wanted to use licenses rather than Assured Shorthold Tenancies (ASTs) in their training flats. They were able to discuss this with the Sharing Solutions Officer and agree to it in a short period of time, and so not

unnecessarily delay delivery.

“Crisis has been invaluable... I can phone her up for guidance and say ‘we’ve got this issue with our scheme. Do you know of any other similar schemes that have had this issue?’ And she will point me in the right direction... she will do the digging for me and find out.”

Another key strength of Crisis’ involvement, and one routed in the presence of a dedicated Sharing Solutions Officer was the opportunity to share knowledge and experience amongst the eight pilot schemes. For example, Elmbridge Rentstart reported that being part of a ‘sharing solutions network’ was an opportunity to learn from other projects:

“That’s how you get to learn things isn’t it, by listening to different projects and things that have gone well, that they found difficult... so then really you can learn from things that other people have learnt from experience.”

Beyond this individual support, Crisis has also organised two well-attended national events (October 2014) and a number of other meetings and seminars/webinars. Both Advisory Group members and pilot scheme managers reported that these were very useful:

“Sharing Solutions has started a national conversation about sharing as a solution to poverty and homelessness. Even if local authorities are saying that they don’t have the resources, at least they’re considering it as an option.” (Advisory Group member)

“[Attending a London meeting of Sharing Solution project managers] was interesting finding out about the other projects as well... I’ve never had any involvement with Crisis or going down to the meetings before. I’d just assumed that the other projects were exactly the same...and

actually they weren’t of course, they were quite different...so I found it interesting listening about those other projects.” (Pilot scheme manager)

3.6 Overall delivery achievements

This section highlights the overall headline outcomes achieved by the Sharing Solutions programme, based on monitoring data supplied by Crisis. While it is important to remember that the main thrust of the programme was to explore new, untried and innovative measures, it is worth providing a context of the scope and reach of the programme.

Up to January 2015, the programme provided accommodation to 172 clients (see Table 3.1). Of these, 118 were men (69%) and 54 were women (31%). Although this falls short of the target set at the start of the programme (220 clients housed), there were two months remaining at the time of census, and most projects believed that they would be closer to the targets by the end of March 2015. The programme was therefore on course to meet its original targets for clients housed.

Table 3.1: Clients provided with accommodation by Sharing Solutions (by January 2015)

Organisation name	Number of clients housed	Target
CAB WHABAC	22	30
The Crisis Housing Coach Service	24	30
Elmbridge Rentstart	25	30
Foundation	22	25
Nomad	27	25
Oasis Aquila Housing	11	25
PATH	24	30
Shelter Great Yarmouth	17	25
Total	172	220

The programme has also assisted

clients from a range of previous housing circumstances. As Table 3.2 shows, 60 clients moved from other accommodation; in 90 cases Sharing Solutions provided accommodation as prevention against homelessness; and 22 clients had been rough sleepers immediately prior to being housed via the programme. This provides some evidence that sharing can be a viable option for clients with varying support needs. This claim will be reinforced in later chapters.

Table 3.3 shows the number of clients on the programme who were pre-matched (they came to the project as a group), matched by the scheme, or entered into sharing accommodation without being matched.

Table 3.2: Clients previous housing situation prior to sharing solutions intervention (by January 2015)

Client group	Clients
Move on	60
Prevention	90
Rough Sleepers	22
Total	172

Table 3.3: Clients tenancy matching by type

Match status	Clients
Matched	48
Unmatched	80
Pre-matched	44
Total	172

Of the 172 tenancies created, 44 had ended by January 2015 (26%). 25 of these were adjudged in the monitoring data to be for 'positive reasons'; and 19 for 'negative reasons'. Where tenancies had ended in a positive manner these were for reasons of:

- Returning to live with a family member;
- Moving to take up employment elsewhere; and,
- The client found and funded their own suitable accommodation.

Where tenancies had ended for a negative reason, these were mainly due to:

- A breakdown in the relationship with the landlord;
- The property was unsuitable for the needs of the client;
- A breakdown in the relationship with other sharers;
- A move to a custodial sentence; or,
- Abandonment of the tenancy.

In cases of abandonment, pilot scheme managers were not fully aware of why this was in every case. But some clients were believed to have returned to rough sleeping, sofa surfing or some other inadequate accommodation.

The programme, by its varied nature, had

used different kinds of tenancy agreement (see Table 3.4). The most common was an AST, held by 64 per cent of clients, and the majority of these were single ASTs as opposed to joint ASTs. License agreements were used by several of the schemes piloting training flats. Schemes that promoted lodgings established bespoke lodging agreements.

Table 3.4: Clients tenancy agreement by type (by January 2015)

Share type	Clients
Single AST	92
Joint AST	18
License agreement	17
Lodging agreement	45
Total	172

Sharing has taken different forms across the programme too. Table 3.5 shows the different types of arrangement that have been adopted.

Table 3.5: Types of shared accommodation

Accommodation Type	Clients
Two bed share	25
More than two bed share	52
Training flat	28
Lodgings	17
Licensed HMO	50
Total	172

Some form of training has been a key aspect of the programme. Of the 172 clients supported by Sharing Solutions, 109 (or 63%) had completed a training course prior to taking

up their tenancy, or during their tenancy. As we will go on to report in subsequent sections, tenancy training had played a key role in sustaining shared tenancies.

The eight pilot schemes used the *Making it Count* tool (Rugg and Pleace, 2013), a resource developed for Crisis by the University of York to help demonstrate the value of Private Rented Access Schemes.¹ The tool uses a set of indicators and costing assumptions to determine the cost savings attributable to a scheme that offsets costs associated with homelessness, poor health and criminal justice. Table 3.6 shows headline results for 'housing' and 'non-housing' gross savings for a three month period. Across the programme, there was a total gross cost saving per quarter of £625,368. Sharing Solutions funding for a three month period equates to £120,000. Therefore, the Making it Count tool suggests that the Sharing Solutions programme provided a net saving of over half a million pounds between October and December 2014.² Or put another way, for every £1 of grant funding, £5.21 of savings was generated.

The savings achieved differed across pilot schemes but this is, of course, reflective of how each scheme worked differently, had distinct foci and operated in contrasting housing markets. Cost savings are, therefore, not directly comparable between the pilot schemes.

¹ The Making it Count tool is available for free at www.crisis.org.uk/crisis-private-renting

² Crisis asked schemes to complete the Making it Count Tool for two quarters: April – June 2014 and October – December 2014.

Table 3.6: *Making it Count*: headline data, October to December 2014

	Gross cost saving per quarter: Housing	Gross saving per quarter: Non-housing	Total gross cost savings per quarter
Elmbridge Rentstart	£50,853	£21,979	£72,832
Crisis Housing Coach Service	£28,578	£6,802	£35,380
CAB WHABAC	£76,746	£21,600	£98,346
Oasis Aquila Housing	£30,688	£3,744	£34,432
Nomad	£106,918	£59,885	£166,803
PATH	£100,529	£31,339	£131,868
Shelter Great Yarmouth	£44,506	£3,744	£48,250
Foundation	£33,713	£3,744	£37,457
Total	£472,531	£149,093	£625,368

3.7 Summary

This chapter has demonstrated that the Sharing Solutions programme has been delivered and managed effectively by Crisis. The programme model - ostensibly seeking an experienced intermediary - to manage the project, had significant benefits for the manner in which £800,000 of public funds was spent. Later chapters will spotlight what has been achieved in terms of outcomes. Crisis was successful as an intermediary fund holder (and significantly contributed to the success of the programme) in the following ways:

- Its broad knowledge of the private rented sector;
- Its linkages with a range of stakeholders, particularly its close association with PRS access projects throughout the country;
- The ability to employ a dedicated and experienced Sharing Solutions Officer, supported by an experienced and knowledgeable team; and,
- Successful management of its triumvirate role as fund holder (commissioner), campaigner and service provider.

Overall, the programme was on course to meet its original targets for clients housed. It is worth bearing in mind that the ability to meet these targets is not the sole criterion by any means for judging the success of the programme. Sharing Solutions is, above all, a learning programme. While the timescale of the pilot projects was not long enough to provide an opportunity to assess longer-term impacts of the programme (such as long-term tenancy sustainability, for instance), the process of learning has been robust and grounded, simply because the pilot projects have managed to house (or re-house) a significant number of clients.

By using the *Making it Count* tool, the Sharing Solutions programme demonstrates significant savings for public services. For every £1 of grant funding, savings of £5.21 were accrued in Quarter 3 of the programme, by taking people out of homelessness.

4. Evaluating Sharing Solutions models

4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the different ‘sharing solutions models’ which the Sharing Solutions programme set out to explore. As Chapter 3 demonstrated, one of the strengths of the programme was that it was able to test a variety of different models. To summarise, the models were:

- Training tenancies;
- Lodgings;
- Accommodating single parents with non-resident children;
- Accessing void accommodation;
- Lead tenants; and,
- Peer mentors.

The following sections take each of these models in turn, providing an overview of the model, key findings from the contributory pilot schemes and a summary of each model’s overall effectiveness.

4.2 Training tenancies

Overview

Training tenancies were designed as a short-term housing where clients could develop the skills and experience necessary for a) sustaining a tenancy and b) sharing accommodation with others. This was often a good option for clients who had little or no experience of sharing and managing their own tenancy previously. It provided an opportunity for clients to receive pre-tenancy training, gain a better understanding of living with others and develop relationships, organise household tasks (such as a cleaning rota) and bill payments, and develop a tenant/landlord relationship.

Three of the schemes piloted the use of training tenancies:

- **Nomad Opening Doors** partnered with South Yorkshire Housing Association (SYHA) to provide five two-bed properties for use as training tenancies. Clients were provided with shared accommodation for a maximum of six months on a license agreement, and received tenancy training and intensive support.
- **Elmbridge Rentstart** partnered with a local charity (Walton Charity) to provide training tenancies for their clients. The properties were shared by four people. Tenants signed up to a license agreement for the first month of their tenancy, and then moved onto an AST. Tenants were supported throughout their tenancy and attended training courses.
- **Oasis Aquila Housing** initially started to pilot the training tenancies model, utilising properties that they had procured by using Empty Homes funding from DCLG. They purchased and refurbished several properties and designated them as training tenancies specifically for their sharing solutions pilot scheme. Tenants were given a three month AST, provided with training courses and intensive tenancy support. However, the project struggled to recruit sharers to the project due to several external factors (lack of sharing culture and the availability of affordable self-contained accommodation). The project, therefore, adapted to concentrate on sustaining shared tenancies and piloting the Lead Tenant model.

Findings

Types of tenancy agreements

Because training tenancies were intended to offer clients fixed term accommodation to meet a specific purpose, there was debate between the pilot schemes and Crisis around the types of tenancy agreement to use. There was a balance to be struck between providing the flexibility to manage a shared

property and offering clients' adequate security of tenure.

Nomad elected to use a protected license agreement in its partnership with SYHA, on the basis that it offered greater flexibility where sharers were struggling to settle into a property or causing disruption for other sharers. The project manager explained their rationale for the approach:

"I absolutely agree that we should be giving the strongest security of tenure that we can, but we also have to balance that with the safety of the other person that lives in the property. There have been instances where issues around violence and aggression have come to light and we need to be able to keep that other person living there as safe as possible and if a situation presented itself."

By contrast, Oasis Aquila initially used a three month AST for their training tenancies, and believed that this offered them enough protections should they need to seek possession. Elmbridge Rentstart adopted a hybrid of the two: clients signed up to a one month license agreement initially and then transferred to an AST for the remainder of the six month term. The project manager explained why this model worked well for them:

"We think that any serious problems that arise with a tenancy usually show themselves in the first month, so the license gives us some flexibility."

This project manager also felt that a license offered some protection to the client also:

"If a tenancy ends and the client goes to the local authority, they'll say 'go back to your AST tenancy', or 'you're intentionally homeless'. With the license, we can get round this one."

In all of the schemes, whether tenants were

on a license or an AST did not appear to make a great deal of difference. In part, the issue of 'security of tenure' was addressed by offering clients intensive support. Regardless of the type of agreement, this gave tenants the best chance of succeeding in shared accommodation. From the perspective of tenants, those who were interviewed did not consider the type of tenancy agreement to be important. Rather, they considered the trust established with the PRS project (and more specifically with their support worker) to be a far more important determinant of 'security of tenure'.

Matching

Pilot schemes identified that appropriate matches were a critical element to ensuring that tenants' experiences were positive whilst in a training tenancy. All the projects reported that beginning with an empty house and designing a group of sharers for it was the most successful strategy they had adopted. Whereas, having to fill a vacant room could be more difficult. This was compounded for some projects (Elmbridge Rentstart and Nomad) by the requirement to quickly accommodate clients in vulnerable housing situations.

However, it was difficult to pinpoint exactly what criteria were used for matching. Stakeholders in the pilot schemes often reported that getting a good match was as much to do with their instincts rather than anything a formative assessment could determine. Tenants interviewed for the evaluation also suggested what had been important in terms of matching, and a few guiding principles did emerge:

- Giving tenants some choice or involvement in the process was found to be important
- An opportunity to meet and socialise with other prospective tenants (prior to the tenancy starting) was regarded as important by tenants

- Tenants with different lifestyles often made good sharers – for example, working different shifts, eating and socialising at different times often gave greater privacy in a dwelling
- Schemes often benefitted from clients approaching them with a sharer in mind, and reported that these arrangements usually worked out well

Another related point that the three pilot projects considered was how many people should share together in a training tenancy scenario. For Nomad, two people sharing was considered to be a useful model, and their tenants reported that they had made a ‘leap’ to share with one person, but to share with more would have been ‘too daunting’. However, in Nomad’s case, a two-person share was financially viable. For Elmbridge Rentstart this was not the case; higher rental levels (in comparison to the local LHA rate) meant that sharing was only viable where four or five clients could share together. This, of course, made matching more complex but was necessary if the training tenancy approach was to be pursued.

Intensive tenancy support

The pilot schemes reported training tenancies were successful where intensive tenancy support was provided for clients, and when clients engaged positively with their support worker. Support workers often visited the property several times a week and supported the clients in a variety of ways – from practical tenancy and financial matters to more personal matters relating to emotional health and wellbeing.

It was apparent from discussions with project workers that these high levels of support were of critical importance to sustaining training tenancies. Support workers reported that they assisted clients in a variety of ways:

“Those with absolutely no experience of handling a flat on their own need help with

just about everything in the early days [of a tenancy]. And that goes for sharing too. Something as mundane as not tidying up in the kitchen can really impact on a shared house.”

Many of the tenants in training tenancies indicated that they required a lot of support and that support was beneficial to them. One woman, for example, reported that she always called the support worker when ‘scary looking envelopes turned up in the post’, but went on to say that she now opens all the post and only contacts the worker if she is in doubt about what to do.

Training

The pilot projects reported that linking training tenancies with good quality training courses was essential. This could be provided ‘in-house’ by the pilot schemes or in partnership with others. Oasis Aquila Housing, for example, partnered with Crisis Skylight to deliver Renting Ready pre-tenancy training. In some cases, tenants were reluctant to take training courses. Elmbridge Rentstart encountered resistance to attending its training courses:

“When clients reach us, they can be at a low ebb. The only thing they’re interested in is a roof over their heads. But we make training compulsory, and we’re quite clever with it. Some is done very informally with support workers rather than fixed courses on a fixed date. We’re taking them on a journey.”

Feedback from tenants who had taken courses was, on the whole very positive, particularly for those who were holding a tenancy for the first time and had no experience of sharing. Those who were more negative, had often had their own tenancies previously and felt that the courses had not improved their knowledge.

Moving on

Pilot schemes reported that most clients

needed some assistance moving on from a training tenancy. One significant advantage for the pilot schemes was the ability to help clients through other projects within their PRS access scheme. Elmbridge Rentstart, for example, could use its rent deposit scheme and its links with the PRS to find clients more permanent accommodation.

However, clients reported the difficulties they foresaw in moving from their training tenancy. Many reported that they were feeling settled and comfortable, and the requirement to move on was daunting. People whose previous housing situations were complex, often regarded a six month tenancy as a long period of time – a more permanent housing solution than they had previously experienced. Several tenants from the Nomad and Elmbridge Rentstart pilot schemes were uncertain what and where their next housing situation would be.

Two of the pilots were able to respond to the issue of tenants becoming settled. Oasis Aquila Housing restructured their delivery model after it became apparent that demand for training tenancies was low. This provided the opportunity to allow their successful ‘training’ sharers to continue on a longer term basis. As one of their tenants commented: *“this is my home now, [I] wouldn’t want to leave it”*. Elmbridge Rentstart responded in a flexible manner when one group of training tenants bonded well and expressed a desire to remain sharing together. The project simply re-assigned the house as a regular shared PRS house and assigned a separate shared house for new training tenancies.

Summary

Pilot schemes demonstrated that training tenancies are a useful way of introducing tenants to sharing and managing a tenancy in a safe way. Intensive tenancy support, training and thoughtful matching supports tenants and equips them better for the future. Both Nomad and Elmbridge Rentstart are seeking to extend their use of training tenancies beyond the project. Although Oasis

Aquila no longer provide training tenancies, this was related to the nature of the local housing market which made tenants less reliant on sharing, rather than a flaw in the model. There are a number of factors which stand out as contributing to the success of training tenancies:

1. The type of tenancy agreement used was believed to be important to allow flexibility in training tenancies. For two projects this meant using a license rather than an AST. While this might in theory limit a client’s security of tenure, in practice it was not a major concern for the projects nor for tenants.
2. Training tenancies are successful when linked to training courses. While it can be difficult to get clients to attend them, there is evidence that they produce positive outcomes.
3. Sustainment of tenancies requires intensive support, particularly for clients who have never held a tenancy or lived in shared accommodation.
4. Careful matching of clients is critical to ensuring that they have a positive experience of sharing. This was important for all the pilot schemes, but it was particularly critical for training tenancies to make sharing a ‘positive’ experience.
5. Smaller numbers of sharers in training flats makes sharing easier for clients to consider, but market conditions dictate how a shared house ‘stacks up’ financially.
6. It is important to ensure that clients have adequate support to move on from a training tenancy into more permanent accommodation. The best way to provide this is for training tenancy schemes to be located within PRS Access Projects offering a range of housing services.

4.3 Lodgings

Overview

An arrangement whereby a tenant (the lodger) lives in the same property as their landlord (the 'host', as it has been referred to in the programme) has always been a recognised housing option, and is still important for particular groups seeking informal and (often) short term accommodation. The Sharing Solutions programme has sought to pilot this approach, and a key driver for its inclusion was to test whether there were opportunities to rent 'spare' bedrooms from people in social housing affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy (RSRS).

Two of the schemes were specifically designed to pilot the use of lodgings:

- PATH, based in Plymouth, originally intended to promote lodgings with households in social housing affected by the RSRS. However, at the time, interest from such households was low, mainly because most were having their housing benefit reduction covered by discretionary housing payments (DHP). PATH, therefore, switched the emphasis of the project towards owner occupiers who were interested in renting a room.
- Foundation, based in Ryedale, set out to establish a lodgings scheme, mainly by targeting social housing tenants affected by the bedroom tax. However, it encountered difficulties in doing so for several reasons. Developing a working relationship with a local housing association was difficult and there was a lack of interest from potential hosts. As a result, the scheme re-focussed its delivery toward promoting sharing more generally. Nevertheless, its experiences have contributed some interesting insights into the model.

Findings

Both pilot schemes found it difficult to establish lodging schemes in their areas as they had originally intended. One of the key

reasons reported was that those affected by RSRS had often received Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) to cover their shortfall, and therefore, less people were interested in the scheme. That DHP would be used so extensively in some areas to alleviate RSRS problems would have been difficult to predict when the Sharing Solutions programme was formulated.

Nevertheless, PATH did have some interest from social housing tenants. They reported that interest in their scheme had been around half from social tenants and half from homeowners. Those that went on to provide lodgings were mainly home owners interested in renting rooms for financial or more altruistic reasons. The fact that there has been interest from the social housing tenants might suggest that if levels of DHP support were to fall, recruiting them to a lodgings scheme may become more viable.

For Foundation, gaining the support of a local housing association was challenging. One housing association was originally keen to be involved, but withdrew their interest. However, Foundation formed a useful relationship with the local authority, which helped to advertise and promote the initiative, although specifically targeting households affected by the RSRS was difficult. The project manager reported that for most of these households that had been approached, lodging was considered as a 'step too far' to take a 'stranger into [our] house'.

The projects also reported that 'selling' the idea of lodging to their clients was a challenge and that they encountered considerable reluctance to the idea. Both projects suggested that a 'lack of sharing culture' locally amongst the target group made it difficult to sell the idea of lodgings. In Ryedale, there was an established culture of lodging, but this was specific to the area's horse racing industry to accommodate young jockeys and stable hands.

Despite these difficulties of supply and demand, headway was made and around 20 lodgings were created by the two projects, and several of these were with people affected by the RSRS. The ‘hosts’ interviewed for the evaluation identified a number of factors that were important to convincing them to join a lodgings scheme:

- The effect of the RSRS was putting a strain on the household budget and there were no opportunities to ‘downsize’. Lodging, therefore, offered a financial incentive
- Having direct support from the PRS Access Project to set up a lodging agreement, support the lodger and arrange and supervise viewings was critical, particularly for those who had never taken a lodger previously. One host in PATH’s scheme commented: *“it’s hard to know what the rules are”*
- Ensuring that the lodgings agreement was adequate to terminate the arrangement quickly if needed

The pilot schemes also had some successes in convincing clients to become lodgers. Two lodgers were interviewed for the evaluation, and both had positive experiences of lodging. The main incentives were cost and opportunity, particularly in Plymouth, where one tenant reported that there was very little else he could afford in the area on the SAR without having to ‘top up’ the rent from his other benefits. For both, they saw lodging as a relatively short-term solution. Both accepted that the lodging agreement did not give them a great deal of protection, but accepted this was the nature of being a lodger. Tenants also described other factors that made their experience a positive one:

- One tenant did not view it as a lodging, but

as a share with someone else

- Additional support from the project around ‘life-skills’, such as budgeting and sharing accommodation was important for tenants

Summary

It was clear that establishing lodging schemes was challenging for both projects. However, there was some success, and several factors were identified as important for a lodging scheme to operate successfully:

- Partnerships with social housing providers and local authorities were critical for promoting the scheme, and particularly for targeting those affected by the RSRS
- Providing support for the lodger *and* the host was reported to be very important
- Ensuring that the lodging agreement were fair to both parties was a key role for the pilot schemes. While lodgings do not offer as much security of tenure as an AST might, lodgings were most successful where both parties understood what they were agreeing to
- For hosts, it was important to fully understand the financial connotations:
 - > Owner occupiers may be eligible for the Rent-a-Room Scheme³ which would allow them to receive rental income tax-free up to a certain amount.
 - > Hosts’ claiming benefits themselves (such as being subject to the RSRS); need to consider how taking in a lodger would affect their claim. The projects reported that where a host affected by the RSRS takes a lodger they are no longer deemed to have a spare room so will be exempted from RSRS, and they can keep £20 per week in rent before

their benefits are affected. The rules may be different under Universal Credit, and this requires monitoring.

Lodgings, as a model for increasing shared accommodation for single people struggling to access housing, certainly has its place. For some clients (and some hosts) it proved to be a positive experience. The particular skills that PRS Access Schemes have for supporting lodgers and hosts could play a key role in expanding a local network of lodgings. Schemes that aim to link up with social housing tenants may have limited impact, unless they can forge partnerships with willing social housing organisations. The evidence from Sharing Solutions is that owner occupiers are often better placed, and more willing, to take a lodger. While it was apparent from the pilot schemes that establishing lodgings required a significant investment of time and effort, it would be worthwhile where there was a need for shorter-term, less secure, but affordable accommodation.

4.4 Sharing solutions for single parents with non-resident children

Overview

From its associations with PRS access schemes, Crisis identified that single parents (mainly men) with non-resident children were struggling to access affordable shared accommodation. Parents in such situations often have their children to visit them during the day and sleep overnight. When the LHA rules were adjusted to limit single people under 35 to the SAR, there was concern that this would increase the number of parents with non-dependent children seeking shared accommodation; and that accommodation they could afford would be unsuitable to support occasional family contact.

Two pilot schemes undertook work to improve shared accommodation for single parents whose children did not live with them full time:

- CAB WHABAC, in Worcester, ran a Fathers

Project, aimed at finding successful sharing solutions for a group it was seeing more of and had no ready housing solutions for. The project had one five-bed house leased from a local charity (Headway). All prospective tenants went through police checks before signing the tenancy. The project provided intensive support for tenants - a support officer visited the property once a week.

- Shelter, in Great Yarmouth, originally planned to pilot a service to house young fathers who were struggling to find suitable accommodation. However, only a small number of young fathers approached the project for help, and amongst those there was a very strong reticence to share. However, the project was able to provide useful information about the challenges faced when implementing this particular model.

Findings

The key challenge facing the pilot schemes was securing some appropriate accommodation. In the case of CAB WHABAC, the project secured one five-bed house with five bedrooms, four of which were fathers' own rooms, and the fifth bedroom had bunk beds, a small annex room with a single bed and its own bathroom. This allowed a father to have some self-contained space during a visit from his children. The property was leased from a local charity (Headway) and the rent was within the SAR, for four people sharing. The pilot scheme described this as an ideal set up for this type of use, but one that was unusual, and generally hard to come by.

Shelter's pilot scheme also found it challenging to identify sufficient demand for such sharing arrangements. Although the pilot scheme set out to concentrate on issues that young fathers face around sharing, young fathers did not make up a large proportion of their client group, and sharing proved 'difficult to sell':

“The majority of people we’ve ended up having... there weren’t as many young dads. There are a proportion of young dads we interviewed who we found it very difficult to sell the concept of sharing to...I think a lot of the young dads we’ve spoken to have kind of expected when the relationship broke down that they may have more housing rights as regards the Local Authority and Housing Act than they actually did as being the non-resident parent. We found a lot of people wouldn’t consider shared accommodation in HMOs - like renting a room and sharing a kitchen and bathroom - whereas one or two dads embraced the idea provided the accommodation was suitable and safe, a lot of dads wouldn’t consider the idea.”

However, young fathers from the CAB WHABAC pilot reported positive outcomes. Most importantly, it allowed them to retain contact with their children, but there was also evidence that the experience of sharing had been positive. One tenant reported that he had initially been wary about sharing with other young fathers, but it had turned out to be better than expected, and importantly, affordable at the SAR rate. The project worker commented on their shared house:

“Just like a family home really. Visiting children call the spare bedroom ‘my room’ ... they don’t see it as they’re sharing it with other children on different days’... ‘To see the people that have gone in there continue to have a relationship with their kids... that’s been really good’.”

CAB WHABAC’s pilot scheme clearly benefited from finding a suitable property, but it identified other challenges that had to be overcome to make it successful:

- They had difficulty setting up enhanced police checks to begin with. Initially, these took longer than expected and the property remained empty for two months as a result. The original plan had been to use a Disclosure and Barring Service

(DBS) check but this was not practicable for people not directly employed by the scheme. Instead, the project reached an agreement with the police to run a criminal record check on prospective tenants. The project reported that this provided them with reassurance, and one tenant reported that the checks were important for him and for his ex-partner’s peace of mind.

- Tenants often required emotional support as they had been through recent relationship breakdowns. Tenants reported that being in settled and suitable accommodation had bolstered contact with their children and, sometimes, improved their relationships with their estranged partners.
- Several tenants were new to sharing and required support to enable them to live comfortably with others. The main areas that tenants required support with were updating HB claims, keeping on top of rent accounts and sorting out cleaning and household chore rotas.
- Initially, the scheme had planned to put together a rota to work out visiting times. However, tenants managed their own arrangements well, making use of a whiteboard to allocate time.
- There were a few instances where ‘parenting styles’ clashed between sharers. However, this was easily resolved by the tenants themselves. As a project worker commented, *“if I throw the question out there, they kind of answer it themselves, so I only had to raise a concern.”*

Summary

The success of this model hinged on the ability to find the right kind of accommodation. CAB WHABAC found a property that was already ideal in its form and function, and also was owned by a charity and offered at a reasonable rent. These circumstances will be difficult to replicate, and there is a case for PRS access schemes and landlords partnering to develop appropriate properties rather than seeking them out. However, CAB WHABAC's experience suggests that once this hurdle is overcome, sharing is a viable solution for this particular client group.

4.5 Accessing void student accommodation

Overview

One opportunity that the Sharing Solutions programme wished to capitalise on was changes to the student housing market in many university towns. Purpose-built student accommodation is impacting on the traditional student housing market. For instance, older terrace properties in Sheffield are no longer in such high demand. Some landlords have switched their lettings to other groups, while some are seeking to exit the market. In some areas, this has led to increased void rates.

Two pilot schemes trialled an initiative to increase the supply of shared accommodation by accessing former student accommodation - Nomad in Sheffield and CAB WHABAC in Worcester.

Findings

Both schemes reported that encouraging landlords to switch out of their core business (letting to students) and into lettings to tenants claiming housing benefit was far from straightforward. This chimes with knowledge and experience in the PRS that landlords tend to operate in tightly defined sub-markets (Crook and Kemp, 2011). CAB WHABAC had a dedicated landlord worker who worked with landlords to convince them that changing to the 'HB market' could be sustainable:

"We've had landlords come to us that have been student landlords and now they're not working with students anymore because the university has built a lot of their own accommodation, so what's happened is they've come to us. And their properties are generally quite good really. They tend to be fairly good landlords and experienced landlords. And we've got some really good rates as well for our leasing schemes."

Nomad in Sheffield utilised a successful partnership with the City's two universities to target void properties. The universities used their contacts with private landlords to promote Nomad and their sharing scheme. The benefit to the university was retaining a relationship with landlords by offering those with voids an alternative income stream.

A key incentive for landlords in Worcester was a lease arrangement which offered landlords a guaranteed rental income and a management service:

"... If [there are] any problems with the tenants we will deal with them. ... if there's any issues with repairs we deal with them. We select the tenants. [The landlord's] rent isn't as much as they got previously but they're getting... they don't have to do anything really."

While Nomad could not operate a guaranteed rent scheme, it was able to attract 'student landlords' by offering intensive tenancy management support and providing an opportunity to fill voids quickly and occupy them throughout the year.

Nomad reported that properties had to be suitable for their client group. In the early stages of the project, landlords offered the scheme larger, difficult to let HMOs. Nomad explained that five or more sharers together would prove too challenging for their clients and these properties would be very difficult to manage and match tenants.

Another challenge for both projects was the type of tenancy agreements used. Student landlords usually let to a group of students on a joint tenancy agreement, whereas PRS access projects tended to champion single ASTs as a more flexible and safer solution for sharers. Again, both projects used their influence with landlords and their ability to provide tenancy support to tenants as a bargaining tool to convince landlords to change their usual lettings practice.

Summary

Nomad and CAB WHABAC reported that there was significant potential to increase shared accommodation by using former student accommodation, particularly where more ‘traditional’ student renting markets were altering in favour of purpose built student accommodation. However, the key obstacle to overcome was convincing landlords to rethink their lettings strategies. Although this was challenging, these could be overcome by providing ‘professional’ services to landlords to offset the risks they perceived. This included: intensive support for sharers, thorough matching, and (where necessary/practical) management and guaranteed rental income.

This is a model that will be important for PRS access projects to consider in areas where student housing markets are changing. It has the potential to provide shared accommodation for single people who struggle to access affordable accommodation. However, projects should be aware that accommodation must be suitable for the target client group. Larger, more difficult to let HMOs may be more readily available, but may not always be the preferred solution.

4.6 Lead tenants

Overview

A lead tenant in a shared dwelling can provide informal peer support to fellow tenants and may have some additional responsibilities for bills, organising a cleaning rota and contacting the landlord about maintenance issues.

Several pilot schemes trialled a lead tenant initiative:

- Elmbridge Rentstart piloted the use of ‘peer tenants’ in its training properties. A peer tenant was (ideally) identified prior to a group of sharers beginning a training tenancy. The tenant had extra responsibilities for paying bills and keeping in contact with the landlord, and also could offer less experienced sharers some advice.
- The Crisis Housing Coach Service in London has a lead tenant in shared accommodation. The tenant received an incentive for taking on some extra responsibilities.
- Oasis Aquila Housing in Gateshead had originally set out to pilot training tenancies, but changed their scheme in response to its local housing market conditions and began to offer shared accommodation with a lead tenant. Oasis Aquila used housing that they owned, and had procured via an empty homes grant from DCLG.

Findings

The pilot schemes reported that lead tenants were a valuable asset in a shared property. The first challenge for schemes was to identify and appoint a suitable person. The projects suggested a range of criteria they were looking for in a lead tenant, including:

- Confidence and experience of living in the PRS and/or sharing accommodation;
- The ability to be personable and communicate well with others; and,

- Willingness to take on some additional responsibilities.

Several schemes stressed the importance of having a lead tenant in place prior to a group of sharers coming together. Elmbridge Rentstart believed that the best model was to install the lead tenant in the property initially to establish themselves, and then move other tenants in. This gave the lead tenant some ‘gravitas’ with other tenants, and a legitimacy to set certain standards. However, such a model was not always possible. In Elmbridge, where rents were high, properties had to be kept full in order for them to stack up financially for tenants claiming LHA, so a period of under occupancy was an expensive luxury.

Lead tenants often took on important tasks such as organising the payment of bills and reporting issues to the landlord, and could take a lead in organising some house rules, such as a cleaning rota or allocating everyone sufficient time to use the kitchen. In Oasis Aquila, it was the lead tenant who was named as the key contact for utility bills. Pilot schemes reported some positive outcomes for the house. One support worker at Elmbridge Rentstart suggested that the lead tenant’s influence in one property had led to a tidier house, and that as a result fellow sharers were getting on with each other better.

One of the key aspects of a sustained tenancy was a positive relationship between tenant and landlord. The Crisis Housing Coach Service reported that where a lead tenant got on well with the landlord, the house ‘ran much more smoothly’. However, workers also reflected that where just one tenant talked to the landlord, other tenants failed to develop a tenant/landlord relationship.

Some lead tenants went further by providing some advice (and sometimes support) to their fellow sharers. The Crisis Housing Coach

Service suggested that the lead tenant often had more experience of living in the PRS and in shared accommodation, and so was well placed to offer advice to fellow sharers, particularly where they had ‘stood out’ during Crisis’ pre-tenancy training courses.

Projects also reported that lead tenants had a role in providing the pilot schemes with some knowledge of what issues were arising in a property. This was the case for Elmbridge Rentstart:

“They’re our eyes and ears. We don’t ask them to spy, but it is useful for us to be able to nip issues in the bud.”

Pilot projects were keen to stress that it was very important to support the lead tenant in their role, and ensure that being in a position of responsibility was not overly burdensome, or created difficulties with other tenants. The Crisis Housing Coach Service ensured that all clients in a shared property were aware of their responsibilities to each other and in respect of the tenancy. In this way, they attempted to reduce the chances of other tenants ‘relying on the lead tenant to do everything’. Similarly, Elmbridge Rentstart made it clear that their peer tenants were not expected to enforce house rules or handle complaints – this was the role of the support worker: *“we have to make sure they’re not put upon by the other [tenants].”*

The way in which a lead tenants was compensated for their role was explored in all pilot projects, and it was achieved in different ways. The Crisis Housing Coach Service often provided some furniture for a lead tenant and offered them some extended vocational training. Elmbridge Rentstart used several different, dependent on the needs of the individual. For instance, one lead tenant received a modest reduction in rent, whereas another lead tenant who was keen to progress to a self-contained flat asked the scheme to assist him to save for a deposit. Oasis Aquila were more cautious about

giving a direct financial incentive to their lead tenants, and instead provided ‘whole house incentives’ such as Nando’s vouchers to go out for a meal together, Tesco vouchers to buy food for a shared Christmas dinner and cinema vouchers. It is difficult to form a view of which type of incentives work best, but it was apparent that offering the lead tenant a choice was worthwhile.

We interviewed several lead tenants, and what stood out strongly was their modest appraisal of their role. One was not even sure whether she was actually the lead tenant, though the project had identified her as such. These tenants were, in practice, doing what came naturally to them by acting responsibly and being willing to assist other tenants. While some were happy to be a lead tenant, one tenant we spoke to felt that there was a tendency for other tenants to rely on her too much and she was considering moving on to another shared house as a result.

Summary

Pilot schemes reported that the lead tenant model had merits. Where it had been successful:

- it enabled better communication between the sharers and the project, allowing personal and practical issues to be identified quicker;
- it enabled better relationships between the tenants and the landlord; and,
- houses tended to be kept tidier, and were more ‘harmonious’.

The evidence here is that shared accommodation benefits from nominating a lead tenant – someone who can play a role in ensuring the smooth running of the house. It was found to be important to:

- Choose a lead tenant carefully;
- Provide appropriate incentives;

- Support the lead tenant to ensure that the role does not become burdensome.

This latter point was particularly important in the light of some evidence to suggest that some lead tenants tire of the role, and that sometimes other sharers can become over-reliant on their lead tenant.

4.7 Peer mentor

Overview

A Peer Mentor model was trialled by one pilot scheme – The Crisis Housing Coach Service in London. The peer mentor’s role was to work alongside Crisis staff to: deliver pre-tenancy training to clients; help clients settle into their new accommodation and helping them sustain their tenancy; assist with matching tenants for house shares; and carry out workshops with clients to talk through issues associated with shared accommodation.

Two volunteer peer mentors were attached to this Sharing Solutions scheme. Both had been clients of Crisis in the past, had undertaken pre-tenancy training and had some experience of ‘navigating their way round the private rented sector’. Their appointment was time-limited to nine months, and their hours were less than 16 hours per week so as not to affect their welfare benefit claims. During the placement both peer mentors were studying towards a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ). Their role was to assist Crisis clients who were looking to access the PRS. To enable them to perform this role, peer mentors were provided with training on how to deliver advice and guidance, and the placement provided them with work experience and skills.

Findings

Staff reported that there were resource implications associated with managing volunteer workers, but the benefits that accrue were worthwhile. With peer mentors, staff had spent more time than had been anticipated managing them. While they

both had considerable skills and knowledge suitable for the role, being able to impart this to clients presented a challenge. Staff found that extra training and supervision was necessary. The peer mentors also took time to adjust from being clients to becoming volunteers, and staff had to manage this transition. For example, one peer mentor found it difficult to exercise some 'detachment' with clients, often getting entangled in their problems, rather than being objective and able to offer appropriate advice and support.

However, staff also reported that the benefits of having peer mentors outweighed these challenges. In particular, staff suggested that the peer mentors could provide more time for those clients who required it; they could develop as specialist advisers in sharing issues; they were able to empathise with clients where they had experienced similar hardships; and could act as a role model. Furthermore, staff were keen to emphasise that as a charitable homeless organisation, supporting volunteers who had previously been clients was a good fit with the organisation's core ethos.

Summary

Engaging volunteers is a worthwhile undertaking and there are positive outcomes for the volunteer, the organisation and clients. The peer mentors thrived because there was a well-resourced programme of support for them and individual staff who could dedicate time to their development and training needs. Recruiting people with the right skills and knowledge was important, but the key lessons from The Crisis Housing Coach Service were that communication skills were equally important, and volunteers required support to make the transition from 'client' to 'advice provider'.

4.8 Summary

This chapter has demonstrated that the Sharing Solutions programme has provided some important lessons about the effectiveness of different delivery models. The first point of note is the broad and ambitious nature of the programme that these models attest to. It is fair to say the Sharing Solutions programme has not played it safe. Rather, it has decided to trial some genuinely innovative, and very difficult, models.

Pilot schemes demonstrated that **training tenancies** are a useful way of introducing tenants to sharing and managing a tenancy in a safe way. Intensive tenancy support, training and thoughtful matching supports tenants and equips them better for the future. A number of factors which stand out as contributing to the success of training tenancies:

1. The type of tenancy agreement used was believed to be important to allow flexibility in training tenancies
2. Training tenancies are successful when linked to training courses
3. Sustainment of tenancies requires intensive support, particularly for clients who have never held a tenancy or lived in shared accommodation
4. Careful matching of clients is critical to ensuring that they have a positive experience of sharing
5. Smaller numbers of sharers in training flats makes sharing easier for clients to consider, but market conditions dictate how a shared house 'stacks up' financially
6. It is important to ensure that clients have adequate support to move on from a training tenancy into more permanent accommodation

Lodgings, as a model for increasing shared accommodation for single people struggling to access housing, has a role to play. Schemes that aimed to link up with social housing tenants had limited impact, due to the negotiations of the RSRS by DHP and the unwillingness to social housing organisations to get involved. The evidence suggests that owner occupiers are often better placed, and more willing, to take a lodger. While it was apparent from the pilot schemes that establishing lodgings required a significant investment of time and effort, it would be worthwhile where there was a need for shorter-term, less secure, but affordable accommodation. Several factors were identified as important for them to operate successfully:

- Partnerships with social housing providers and local authorities were critical for promoting the scheme
- Providing support for the lodger *and* the host was important
- Ensuring that the lodging agreement were fair to both parties was a key role for the pilot schemes
- For hosts, it was important to fully understand the financial connotations of collecting rent, particularly its impact on the host's benefit claims

Providing **shared accommodation for fathers with non-resident children** was one of the most challenging aspects of the Sharing Solutions programme. The success of this model hinged on the ability to find the right kind of accommodation. One project (CAB WHABAC) found a ready-made property that was ideal in its form and function, and also was owned by a charity who offered to the scheme at a reasonable rent. These circumstances will be difficult to replicate, and there is a case for PRS Access Schemes and landlords partnering to develop appropriate properties rather than

seeking them out. However, CAB WHABAC's experience suggested that once this hurdle is overcome, sharing is a viable solution for this particular client group. It can generate positive outcomes for fathers' continued contact with their children, and provide some support and security after a relationship breakdown that stabilises their lives.

There is significant potential to **increase shared accommodation by using former student accommodation**, particularly where more 'traditional' student renting markets have altered in favour of purpose built student accommodation. However, the key obstacle to overcome was convincing landlords to rethink their lettings strategies. Although this was challenging, these could be overcome by providing 'professional' services to landlords to offset the risks they perceived. This included: intensive support for sharers, thorough matching, and (where necessary/practical) management and guaranteed rental income. However, projects should be aware that accommodation must be suitable for the target client group. Larger, more difficult to let HMOs may be more readily available, but may not always be the best sharing solution.

Lead tenant models have merits in different sharing scenarios. Where it had been successful:

- It enabled better communication between the sharers and the project, allowing personal and practical issues to be identified quicker;
- It enabled better relationships between the tenants and the landlord; and,
- Houses tended to be kept tidier, and were more 'harmonious'.

The evidence here is that shared accommodation benefits from nominating a lead tenant – someone who can play a role in ensuring the smooth running of the house. It was found to be important to:

- Choose a lead tenant carefully;
- Provide appropriate incentives; and,
- Support the lead tenant to ensure that the role does not become burdensome.

The Crisis Housing Coach Service demonstrated that volunteer **Peer Mentors** can deliver positive outcomes for the volunteer, the organisation and clients. The peer mentors thrived because there was a well-resourced programme of support for them and individual staff who could dedicate time to their development and training needs. Recruiting people with the right skills and knowledge was important, but the key lessons from The Crisis Housing Coach Service were that communication skills were equally important, and volunteers required support to make the transition from 'client' to 'advice provider'.

5. Cross-cutting issues

5.1 Introduction

This chapter spotlights some of the cross cutting issues that emerged from the Sharing Solutions programme. It draws out the following broad issues:

- The supply of suitable accommodation
- Cultures of sharing
- How sharing is ‘managed’
- Supporting tenants: sustaining tenancies
- Landlord engagement
- The role of partnerships

5.2 The supply of suitable accommodation

The development of new models of sharing to meet the housing needs of people eligible for the SAR relies upon there being adequate supply of suitable (affordable, accessible) accommodation. Yet this varies considerably by area and by housing market context.

In some areas the supply of shared PRS accommodation generally is limited. Stakeholders at Shelter (Great Yarmouth), for example, reported inadequate supply with one landlord explaining that there is a *‘lack of shared accommodation in that if I place an ad I’ll be inundated with people looking for accommodation so there’s obviously a massive need’*. Another explained the limited shared accommodation with reference to their being no university in the town and so no ‘culture of sharing’. The same was true of Gateshead, despite its proximity adjacent to the university town of Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Another factor for Gateshead was the (relative) affordability and availability of PRS and social housing, meaning that a requirement for shared accommodation was low. Throughout the pilot schemes, there were reports that HMO licensing is deterring some landlords from providing shared accommodation, with reports of some converting shared accommodation into single studio flats.

In other housing markets, shared accommodation may be abundant but not accessible to people on low incomes or in housing need. The ‘University Towns’, for example, had a ready supply of rented accommodation but much is exclusively for the student market. In London, Ryedale and Worcester shared accommodation in the PRS was reported to be commonplace but local housing markets are so competitive that very few properties are available at the SAR. In Ryedale, for example, the SAR was £66.43⁴ but, according to a local stakeholder, only a couple of landlords had rooms available at this rent, and competition from students was reported to have inflated rental prices in Worcester - according to a stakeholder at CAB WHABAC, the student population there had ‘mushroomed’ in the past 5 to 10 years. In London also, while there is a strong culture of sharing and a supply of shared accommodation, finding a room at (or anywhere near) the SAR is becoming increasingly difficult. Supply problems in London are also compounded by the very high demand for PRS accommodation. The Crisis Housing Coach Service reported that the high demand in London was actually ‘hiding’ available properties from view - landlords rarely had to advertise a vacant property any more - instead letting it to prospective tenants who contact them directly. This was restricting PRS access

4 At the point of the fieldwork in January 2015.

projects and their clients from seeking out properties.

In addition to pushing up prices, there was evidence that booming rental markets had prompted some landlords in some areas to exit the HB market, instead seeking working tenants only. As a result, HB claimants were finding it even harder to secure rented accommodation. In addition, stakeholders also reported that what was available for HB claimants was increasingly residualised - accommodation of the poorest quality, in the least attractive places and often poorly managed.

Several pilot schemes found innovative ways of increasing the supply of shared accommodation. Oasis Aquila Housing in Gateshead, for example, used a empty homes grant from DCLG to purchase and refurbish redundant properties. These were used for its sharing solutions project – initially as training flats, and later as more permanent homes for tenants. Similarly, Elmbridge Rentstart actively engaged with a local charitable housing provider to bring some empty properties back into use. The project also used partnerships with local businesses and a scheme for ex-offenders to redecorate the properties.

Changes to the student housing market in some areas (Sheffield, Plymouth, Worcester) have provided the potential for increasing the supply of shared accommodation. As new purpose-built student accommodation has been supplied, more traditional terrace student shared accommodation has become vacant and difficult to let, offering an opportunity for it to be switched towards the HB market. This is a trend occurring in other university towns and cities across the country. As stakeholders at CAB WHABAC (Worcester) and Nomad (Sheffield), explained:

“We’ve had landlords come to us that have been student landlords and now they’re not working with students anymore because the university has built a lot of their own accommodation, so what’s happened is they’ve come to us. And their properties are generally quite good really. They tend to be fairly good landlords and experienced landlords. And we’ve got some really good rates as well for our leasing schemes.”

“They’re [contacting us and] saying ‘look I’ve got this house, I can’t let it, I’ve let it to students for the past twenty years, and I can’t let it now.’”

The experience of PATH illustrates well the variation in supply of accessible PRS shared accommodation (even in adjacent areas), and the different contexts within which the Sharing Solutions schemes were operating. PATH operates in Plymouth and in Teignbridge, areas with quite different PRS markets. Like Sheffield, recent new build student accommodation in Plymouth has released property previously rented by students, therefore making access easier. Rents are also about £70 per week, within the SAR rate, and stakeholders reported that landlords in Plymouth were generally willing to rent rooms to benefit claimants at the SAR. Teignbridge however, a large, rural Local Authority in the ‘commuter belt’, has much higher rents, fewer properties available at the SAR rate and landlords were reportedly more reluctant to accept tenants on benefits. Accommodation does tend to be of a lower standard in Plymouth due to availability and high numbers of ‘buy to lets’ but is affordable and accessible, as opposed to Teignbridge.

5.3 Cultures of sharing

Sharing in the PRS has long been an established component of people's housing pathways. Requiring only a short term commitment, sharing in the PRS can be an ideal and positive housing choice at particular points in the life course (university, the transition from leaving home, during early career when work related moves may be necessary). Sharing is, however, culturally associated with youth and transience and the recent change to the LHA rates has extended the age at which single people are expected to share beyond this cultural norm.

It is important to note, however, that cultures of sharing are not universal or fixed, but shift and change in response to housing market conditions and local context. For example, in London (and other high demand markets) where owner occupation and self-contained rented accommodation is financially beyond reach even for those with decent incomes, it is already common and culturally acceptable for people to share accommodation in the private rented sector into their 30's, and increasingly beyond. In contrast, stakeholders reported no such 'culture of sharing' in areas such as Gateshead, where self-contained accommodation is still reportedly easy to access and affordable. Stakeholders there reported that rents in the PRS are low and social housing relatively easy to secure and so sharing is simply not the norm, at any age. Oasis Aquila Housing's project manager said that it was an "*uphill battle to convince people to consider sharing*". However, Oasis Aquila were able to make inroads by improving the supply of shared accommodation in Gateshead, using their own properties (former empty homes, purchased and refurbished with a grant from DCLG) and properties sourced from the PRS.

The presence of a large student population was also found to engender broader cultures of sharing, with Nomad (Sheffield), for example, encountering less resistance to the idea of sharing amongst their clients than

other Sharing Solutions Projects. In contrast, talking about the Sharing Solutions Project in Great Yarmouth, one stakeholder from Shelter suggested that: "*it's not like a university town where there's big sharing cultures, so it was kind of bucking that trend*".

However, there were reports from all the pilot schemes that there was considerable resistance to sharing amongst the client group. Stakeholders reported that they had to make significant efforts to shift cultural norms and expectations. In areas where, historically, social housing tenancies have been easy to secure (Sheffield, for example) expectations persist about accessing a one bedroom flat in this sector. As one stakeholder explained:

"People just need a massive reality check. The good old days of seeing an empty property and going to the council and saying 'can I have it?' are well and truly gone. When I first started working with homeless people - which was about 15 years ago - it was like that. I started off working with [X organisation] when the bidding system came in, just in certain parts of [the area] so with our clients, we'd put one bid on and we'd get a house or we'd get a flat and a lot of people think it's still like that. So I have to say to people 'if you haven't got priority you're looking at five or seven years for a one bedroom flat'. They don't believe you but it is the case."

Clients' resistance to sharing was reported to be frequently linked to concerns about who they would be sharing with as well as a general preference for self-contained housing. While there were some suggestions that welfare reforms were having an impact on clients' attitudes to sharing, this appeared to be minor at the current time. Several stakeholders reported that managing client expectations about their housing options was one of the most challenging aspects of the programme. For example:

“No matter how well you can try manage expectations with clients, some clients would rather carry on as they are if they can’t have what they want or if they want isn’t affordable to them. It’s very difficult to talk to people about affordability when... if people come in and they’re under 25 and they want the one bedroom flat, we’d have to explain that out of the £57 a week Jobseekers, by the time you’ve paid top-up for a self-contained place and then you’ve got to think about your food and everything else, it’s just not viable a lot of the time and people would rather just not hear that and just do it anyway and find themselves homeless again in a couple of months.”

“Sometimes this is a bit of a reality check for people because one thing that does come across all the time is when we tell people ‘we can help you find a room in a shared house’ they say ‘I don’t want that, I want a one-bedroom flat’. So part of this [workshop] is looking at why you can’t have a one-bedroom flat, how much that would cost, and how much you’re actually going to get in HB...and looking at the difference between being in a one bedroom flat... You’re gonna be working and coming home and you’re not going anywhere else; if you’re living in a shared property you’ve got a little bit of money to play with so you can have a social life as well.”

As the quote directly above illustrates, pilot schemes were taking a proactive approach to clients’ reticence about shared accommodation, an important step in a potentially slow process of cultural change. For the schemes operating training flats, these provided a practical way of changing clients’ expectations by offering a short term opportunity to share.

5.4 Managing sharing

The barriers and challenges encountered by single people claiming housing benefit – access to the PRS, securing accommodation at an affordable (SAR) rate – means that intervention in the market is required, and the Sharing Solutions programme highlights this. To improve the availability of shared accommodation and the sustainability of shared tenancies, requires managing from both a supply side (landlords) and a demand side (tenants). All the pilot schemes, therefore, had to negotiate a series of considerations and challenges about managing shared accommodation. Some key questions and lessons emerged:

The type of tenancy agreement – i.e. a single shared agreement or individual agreements for each tenant - is a key consideration for landlords managing shared accommodation and for tenants sharing. Individual tenancy agreements are more cumbersome from the landlord perspective but offer certain protections for tenants. Pilot Schemes used a number of different types of agreement (see Table 3.3).

Nomad elected to use a protected license agreement in its partnership with SYHA, on the basis that it offered greater flexibility where sharers were struggling. This raised issues between Nomad and Crisis over offering clients the strongest security of tenure, but it was agreed to trial a license in the context of training flats. The project manager explained their rationale for the approach:

“I absolutely agree that we should be giving the strongest security of tenure that we can, but we also have to balance that with the safety of the other person that lives in the property. There have been instances where issues around violence and aggression have come to light and we need to be able to keep that other person living there as safe as possible and if a situation presented itself.”

CAB WHABAC similarly opted to use license agreements for the first six months of the tenancy; tenants were then given the option to move on to ASTs (if rent accounts were up-to-date). This approach reportedly worked well for CAB WHABAC and was done in the best interest of clients for whom an AST would be too great a risk. As one stakeholder from CAB WHABAC said, *“if we offered everyone ASTs straight off... it would be too much of a gamble and it would be too expensive for the ones that don’t work.”* Some tenants chose to remain on a license agreement after the six month period and when the choice was there to move to an AST, as it allowed a greater degree of flexibility.

By contrast, Oasis Aquila Housing and Elmbridge Rentstart have adopted Assured Shorthold Tenancies (ASTs). Both project managers were confident that the law provided adequate leverage to remove a tenant who posed a risk to others.

There is no right or wrong answer here, and on the basis that training flats are offered for a short period (normally 6 months), and the client is supported intensively by an established PRS project, a license can be effective without diminishing a client’s security of tenure. License agreements can be beneficial for the tenant by allowing more flexibility, and for the scheme present less of a risk. Applying licenses to a less regulated scenario, however, would be more problematic.

Who will be responsible for managing the property is also a key consideration, i.e. whether the property is managed directly by/ via the landlord or through a leasing agency. Again, the pilots responded to this in different ways and both had their merits. Where pilot schemes had direct control for properties it was considered to be positive as it made close monitoring more straightforward, and for clients it meant they did not deal directly with a landlord. (This could also be viewed

in a negative way - that clients are not exposed to real world conditions - however none of the projects considered this to be a critical issue). Conversely, those schemes that partnered with larger landlords, such as Nomad and Elmbridge Rentstart have benefited from having a housing partner, both in terms of access to stock, but also access to expertise and knowledge.

Experienced staff and experienced projects

achieved better results, with knowledge of the local PRS and understanding of how to engage and converse with landlords, being critical to success. This certainly paid dividends for the Sharing Solutions programme. All pilot schemes demonstrated a clear understanding of their clients’ needs and the state of the local housing market, and all had access to advice workers with broad experiences of supporting client beyond housing options. However, it should be recognised that such experienced PRS schemes do not exist everywhere there is a need for them. Managing sharing is complex and less experienced schemes may struggle to meet the needs of clients and landlords and local authority departments will not be sufficiently resourced to provide the intensity of support required.

Pilot schemes identified that appropriate matches were a **critical element to ensuring that sharing** was successful. There are, therefore, important questions about how far landlords should attempt to ‘match’ tenants and, if so, how this is best done effectively.

Matching was described as ‘more art than science’ and that it needed to be pragmatic. For example, Nomad’s experience was that filling an empty property was relatively straightforward. The project worker would assess clients and come to a judgement, and then allow clients to meet up. However, there were occasions when a room became available, and more pragmatic decisions had to be taken. Stakeholders in the pilot schemes often reported that getting a good

match was as much to do with their instincts rather than anything a formative assessment could determine. However, a few guiding principles did emerge.

- In particular, giving tenants some choice or involvement in the process was found to be important.
- Tenants with different lifestyle often made good sharers. For example, working different shifts, eating and socialising at different times often gave greater privacy in a dwelling. However, there was evidence from sharers that a mix of ‘working’ and non-working’ tenants could lead to tensions (see Chapter 5).
- Most schemes had processes in place for tenant matching. At CAB WHABAC, for example, project workers met every four to six weeks to discuss current and potential vacancies. A project worker explained that:

“We try and match people to where we think they’ll fit. It can’t ever be a perfect science because we’re working with real people here, and sometimes you’re thinking they’re not particularly going to get on that well but that person needs a space, and they’ll be okay as a tenant ... we’re just going to have to manage it and see how we get on.”

- Throughout the programme, there had been successful examples of shared accommodation consisting of a mix of different people. At The Crisis Housing Coach Service, one stakeholder commented that:

“Mixed houses can enable better sustainment. Sharing Solutions is not demarcating people into housing silos. It’s encouraging clients to mix and be housed in general communities.”

The provision, form and intensity of tenancy support is another consideration for landlords and organisations developing sharing models. All of the schemes were offering intensive tenancy support and reported this to be critical to the success of the programme. Pre-tenancy training, training flats, regular visits, and peer mentoring were forms of support used by the pilot schemes that proved particularly useful.

Bond schemes can be essential to enable vulnerable and low income people to access shared accommodation. Many vulnerable people cannot save for a deposit, particularly those living in hostels and individuals coming from a family or relationship breakdown. Some landlords, particularly those taking in lodgers do not require a deposit, making this type of accommodation particularly attractive to vulnerable groups. All of the pilot schemes had access to bond schemes of one kind or another, and this was viewed as an essential for their clients to access the PRS. Elmbridge Rentstart for example runs a successful tenancy deposit scheme⁵ which project workers claimed was an essential component for engaging landlords and encouraging them to rent to their clients.

Assessing tenants’ suitability for a shared housing scheme, and their suitability to form a household with the other resident tenants is not a straightforward process. Stakeholders at CAB WHABAC, for example explained that they go through a fairly lengthy and detailed process of understanding the applicants’ situations and needs, exploring their housing history, support needs (e.g. health and mental health, history of dependency, offending and such like) and financial circumstances and capabilities. A stakeholder explained, however that:

“... [I]t’s not necessarily any of those things

5 <http://www.elmbridgerentstart.org.uk/deposit-guarantee-scheme.shtml>

that would rule someone out... we'd look at what their offences are and what impact that's going to have on their housing and we'd work through that."

And in relation to drug use a similar point was made about the importance of understanding the specific circumstances of that individual case, before making a decision:

"If it's cannabis possession once five years ago, we'd have a bit of a chat to them about how things are now; if it's anything else like for example heroin or dealing then you don't want to put them with four other people that are getting on really well."

Similarly, a stakeholder explained that ill mental health can render shared accommodation inappropriate for some clients but by no means all.

CAB WHABAC carried out police checks on potential tenants in shared houses to create a safer environment for both tenants and their children. For those pilot schemes seeking to provide for absent fathers, safety concerns were considered to be very important – and difficult to pursue. CAB WHABAC, for instance, had planned to ask tenants to complete a Disclosure and Barring Service Checks (DBS) check (previously CRBs), but found that these could only be carried out on volunteers or employees. They managed to overcome this obstacle by applying for a national police check from their local police station. CAB WHABAC experienced significant delays in filling all the rooms in the property as clients did not always disclose their offences immediately.

5.5 Support for tenants to sustain tenancies

All pilot schemes provided, and emphasised the importance of tenancy support. There was a consensus that without support, tenancies were less likely to be sustained. One stakeholder commented that the clients most likely to sustain their tenancy beyond six months were those who had been referred from a local supported housing project, contrasting this with those clients referred to them by the local authority. It is important to remember here, however, that many of the schemes were targeted at vulnerable people and that not all under 35s in shared accommodation would require the level of support provided by these schemes.

Pre-tenancy advice and support was commonplace. At Foundation (Ryedale), for example, Tenancy Ready Training is available for those who need it, providing advice and information about tenancy agreements, money, budgeting, healthy lifestyle, being a 'good tenant' and the choice based lettings scheme (North Yorkshire Home Choice). In other schemes (Nomad, The Crisis Housing Coach Service, and Elmbridge Rentstart), pre-tenancy training was considered so important that attendance at a workshop was compulsory for engagement with the project. One worker from Nomad explained:

"We do get people when we tell them they've got to do these workshop who say 'I'm not doing it' but we say 'then we're not re-housing you'... or we get people who say 'I've had my own tenancy before'... well it's obviously failed or they wouldn't be here."

Several schemes reported that getting people to training sessions was often very difficult. There was a fine balance to be drawn between being inflexible (such as refusing to work with clients who missed training) and being very flexible (as one worker put it – 'being far too soft').

Most schemes also had ongoing systems of support or review in place so that issues (from the point of view of the landlord or the tenant) could be identified and addressed in a timely manner. In many of the schemes, tenants were visited or contacted by a support worker several times a week. This is, of course, very intensive support. For some clients, this high level of support was provided for the duration of the tenancy (Crisis Housing Coach Service), or the first six months (Nomad's training flats). In several schemes (PATH, for example) a formal 'health check' of the tenancy was carried out with the client every two months.

While this appears to be a very high level of tenancy support, all the pilot projects were adamant that this was required for their clients, particularly in shared accommodation. In addition, the pilots reported that such intensive support was an important factor in encouraging landlords to accommodate their clients. Elmbridge Rentstart, for example, operated in a high cost PRS market area where property was difficult to source. They reported that their reputation for providing intensive support with clients was essential to maintaining the involvement of landlords. The Crisis Housing Coach Service, which offered intensive support, reported a 96 per cent sustainment rate at six months. They also provided financial support to tenants if necessary to help with deposits, rent in advance or lettings/admin fees. Positive outcomes for tenants and landlords outlined in Chapter 6 reinforce this finding.

Some organisations had noticed an increase in levels of tenancy sustainment since launching their Sharing Solutions scheme, attributing this partly to the support they were able to offer, the attention they were able to pay to tenant selection and allocation, and the experience accrued. A stakeholder at CAB WHABAC, for example, made the following comment:

"If I look at what we were doing a couple of years ago, we did have a fair turnover really and it's not like that now. A lot of that is to do with the staff that we have here at this moment, the people they select, and put them in the right place."

Other stakeholders from this scheme made similar comments but also pointed out that without such schemes, some tenants would simply fall through the net:

"Without what we do a lot of people would be lost."

"Normally, you wouldn't call your landlord if you'd been sanctioned, whereas because we go over once a week and give that support, or they know they can pop into the office, they'll just come in and say 'this has happened' or 'what can I do about this?' So I think they've got as much as you can give to give them skills to be able to maintain [a tenancy] and hopefully move on to other types of accommodation and they've got those skills."

5.6 Engaging with landlords

Experiences of engaging with local landlords and securing property for their schemes varied widely. However, some key issues and lessons emerged:

- All the pilot schemes had a previous track record of working with landlords and this had given them a head start for Sharing Solutions. One worker from Elmbridge Rentstart commented that:

"Sharing is a different proposition for landlords. I think if we'd had no history whatsoever with them, they'd hang up straight away. But I think they're beginning to trust us."

- A worker at Foundation (Ryedale) explained that a previously funded PRS scheme by Crisis had been operating in

the area. The worker was able to capitalise on this work and maintain links with existing landlords together with recruiting new landlords to join the scheme.

- Schemes employed several non-financial incentives with landlords to make them more likely to engage, for example by taking responsibility for all paperwork and bureaucracy, finding, vetting and matching potential tenants. Several stakeholders pointed to the importance of ensuring HB is paid direct to the landlord with one going so far as to say *“I honestly think that if the tenant received HB directly to them, we’re not going to get landlords on board”* (Sheffield). The support provided to tenants was also reported to reassure landlords and increase the likelihood of them engaging in the scheme.
- As a result of the challenges attracting landlords, combined with limited availability of shared PRS accommodation in some areas (reported, for example in Ryedale where a small number of landlords/lettings agencies control most local properties) and a prevalence of rogue landlords in others, Sharing Solutions schemes often had to rely on a relatively small pool of landlords to deliver their project. As one worker from Shelter (Great Yarmouth) explained:

“We had a hard core of landlords who were quite good and they had decent quality properties. I think it’s been more challenging where the tenants have found the accommodation themselves. There was one we had to refuse because there was a prohibition order on the property, for instance, because there was a lot of disrepair and it wasn’t safe for fire regulations and the client was very disappointed but...we don’t set anyone up to fail.”

- Pilot schemes reported that building relationships with landlords and ‘bringing them on board’ was quite resource

intensive and required very careful negotiations. Crisis Housing Coach Service, in particular, reported that building links with landlords was the most time consuming aspect of the project leader. At CAB WHABAC, the scheme benefitted from having a dedicated landlord officer, responsible for engaging landlords and producing regular newsletters and information updates.

- Pilot schemes often had to act quickly to start a tenancy. At Foundation (Ryedale), the project worker reported that landlords put pressure on the project to get their rooms let as quickly as possible. This could on occasion, stymie the tenant matching and tenant preparation process – but the alternative was losing the property.

5.7 Partnerships

Partnerships with other organisations played an important role in the success of pilot schemes. One of the key partnerships for many schemes was with the local authority. This was especially important as a referral route into the schemes. One local authority officer in Great Yarmouth identified how the partnership with Shelter benefited them:

“We really look at the legislation, as I say we’re driven by the homeless legislation around someone who’s not priority need, not hitting that high end vulnerability, or someone who’s come in from the housing register point of view who may have accommodation but it’s not suitable for the long-term and is looking for something to call their own but due to...we’ve got a new allocations policy so there’s eligibility and qualification criteria so they may fail that, or their housing needs may be incredibly low and because in Great Yarmouth we have a particularly high need for one and two bedroom properties, then we know we’re not going to be able to help them with social housing. Quite often the customer would want an immediate

solution and if you put your name on a list it could be months or we could make the referral to Shelter who will potentially have the ability to help quicker and... some people take it up, some people don't, it's not for everyone so..."

Some projects had long and well-established links with local authorities. But for others, there was work to do to strengthen those linkages. For Elmbridge Rentstart for example, they have regular links with the local authority, but are seeking to improve that relationship so that homelessness is recognised more (in an area where 'hidden homelessness' prevails) and the benefits of PRS access schemes are recognised. Elmbridge Rentstart have forged many successful partnerships with local organisations and now are part of an informal group who are actively seeking to improve housing conditions and combat homelessness in the Borough. For example, the project works closely with several landlords, including Walton Charity, to properties suitable for shared accommodation. With others, a temporary night shelter has been established – the first of its kind in the Borough.

For all the pilot schemes, linkages with local housing benefit teams were considered as essential. Pilot schemes often supported clients with claims and followed up on late, under- or over-payments. The changing landscape of welfare benefit payments however was considered to be a risk. One worker explained how the local authority changes had affected them:

"The only thing I will say is – because it is important if we want to sustain what we're doing – is that housing benefit have been taken over by a private company. We used to have a really good relationship with housing benefit and we haven't anymore. We used to have regular meetings on a monthly basis and that's stopped. It's not been a huge problem, but things are a bit trickier than they used to be... we've

housed people before we knew if there was an overpayment so we could deal with that. A couple of months someone's in and you get a massive overpayment letter and their deductions are a huge amount and actually the tenancy isn't manageable."

Nomad Opening Doors in Sheffield partnered with South Yorkshire Housing Association, which provides a good example of stimulating shared accommodation by making use of the social housing sector. SYHA hands over five properties to Nomad to use as training flats offering 6 month tenancies to sharers on a license agreement. While SYHA retain the landlord function, Nomad manage the properties. The partnership has a number of key advantages:

- Clients housed under this arrangement are eligible for a higher rate of HB (it isn't LHA) and can claim the additional vulnerability allowance. It therefore stacks up financially far easier than a PRS property would.
- As an experienced and well-resourced landlord, SYHA has provided Nomad with valuable advice and support:

"They've been really helpful with the housing management stuff as well... obviously because they're the landlord, they have to ensure that everything is in place... they have loads of procedures that we have to follow. They told us what policies we need to have in place and we had to go away and write all of those. And then they have final approval of those. They do a Focus annually... so this year it was on evictions and eviction procedure. They've organised training with their legal team around the equality act and the impact of taking eviction action against someone. Next year I think there's one on repairs and legal responsibilities around that."

- Clients have access to a professional and responsive repair and maintenance service.

Another partnership of note is the London Practitioners Forum, arranged and facilitated by The Crisis Housing Coach Service. The forum convenes bi-monthly and is attended by a range of stakeholders who run PRS access schemes across London, including some local authorities. It aims to disseminate good practice and discuss the challenges associated with accessing the PRS, with a focus on sharing. The forum is generally well attended and has managed to bring together organisations to join resources, and work together to tackle common challenges. For example, the forum has developed a ‘landlord/property sharing protocol’ enabling PRS access schemes to share details of properties that they find difficult to fill. The forum is also putting together a resource pack to assist tenants, including a ‘tenant CV’ template, and model questions to ask landlords at a property viewing. The forum has also been a vehicle for distributing knowledge gleaned from the Sharing Solutions programme via Crisis’ involvement.

5.8 Summary

This chapter has shown that there are a number of cross cutting issues relevant to all Sharing Solutions schemes. Such issues act as key determinants of schemes’ success and ‘make sharing work’. Of course, the way in which Sharing Solutions pilots tackled these factors was heavily influenced by geographical differences, target client groups, and local contexts. This chapter has drawn out the following issues and identified key learning points from each scheme.

The supply of suitable accommodation: access to affordable and suitable accommodation formed the basis of Sharing Solutions schemes’ success and varied by local housing market contexts. While the barriers faced by different schemes were never exactly identical, there were common threads that grouped a few schemes together. Great Yarmouth and Gateshead struggled with a lack of supply

of shared accommodation, whereas other areas (London, Ryedale and Worcester) had plentiful supplies of shared accommodation but excessive demand and competition. Sharing tended to ‘work’ more in areas where student property markets were changing, where schemes could tap into ex-student housing.

Cultures of sharing: these varied across areas and local housing market contexts. Sharing Solutions schemes could ‘get off the ground’ more readily in areas where sharing was culturally accepted. Expectations endured of being able to access social housing or self-contained flats in the PRS, and the lack of choice around sharing inherent in the SAR reforms was understandably a bitter pill to swallow for many clients. All schemes reported the necessity of working towards an attitudinal shift in terms of sharing amongst wider society.

How sharing is ‘managed’: schemes succeeded by managing shared accommodation from both a ‘supply’ side (landlords) and a ‘demand’ side (tenants). Schemes had a series of considerations to negotiate to ensure that each side worked in tandem and ‘what was best’ for the client also met the needs of the landlord. Such management issues revolved around deciding on the best type of tenancy agreement; the best party to manage the property; the project’s staffing; and how to match, support, and assess tenants.

Supporting tenants / sustaining tenancies: intensive tenancy support was crucial for the sustainment of tenancies and outcomes of schemes. Although the ‘type’ of support on offer varied, the high level of support was consistent across all schemes and it was made evident that this was essential both for tenants and landlords.

Landlord engagement: schemes took advantage of existing landlord relationships and this gave them a head start; and taking steps to incentivise landlords also proved

successful (whether sourcing, vetting, matching and supporting tenants or paying HB direct to the landlord). Getting landlords on board was nevertheless still a time consuming and resource intensive process.

The role of partnerships: partnerships with other organisations proved vital in order to secure appropriate client referrals, as well as to make referrals in the other direction where necessary. Good relationships with stakeholders from partner organisations made a vast difference to the operation of the scheme, and where there was a sense that these relationships were at risk of breaking down (for instance with local benefits teams) this was a cause for concern. The partnership between Nomad and SYHA was given as an example of good practice.

6. Outcomes for tenants and landlords

6.1 Introduction

This chapter explores outcomes and impacts of the Sharing Solutions scheme on tenants and landlords. It draws on data from interviews with current tenants and participating landlords from across all eight case study areas. It examines whether Sharing Solutions has altered people's perceptions and attitudes towards sharing. Overall findings are interspersed with vignettes from tenants and landlords who offered noteworthy reflections on their involvement with the Sharing Solutions scheme and whose stories illustrate the findings more clearly.

6.2 Outcomes for tenants

Outcomes for tenants, across all schemes, broadly revolved around three stand-out themes: **support**, **independence**, and **affordability**. Subsequent discussion explores and elaborates on each of these themes in turn.

Sharing Solutions gave tenants access to invaluable support, social and advice networks

Sharing Solutions encompassed more than a 'roof over one's head'; schemes offered intensive tenancy support packages, in the form of pre-tenancy training, skills courses and workshops, weekly house visits, peer mentoring, on-the-spot / drop-in advice, and follow-up support after a tenancy has ended. Project staff supported tenants with a range of issues that often stretched beyond housing, to resolving issues with benefits, managing budgets and other finances, employability, and making referrals to other support agencies (such as mental health or counselling services) where necessary. This support often made all the difference to tenants' experiences of shared accommodation, and was especially vital for tenants with complex pasts and higher support needs. Such groups of tenants

may have struggled both to maintain regular tenancies without this level of support, and to cope with other related issues that put tenancies at risk. In fact, some respondents cited 'being able to support themselves' as one of the main barriers to moving into self-contained housing in the private rented sector straight away; and others contrasted their current experience to past housing situations where they had been left to flounder without any support. One tenant recounted, "*[when I was lodging], I was chucked in the deep end*". In some cases, support by project staff was treated as a 'safety net' – as something to fall back on when needed – encapsulated by the statement "*I know if I did have problems I could go to Shelter so I feel a lot better knowing they're there. So I don't really worry too much.*" Other times support was quite heavily relied upon and tenants became more dependent on it: "*Say the house was a mess and [X] didn't come, I wouldn't have anyone to talk to about it and it wouldn't get sorted.*"

Here, there is a fine balance to be struck between enough and too much support. While 'too much' support risks tenants becoming co-dependent and perhaps, not taking responsibility for managing tenancies themselves, 'too little' support – particularly for more vulnerable adults – in the private rented sector risks the tenancy itself. As one landlord said:

"In a lot of shared accommodation people get kicked out quickly because they don't pay their rent."

This issue also materialised at Shelter Great Yarmouth where support was less intensive and relied on tenants going to the scheme themselves with problems rather than a project worker routinely visiting and asking them. This scheme found that tenants were reluctant to report problems in time, and often 'buried their heads in the sand' until things spiralled out of control:

“I think I would like to find an extra way of reaching people before they hit that point of crisis. With the support and everything, it’s good but you... it’s really hard to detect the problem because a lot of times the clients are telling you everything’s okay and it’s not until you hear from the landlord... so I think any way of having some kind of better way of getting them to come forward more readily would be good but I’m not quite sure...how we could improve that really...”

The advantages to tenants of receiving a high level of support were obvious and the requirements of providing it were understandable, given that there is so much at stake even if tenants make relatively minor mistakes in the private rented sector. As a result of having stable housing and supported tenancies, many tenants were consequently able to focus on and work on improving other aspects of their lives, as the following vignettes demonstrate.

Craig (Sheffield)

Before coming to Nomad, Craig lived with his mother for one year after finishing university. Craig described how this living situation was far from ideal and the relationship was strained by various issues, including Craig’s struggle to address his gambling issues. Although Craig wished to move out, he felt that he was not in a position to do so by himself. Being part of the Sharing Solutions programme at Nomad provided Craig with the support, skills, and stable accommodation to allow him to move on with other aspects of his life: *“every time I get down, I bounce back quicker each time and that’s helped with the environment I’ve been in as well and the support that’s been available.”* Craig attended the pre-tenancy workshops as well as additional courses run by Crisis Skylight to help improve his employability, CV-writing skills, and confidence. Craig was in the process of completing his Maths GCSE qualification, and was pleased with the progress he was making with this: *“I’ve been making a lot of progress with that and it’s been keeping me on the straight and narrow.”* Craig felt confident that if he encountered any difficulties in the future or when moving on to new accommodation, the staff at Nomad would be there to offer him guidance.

Robert (Worcester)

Robert found himself homeless after his relationship with his then partner broke down and he was forced to stay on his friend’s sofa: *“I was quite lucky as one mate managed to help me get a semi-permanent place on his mate’s settee. But it was a one-bedroom flat and there were three of us in there so it was cramped as it was only a small flat.”* Robert described the lack of privacy, freedom, and control he felt while sofa-surfing: *“sofa-surfing was terrible; no privacy; I didn’t have any say on what was on television... you were just stumbling by; you didn’t feel any part of a place because you’re not living at that address.”* At the time, Robert could not afford to move into a hostel and had experienced additional barriers in attempting to access private rented sector accommodation: *“they were for students only or professionals only, and at the time, I didn’t have a job so I felt very trapped.”* Robert was referred to CAB WHABAC by ‘The Bubble’ at the YMCA, and was offered a room in a shared house with four other single males. Robert has lived there for just over a year now. Although his current housemates were unknown to him at the time, Robert has settled in well and enjoys the social aspect of sharing as well as the support network it offers: *“it’s like an extra bit of support if you do need it.”* Robert has since started working at a local supermarket and is ambitious to work his way up the ranks there to be able to start earning more money and begin thinking about moving to self-contained accommodation. Robert felt more confident about moving on and negotiating the housing market since being part of the Sharing Solutions project at CAB WHABAC. He felt assured that a housing project worker would be there to support him with this process if he needed it: *“sometime you just need a bit of support to point you in the right direction.”*

Some tenants settled into their accommodation so much so that they saw it as more than ‘bricks and mortar’ and referred to it as ‘home’. In these cases, tenants sometimes expressed their reluctance to leave and move on to somewhere new. Often, being part of Sharing Solutions had actually changed tenants’ perceptions of sharing. For instance, one tenant who had never shared with anyone other than his family before said that he *“would share again in a heartbeat”*; another that she was *“not really in a rush...to go. If after six months I got priority and they said ‘you’ve got to move to Parsons Cross’, I’d be like ‘no, I don’t wanna move’ because it’s not somewhere I wanna move and I’m happy where I am.”*

As well as the formal support provided by the housing projects and their staff, tenants also benefited from the more informal support networks comprised of their fellow housemates. The social aspects were commonly mentioned by tenants as what they enjoyed the most about sharing. Tenants who were strangers before they lived in the same property together had since bonded, had come to support each other - whether emotionally, practically, or financially - and were planning to move on to renting together when ready. Examples of this abound in the interviews with tenants and staff - when, for instance, the housing support officer asked one tenant of her best experience of Sharing Solutions she replied, *“you gave me my best friend.”* Several tenants mentioned the advantages of *“always having someone around”* which was better than perceived or actual experiences of feeling isolated in self-contained accommodation: *“if you’ve got problems, there are people around to talk to... you’re not shut up by yourself”*; *“if you’re feeling a bit down there’s always someone pottering about and you can have a chat.”* Having company and spending time in the communal areas was, at the same time, optional for tenants - who still had the freedom to retreat to their own rooms when they wanted - and this was contrasted to hostel life or larger HMOs where private space was often compromised by too many other sharers:

“I don’t think I would like it if there were like 50 people...it’s a good number here”; “I don’t think I’d like it because you’ve got more people to get on with and there might be clashing. I think one’s enough.”

Access to training and skills programmes prepared and empowered tenants for future routes into independent living and tenancy sustainment

Engaging with training and skills programmes was a compulsory aspect of some schemes - at Nomad and Elmbridge Rentstart tenants had to attend pre-tenancy workshops in order to qualify for housing support; and at the Crisis Housing Coach Service, clients’ accessed housing support after attending classes of their own accord. In all cases, engaging with training was justified as necessary and in the best interests of clients. The Crisis Housing Coach Service received some feedback that they *“make clients ‘jump through hoops’ for accessing their housing service”* but the housing coach reported that this was essential for fostering the ‘life-skills’ that led to improved tenancy sustainment for clients.

Feedback from tenants on their enjoyment of the training programmes was mixed, with some not finding it very useful if they had completed similar workshops in the past (*“I just thought let’s just hurry up and get the four weeks out the way kind of thing”*; *“they were pretty boring but...”* *“It was budgeting, drugs awareness, that sort of stuff, but I’d already done that with Rush House”*), and others finding the training invaluable in terms of learning the skills necessary for independent living in the private rented sector and elsewhere: Craig (see vignette above) felt that engaging with the training courses on offer was *“keeping [him] on the straight and narrow”*; Faye (see vignette below) had learnt how to budget which helped her manage household bills more efficiently and had boosted her confidence; and Paul (see vignette below) was more aware of the rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords as a result of attending the pre-tenancy

training at The Crisis Housing Coach Service, and felt more confident in negotiating the housing market in the future.

Faye (Sheffield)

Faye came to Nomad after spending four years sofa-surfing at friends' and relatives' houses. Faye understandably found this experience difficult: *"I didn't have my own space, I didn't have anything, I didn't socialise with anybody"*. She later tried moving back in with her mother, but their relationship broke down. Faye had tried applying for social housing through the council but found out she was not classed as *"priority need"*, but was referred to the Sharing Solutions project at Nomad. At first, Faye was slightly apprehensive about the prospect of sharing: *"I was a bit scared because I'd never been in shared before but now I like it, I enjoy it."* Faye found that she had benefited significantly from the Nomad training flats, the workshops and the support offered as part of the scheme: *"while I've been here, it's boosted my confidence a bit more...I'm not sleeping on settees and I've got my own space. My confidence has gone up a lot. I never used to be able to... I used to cry at everything... talking about my situation and stuff."* Attending several of the workshops had been a great help for Faye, in developing her knowledge notably around budgeting and drugs awareness: *"I wasn't aware of a lot of drugs. I knew what cannabis was but anything else I didn't know – I found it useful."* Faye received weekly house visits from the housing support officer at Nomad and found these invaluable: *"it's just having someone there. Say like you said about reports on the property and stuff like that; just having someone to having a little chin wag with as well. If I've got any problems she's there, she'll deal with it. If a letter's come and I don't understand she'll deal with it."* Faye has learnt a great deal about managing a household whilst at Nomad, and even helped her housemate with the budgeting and shopping. Although Faye had made the most of her time at Nomad so far, she still expressed a desire to move on to her own accommodation when the time was right: *"I wouldn't want to be in this position permanently. I enjoy being here but... in my room, I'll be in there mostly. I just come down and cook, I don't really eat here... so having your own living room and stuff... being able to get in the bath and have the door open and stuff like that..."*

Paul (London)

Paul had been living in a hostel prior to moving to the Sharing Solutions scheme: *"[I was] not too keen on living there, it was a bit rough to be honest... the condition wasn't really alright, there were too many people as well."* Paul had been living in his current shared house since August 2014 and much preferred this living situation to being in the hostel. He was currently sharing with three other people and although Paul had not met them before it did not cause too much anxiety given that he had shared with more people before at the hostel: *"three people would definitely be better than ten so I knew it was going to be easier."* Paul had faced barriers in the past when trying to access the private rented sector, most notably around affordability: *"with the deposit as well it was too much."*

Not being satisfied with his housing situation in the hostel, Paul talked to the hostel manager, and was then signposted to Crisis. Although slightly anxious about sharing before he moved in (*"I wasn't sure what I was going to find out... but everything went well"*), Paul now has a good relationship with the other sharers in the house and enjoys the social aspect of sharing: *"the friendship we have now, we have a great relationship now."* Paul engaged well with the training on offer at Crisis and feels that he has benefited from this. He is doing two extra courses with Crisis (learning English and taekwondo) as well as having completed two weeks pre-tenancy training, which included managing relationships with landlords, preparing for a viewing, deposits and deposit policies, and tenant rights and responsibilities: *"now when I get my own place I'd know what I'm doing."*

Paul mentioned some challenges of sharing: *"when you do the rota of the house, who's cleaning this, who's cleaning that... sometimes it's just a bit confusing"* but importantly had learnt how to cope with these (*"you just gotta get used to it"*). Paul would still prefer to have his own place eventually but accepted that sharing was the best option in the present: *"I would rather have my own place but right now it's too expensive but it's okay... at the moment that's what it is."* Although the tenancy was for six months, Paul was hoping the landlord would extend this, until Paul was ready to move on to the next step (*"next step is I definitely want to get my own place"*).

Sharing Solutions provided tenants with an affordable housing option

Sharing was also a more viable option for tenants simply because it was more affordable than other housing options – for under-35s subject to the SAR and even for those over 35 – such as living in self-contained private rented sector accommodation and some hostels. Although most tenants would have ideally preferred to have ‘their own place’, they had come to accept that this would not have been possible given their current financial circumstances and their reduced LHA entitlement. One scheme mentioned the initial challenges involved in attempting to help tenants make that realisation:

“Sometimes this is a bit of a reality check for people because one thing that does come across all the time is when we tell people ‘we can help you find a room in a shared house’ they say ‘I don’t want that, I want a one-bedroom flat’. So part of this [workshop] is looking at why you can’t have a one-bedroom flat, how much that would cost, and how much you’re actually going to get in HB...and looking at the difference between being in a one bedroom flat... you’re gonna be working and coming home and you’re not going anywhere else; if you’re living in a shared property you’ve got a little bit of money to play with so you can have a social life as well.”

Sharing was also a more accessible option for tenants who were not entitled to any additional priority on the affordable housing register. Many tenants cited affordability as a common barrier to accessing the private rented sector, in terms of rental prices and the potential shortfall between LHA rates and local housing market rents, as well as the cost of the deposit and other administrative fees charged by letting agents (see James’ vignette below). Several schemes supported tenants financially by covering tenants’ deposits and letting agent fees, paying for a month’s rent in advance, including utility and

other bills in the rent payments or under a small service charge, or by training tenants to budget their own finances more effectively and running money management courses.

Sharing meant that tenants were not only left with more disposable income after rent payments but could actually access the private rented sector where previously high upfront costs meant they were excluded. One tenant mentioned how he found it easier to manage keeping up with paying his rent since all bills were included; as such, this tenant had managed to save up for a deposit on a self-contained property. Another tenant saw the main benefit of sharing as being its affordability:

“It’s cheaper... Shelter paid deposit and helped go through the tenancy agreement...I’ve managed it because it’s pretty cheap this place to be honest.”

However, it was rare that tenants saved money through shared utilities or food costs. Two exceptions were in CAB WHABAC and Elmbridge Rentstart. In the former, two tenants split the cost of the food shopping; and in the latter, one tenant remarked that sharing Wi-Fi and household bills worked out cheaper in shared accommodation than in self-contained. In most schemes, we found that tenants took sole responsibility for their food shopping, utility bills and other household costs – most tenants ate meals separately in their rooms and had their own cupboard space.

James (Plymouth)

James had previously had a house share for about a month, but had been sofa surfing for about four months and had slept rough on a few occasions. He was claiming Job Seekers Allowance. James explained he was able to search for accommodation as he had a laptop and while sofa surfing was able to use the internet at the property but reported a lack of available properties; only a maximum of eight properties were available at the time of interview. In addition to the lack of properties, James suggested affordability was problematic *“It was more of the price really, a lot of it was asking quite a lot.”* James was aware that the rental prices were above the amount he could claim on housing benefit and was worried about making up the shortfall. When James had the opportunity to take up lodging he explained he didn't really view the scheme as lodging but saw it as house sharing, which he was happy to do: *“as long as I can afford it with help from housing benefit, I would happily take it.”* James spoke positively about the additional help he had received for the project worker, she *“helped with budgeting, making sure I have enough money left over for myself to live on basically...”* James had been struggling previously with his finances.

6.3 Outcomes for landlords

Discussion now turns to the outcomes for landlords involved with the Sharing Solutions programme, including their motivations to work with participating schemes, how the partnership benefited them, and how they envisaged the partnership continuing into the future.

Vetted tenants

Several landlords remarked that working in partnership with the respective Sharing Solutions schemes gave them confidence about the tenants who would be living in their properties. They trusted that staff from the scheme would act as mediators, in a sense, and would only refer suitable tenants who had been through various 'checks', and who would take care of the property and abide by the terms in their tenancy or license agreements. As one independent landlord from Great Yarmouth said, *“It gives me a little more confidence in terms of the people that are prospective tenants than simply getting somebody out of the paper.”* It also made the process of finding tenants much simpler and quicker for this landlord: *“If I have a vacancy, generally I will call them up, see if he's got anybody that potentially might be suitable before then taking other steps to advertise.”*

Complex pasts or offending histories did not necessarily rule all tenants out for some landlords, as another anecdote from the Great Yarmouth landlord demonstrates:

“One of my earlier tenants... he had a very long criminal record for burglary and that sort of thing. He came through Shelter and convinced Shelter that all this was behind him and now he wanted to sort out his life. Shelter gave me a brief indication of his background. I met him and I was convinced that actually he needed a fresh start. So I accepted him as a tenant.”

That the tenant had come to this landlord via Shelter and was engaging with their support helped in this case. For landlords, then, being involved with Sharing Solutions meant that they were introduced to suitable,

'vetted', tenants through *trusted* mediators – this cut out the advertising process for landlords and saved them time and money in the short and long term. It also reduced the risk of 'delinquent tenancies', as tenants were vetted by schemes' selection criteria on their likelihood of being able to sustain a tenancy. It also *helped* if schemes already had an existing relationship with participating landlords and were therefore trusted by them (some landlords had been working with schemes for a long period prior to their involvement with Sharing Solutions) – this was not always the case though and several schemes successfully engaged landlords they had not worked with before (the independent landlord was introduced to Shelter through the Local Authority). Local context also played a part, such as in Worcester and Sheffield where student property markets were changing and purpose-built student accommodation was replacing shared student houses.

Supported tenants and landlords

All Sharing Solutions schemes offered intensive support packages for tenants, at all stages of the tenancy – this included pre-tenancy training so that tenants are 'renting-ready'; ongoing support throughout the tenancy; and follow-up support when tenants were ready to move on. Most schemes were able to offer this level of support due to their relatively small client (and landlord) numbers, and as one project worker from the Crisis Housing Coach Service highlighted, this would not have been possible to do if dealing with a high number of clients. Having an expert worker on hand was considerably advantageous, to help deal with issues for tenants and for landlords themselves. In the Shelter Great Yarmouth scheme, *"Shelter is there... they've always made it very clear if there is any issue at all, either from the tenant's point of view or from my point of view, or if they have issues with their benefits or anything, he's there to provide additional support to the tenant."* Likewise, either tenants or landlords could draw on

the advice and support available at CAB WHABAC if any issues arose and this could be resolved quickly – for instance, if there were any problems with a tenant's Housing Benefit payments. As a stakeholder at CAB WHABAC remarked, *"if there's a problem... with HB or there's an issue in the house... we want to resolve it; we don't want anyone to become homeless. So they've got someone for free that will be there to look out for them."* There was a general consensus, then, that supported tenants would mean more sustainable tenancies as any problems (with benefits, housing, individuals) could be resolved before they got out of hand and jeopardised the tenancy.

Some schemes offered additional and relatively intensive landlord support. CAB WHABAC, for instance, had a specific landlord worker who produced and sent out newsletters to landlords with up-to-date information about new regulations, funding, energy schemes, and changes in legislation.

As well as supported tenants being good for landlords, some of the landlords interviewed cited philanthropic reasons for being involved with a scheme which supported tenants – that it was good for the sake of the *tenants* – and this fitted with their original vision and social responsibility, as social landlords with charitable status. South Yorkshire Housing Association, one of the landlords working with Nomad, stated:

"We don't benefit [from working with Nomad] whatsoever. There may be a slight financial benefit in the sense that we make a slight profit on our dealings with the managing agent but because we're a charity, that just goes back into the service. So there's no financial incentive as such."

Rather, working with Nomad on the Sharing Solutions scheme was a 'historical principled decision' which brought SYHA the reassurance that their tenants were in 'good accommodation' with access to intensive support:

“The original incentive was so we could know that our customers were in good properties because we’re the landlord, and if they needed supported accommodation and they needed that specialist input, we could bring it in from the third sector. And that relationship just continued because it’s just part of South Yorkshire Housing’s being.”

Similarly, the Crisis Housing Coach Service mentioned that some of their landlords were on board with the Sharing Solutions scheme due to benevolent, cultural or religious reasons, in offering LHA claimants rooms while not making much of a profit. And the landlord from Great Yarmouth, knowing that the general standard of shared accommodation in the area was fairly low, asserted:

“When I decided to venture into offering shared accommodation I bought a property and did it up to quite a high spec and wanted to make sure that the accommodation I offered was what I would have been happy living in when I was at that stage in my life because I’d seen quite a lot of rubbish accommodation to be honest.”

Stability of rental yields and ‘micro-management’

Though financial gains or profitability were not given as major incentives or outcomes for landlords, there were still some financial advantages to working with the various Sharing Solutions schemes. One such advantage was having a guarantee of rent payments from tenants, or at least a greater likelihood of receiving them given the support from project staff. The service manager at CAB WHABAC hinted that participating landlords were actually not making as much in rent now as they were doing previously but that this was a small compromise considering what they got out of the scheme. Eviction through longstanding non-payment of rent was seen as such a complex and convoluted

process that landlords wished to avoid at all costs, so being able to work in partnership with a support agency who would work with tenants to help them manage rent payments was a significant pull factor.

Certain schemes also offered to pay tenants’ deposits and first month’s rent upfront which meant that landlords could take on that tenant:

“If tenants came to me through the paper I wouldn’t have taken them because they wouldn’t have been able to provide me with rent in advance.” (Independent Landlord, Shelter, Great Yarmouth)

Schemes also helped with other aspects of household and tenancy management, making sure the property was well looked after by tenants and kept in a state of good repair. Schemes therefore acted as ‘micro-managers’ of properties. CAB WHABAC carried out formal and informal property checks, or could ‘keep an eye on the property’, during weekly house visits. Most schemes employed cleaners, particularly for communal areas, which also worked to maintain property standards.

6.4 Summary

Although it is difficult to clearly assess what in particular contributed to **tenants’ outcomes** in sharing without tracking tenants in the long-term, it is evident that sharing as part of Sharing Solutions was a largely positive experience, and provided tenants with stable and secure housing in a supportive environment. Specifically, tenants benefited from Sharing Solutions in the following ways:

- The acquisition and development of skills necessary for independent living and tenancy maintenance
- Increased confidence as a result of the above
- The space and support to focus on and improve other aspects of their lives

- Having a ‘safety net’ of support to cope with issues that might otherwise put tenancies at risk, and
- Being financially ‘better off’

There were a number of ways that schemes helped to make the experience of sharing more successful for tenants:

- Offering intensive support packages - this tended to work better when staff could go to tenants (offering regular house visits, for instance) rather than when tenants were expected to seek the support themselves
- Tenants were happier when sharing with a smaller number of people, and contrasted this with their experience of sharing at hostels
- Including bills in one rent payment meant that tenants could manage their finances and budget more effectively
- Employing a cleaner for communal areas helped to prevent potential conflicts over cleaning responsibilities and to keep the property in good repair

Landlords benefited from tenants being supported and trained: supported and knowledgeable tenants were more likely to pay rent, look after their properties, and have a good relationship with their landlord. In this case, what worked for tenants simultaneously worked for landlords. As Section 5.6 demonstrated, landlords were attracted to schemes largely by non-financial incentives: because schemes acted as a trusted mediator who could ‘micro-manage’ any issues. The majority of outcomes were not specific to sharing necessarily, but revolved more around working with a trusted PRS access scheme and the support they provided in terms of management, tenant support, and financial help. However, this support was only viable for schemes to carry out through being part of the Sharing Solutions programme. This section has

shown that landlords benefited through their involvement with Sharing Solutions, summarised below:

- Landlords saved time and averted risk if tenants were referred by schemes who took responsibility for finding, assessing, vetting and matching potential tenants
- Supported tenants meant more sustainable (and less risky) tenancies as problems could be resolved before they got out of hand. Having access to expert support/project workers meant that landlords did not have to spend time supporting tenants or carrying out conflict management themselves
- Landlords benefited directly from the specific landlord support/advice on offer at CAB WHABAC and the London Housing Coach Service
- Landlords’ properties were kept in ‘good repair’ by schemes’ employment of a cleaner; and regular house visits where project staff could conduct informal property checks
- Landlords received some financial gain through more stable rental yields, a reduced propensity to be forced to evict, and pre-payment of deposits and the first month’s rent

7. Conclusions

7.1 Conclusions

The increased pressure on housing markets across the country, as the result of lack of supply, patterns of new household formation, persistent affordability pressures, and reductions in housing and other welfare benefits make it inevitable that more people will move into shared accommodation as the most financially viable solution to their housing needs. However, there is also a reluctance to enter into sharing with ‘strangers’ rather than family members or friends, and these concerns are highlighted for many members of vulnerable groups facing challenges such as living with others, gaining access to the PRS, and then sustaining a tenancy. In terms of supply, landlords are also often reluctant to take on shared accommodation due to the management complexities (and costs) that can arise (for example on termination of tenancy) and because they fear returns may be lower than in self-contained. In this context, Sharing Solutions is an opportune programme which has been able to test out various ideas for making shared accommodation a more attractive option for tenants and landlords alike. The evidence in this report suggests that a number of the potential barriers to developing more shared accommodation can be overcome, if additional support, effective partnership working and the dissemination of good practice are to the fore.

The aims of the Sharing Solutions programme were threefold:

- To develop new models to encourage and support landlords to rent their properties to the SAR claimants;
- To improve the availability of shared accommodation; and,
- To improve the support for tenants to sustain their tenancies.

The analysis of the eight pilot schemes suggests that the programme has met the first two of these aims and is on course to meet the third, though it is too early to assess the longer term sustainability of the various shared accommodation arrangements that have emerged. As Chapter 3 demonstrated, Crisis has successfully delivered the programme and its involvement has provided added value. It successfully developed and supported the eight pilot projects throughout England, in contrasting housing markets. In the process, Crisis has reinforced its reputation as a leading national organisation in policy debates and innovations around the future development of the private rented sector, especially in terms of the needs of single people who are homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless.

The programme has also raised awareness about how to deal with some of the challenges of shared accommodation through various dissemination activities, such as this report, the publication of the Sharing Solutions Toolkit, the Practitioners Forum organised by Crisis and the network of PRS Access Projects will contribute to this process. But much more will need to be done in the future to share good practice - not just from the eight pilot projects but more widely. There are few standard ‘off-the-shelf’ practices that can be advocated across all areas, as their utility and relevance will inevitably be mediated by the local housing market context - whether there is a prominent student market or not, whether there is an established culture of sharing, whether it is a low or high demand area, whether the PRS is dominated by a few large professional landlords and agents, or by a host of smaller landlords.

The Sharing Solutions programme has demonstrated that shared accommodation can be made to work effectively for low-income tenants who are in receipt of welfare

benefits, given intensive support and training. This in turn requires both additional funding and expertise of working in the sector, which is at a premium in many local areas. This review of the eight pilot schemes indicated that staff, volunteers and stakeholders all understood the needs of the client groups involved and had experience of engaging with, and intervening in, the private rented sector. However, their capacity to develop sustainable networks and ways of working is inevitably hampered by their reliance on grant funding. The specific funds for the programme made available by DCLG had a very positive impact. The programme provided assistance for around 200 clients over an 18 month period. By January 2015 it had provided accommodation to 172 clients and at the time of writing only 19 of these tenancies had ended for negative reasons.

But in the current (and future) spending climate, it is essential that any new scheme can produce savings as well as meet housing needs. The use of the Crisis Making it Count tool showed that there was a total gross saving (through reducing homelessness) of £625,000 per quarter, against a cost of £120,000. For every £1 of grant funding, £5.21 of savings was generated. The positive outcomes for tenants and landlords discussed in this report indicate that investment in PRS access projects to promote sharing solutions is a worthwhile and cost effective policy. But it requires the funds, and the political will, to kick-start schemes, and intensive support is required to sustain tenancies in the long-run - both to assist the tenant, and to incentivise landlords to rent their properties to vulnerable people. This comes at a price; but this report shows that the eventual benefits of programmes like Sharing Solutions will soon outweigh these costs, if they can thereby prevent an increase in homelessness among this 'at risk' group on the margins of the housing market.

7.2 Recommendations

Recommendations for private rented sector access schemes

- Extend the use of training flats, especially in partnership with the housing association sector, and with detailed prior client assessment, compulsory training and regular contact with a support worker
- Develop 'lead tenant' schemes, with appropriate incentives, especially in areas where there is little culture of sharing
- Promote pre-tenancy training, and ensure that courses consider issues around shared accommodation
- Provide worked examples of possible financial gains for landlords letting at the SAR as opposed to self-contained accommodation (e.g. stability of rental yields, reducing the propensity to be forced to evict, pre-payment of deposits)
- Provide examples of possible management gains for landlords participating in schemes similar to Sharing Solutions (e.g. undertaking more comprehensive tenant vetting on their behalf)
- Extend the range of options for prospective tenants - e.g. lodgings in the social housing sector - coupled with vigorous host recruitment and training and written lodgings agreements; this will be more applicable in tighter housing markets
- Work with local universities to develop links with larger landlords who specialise in the student market to encourage broadening their offer to HB/LHA tenants, especially where purpose-built student accommodation is planned for expansion
- Encourage private landlords to apply for Empty Homes grants to use properties subsequently for sharing
- Undertake a 'health check' of tenancies in

shared accommodation at least every two months

- Further develop the peer mentor scheme piloted by The Crisis Housing Coach Service. This received positive feedback, as clients responded well to peers who had experienced similar difficulties and hardships, but a well-resourced programme of support needs to be in place to ease the transition from service user to volunteer

Recommendations for local authorities

- Fund or provide match funding for a range of options for prospective tenants - e.g. lodgings in the social housing sector - coupled with vigorous host recruitment and training and written lodgings agreements
- Promote wider use of the Rent-a-Room scheme by owner occupiers
- Use Discretionary Housing Payments to ease access to shared accommodation (through paying deposits etc.)
- Use Discretionary Housing Payments to support groups and individuals that struggle to access shared accommodation
- Prioritise Empty Homes grants for landlords to use to renovate their properties to shared houses

Wider recommendations for organisations working with (young) people accessing shared accommodation

- Appraise all applicants of their realistic chances of being rehoused - to concentrate minds on other options and manage expectations
- Offer support and financial advice to first-time sharers prior to gaining tenancies - through workshops, and on-line support
- Housing associations should consider taking on tenant matching and tenancy management responsibilities in shared

accommodation from private landlords

Recommendations for government

- Provide additional funding for PRS access schemes to set up, trial and establish sharing schemes
- Promote sharing to local authorities as a viable housing option but in doing so recognise and highlight the additional resource, staffing and support capacity which is required to make schemes successful
- Promote existing good practice across all Government departments whose work impact on those subject to the SAR
- The government should review the operation of the Shared Accommodation Rate and consider in particular, a) whether it is working adequately in all housing markets, and b) whether exemptions from the SAR are adequate to meet the needs of under-35s with specific housing needs

Recommendations for Crisis

- Promote the success of the models trialled by the Sharing Solutions Schemes elsewhere to allay some of the specific concerns about sharing from this group of tenants
- Promote the use of landlord/property sharing protocols to areas with a large PRS outside London
- Promote Practitioners' Forums in larger PRS housing markets (for example, Greater Manchester, West Midlands) following the London example
- Work with local authority associations, the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH), the National Housing Federation (NHF), the Residential Landlords Association (RLA) and the National Landlords Association (NLA) to promote good practice in the management and development of shared accommodation

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Appendix 1. Sharing Solutions pilot scheme descriptions

1. Nomad Opening Doors (Sheffield)

Nomad Opening Doors - a charity and not-for-profit company based in Sheffield - provides housing support to individuals and families as part of the Burngreave Tenancy Support Scheme. The organisation now operates its Sharing Solutions scheme and the *Smart Renting* project - their private rented sector access scheme.

<http://www.nomadsheffield.co.uk/>

Local context

While a sharing culture exists in Sheffield (being a university town), it is not prevalent amongst Nomad's clients. It is becoming increasingly difficult to accommodate clients who are eligible for the SAR only. The city's student housing market has undergone transformation over the past five years. More purpose built student accommodation has reduced demand for more traditional Victorian terraced shared properties.

Nomad's Sharing Solutions Scheme

When running Smart Renting, Nomad noticed a core group of clients who it felt ill equipped and resourced to support; they were not 'priority need' but had support needs that made them unsuitable to move directly into the PRS and were a high risk for tenancy failure.

The project works in partnership with South Yorkshire Housing Association (SYHA) who provides a number of properties that Nomad uses to accommodate clients on 'training tenancies'. SYHA provide landlord services and Nomad provides intensive tenancy support. The training tenancy lasts a maximum of six months and tenants sign a protected license agreement.

Nomad runs compulsory tenancy training workshop for its Sharing Solutions clients, and work closely with Crisis Skylight to offer clients education and training opportunities.

2. CAB WHABAC (Worcester)

Worcester Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and Worcester Housing and Benefits Advice Centre (WHABAC) work across all strands of advice, and with vulnerable people to help them with their housing situations. This includes providing support, running shared houses and self-contained housing through the SmartLets scheme, and a deposit guarantee scheme called SmartMove. CAB WHABAC operates in the Worcester and run outreach work in the Wyre Forest district.

<http://www.cabwhabac.org.uk/>

Local context

Competition from students has inflated the price of accommodation in Worcester. The student population has ‘mushroomed’ in the past 5 to 10 years, particularly in St. John’s where the university is located. People claiming LHA are finding it increasingly difficult to access the PRS, and access to social housing is limited. Shared accommodation (outside the ‘student market’) is reportedly in very short supply.

CAB WHABAC’s Sharing Solutions Scheme

There are two main strands to the pilot scheme: a sharing project for fathers with non-resident children; and the promotion of shared housing for under 35s as part of their SmartShare scheme.

The shared house for the fathers project has five bedrooms, four of which are father’s own rooms; and the fifth bedroom has bunk beds for non-resident children, an annex room with a single bed (so the father can be in the next room), and an en-suite. This project addresses the gap in provision of decent shared accommodation, which is suitable for children to stay overnight. All prospective tenants go through police checks before signing the tenancy.

Both aspects of the project include intensive support, with a Housing Project Worker visiting the houses once a week. The project has partnerships with Worcester City Council, Wyre Forest District Council, several housing associations and local charities who supply furniture, other ‘essentials’ and offer financial advice.

3. Shelter (Great Yarmouth)

Shelter is a national housing and homelessness advice charity, providing advice to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness or threatened with eviction. Shelter Great Yarmouth have an interest in the private rented sector, as they see it becoming a more common and viable option for people who cannot receive support through their local authority or housing associations.

<http://england.shelter.org.uk/>

Local context

Private rents are high in the area and those on the SAR are paying an average weekly ‘top-up’ of £9. There is a shortage of shared accommodation, and a lack of a ‘sharing culture’. Many landlords are reportedly reticent about letting to single younger people claiming housing benefit.

Shelter’s Sharing Solutions Scheme

Sharing Solutions is different from the rest of the work that Shelter does; they only have one other private rented sector project in the South West of England. The priority aim of the project is to help young people who are either homeless or moving on from hostel

accommodation to make a start in the PRS.

Crisis asked Shelter to initially concentrate on issues that young fathers face around sharing but in the end, young fathers did not make up a large proportion of their client group. Instead the project has focused on supporting young people who were making the transition from hostel accommodation to the private rented sector. Project partners include Great Yarmouth Borough Council and Great Yarmouth YMCA.

4. The Crisis Housing Coach Service (London)

The Crisis Housing Coach Service is based at Crisis Skylight London which is primarily a learning and skills centre. Their projects take a holistic approach to helping people around the strands of housing, wellbeing/mental health/mindfulness, and employment. It provides clients with in-depth pre-tenancy support focusing on acquiring the skills necessary for a move into independent living.

<http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/crisis-prs-housing-service-.html>

Local context

The PRS market in London has become even more competitive in the past six months. The average London rent is £600 per week, and people seeking accommodation at LHA rates are finding it very difficult. In addition, properties available in the more affordable end of the market are of poor quality. And, there is a reported trend towards landlords converting HMOs to studio flats to maximise rent yields and avoid HMO licensing costs.

The Crisis Housing Coach Service Sharing Solutions Scheme

The pilot scheme works to access shared accommodation for Crisis clients who are undertaking pre-tenancy training. To assist with this, the project has supported 'Peer Mentors' to provide encouragement, assistance and support to clients moving into shared accommodation, and has appointed 'lead tenants' to make shared accommodation more harmonious and stable. In addition, the pilot scheme manages and hosts a pan-London practitioners' forum to share good practice and discuss common issues surrounding sharing with other private rented sector access schemes.

5. PATH (Plymouth)

PATH provides a range of homeless prevention services including a rough sleeper's team, a Housing Information Support Team and a rent deposit scheme. They are currently working toward setting up a lettings agency.

<http://www.plymouthpath.org/>

Local context

PATH operates in both Plymouth and Teignbridge - areas with different PRS markets. Recent new build by the University in Plymouth has released property previously rented by students, providing opportunities for increasing shared accommodation for PATH's clients. Rents are around £70 per week and within the LHA rate. Teignbridge however, has high rents generally and fewer properties available at the LHA rate (and landlords are reluctant to accept those on benefits) It also has fewer properties available at the LHA rate.

PATH's Sharing Solutions Scheme

Although originally designed to help tenants facing the bedroom tax rent rooms out, DHP has negated this need to some degree. Those involved with the project as landlords are mainly home owners who are interested in renting rooms for whatever reason - some altruistic but mainly for extra cash. The Sharing Solutions project fits neatly within the PATH team and is mainly about opening up the idea of sharing. Sharing solutions is complementary to the existing work of PATH.

6. Foundation (Ryedale)

The programme is led by Foundation a registered Social Landlord and Charity. The programme is co-located within the local authority and compliments the work the Housing Solutions Team, adding a sharing element to their housing offer.

<https://www.foundationuk.org/home.html>

Local context

While the PRS does support those seeking accommodation at LHA rates, under 35s are now struggling to find affordable properties to rent. The vast majority of rooms available to rent are around £12-15 per week higher than the LHA rate (around £66), meaning that many of Foundation's clients are paying a 'top-up'. Landlords are generally willing to rent properties to LHA claimants and the local authority offer a local bond/ rent in advance scheme to ease access to the PRS.

Foundation's Sharing Solutions Scheme

The project's initial focus was to establish a lodgings scheme by accessing rooms with social housing tenants affected by the removal of the spare room subsidy (RSRS). However, this proved challenging due to a lack of interest from social sector households as DHP was mitigating RSRS and a housing association who was originally keen to be involved have withdrew. The scheme changed tack to promoting sharing as a housing solution and challenging the lack of sharing culture that exists locally.

7. Elmbridge Rentstart

Elmbridge Rentstart is a charitable organisation established in 2001 to assist single people and childless couples on low income to access accommodation in the private rented sector. It runs a range of PRS access services including a deposit guarantee schemes, housing advice and support and has helped to establish an emergency night shelter. Rentstart receives funding from Elmbridge Borough Council, Crisis, Walton Charity, Homeless Link and Thames Homeless Project.

<http://elmbridgerentstart.org.uk/>

Local context

The borough consists of a collection of relatively small towns and villages. There are very few HMOs and there is no established culture of sharing. Rental prices are very high and finding accommodation at or near LHA rates is increasingly difficult. Tenants are very reliant on Discretionary Housing Payments, however, this is becoming more difficult to access for the PRS as DHP is also supporting residents affected by removal of the spare room subsidy. Changes to the Shared Accommodation Rate have had a negative impact on the Borough, which had a high proportion of single men in 1 bed flats.

Rentstart's Sharing Solutions Scheme

Elmbridge Rentstart's clients fall broadly into two categories: those who have no experience of sustaining a tenancy and require training and support; and those who are more experienced but are 'having a difficult time'. In order to better support the former group of clients, Sharing Solutions funding has enabled the project to develop four properties; two for use as training tenancies and two as move-on accommodation. In addition, each shared house has a nominated 'peer tenant' who takes on additional tenancy responsibilities in return for a small incentive. All clients who sign up to the Sharing Solutions project must complete pre-tenancy training, which Rentstart provides in-house.

The properties used in the scheme are owned and managed by a local charitable housing provider. They were empty homes, and Rentstart used its connections with private businesses and other voluntary organisations to assist with their refurbishment. Lettings and rent collection are carried out by a local ethical lettings agency and RentStart underwrite any losses. In most cases, LHA is paid directly to the agent, who passes this onto the landlord.

Clients are allocated a training tenancy for 6 months. In the first month, a license agreement is used to give the project workers time to assess whether the client is suitable for shared accommodation. After that, tenants sign an AST. Tenants are supported by a Rentstart project worker who may visit the property or make contact with tenants once or twice a week. All clients are obliged to attend a course of tenancy training. Move-on properties are used to create a more effective housing pathway for Sharing Solutions clients. Clients can also be supported by Rentstart's deposit guarantee scheme.

8. Oasis Aquila Housing (Gateshead)

Oasis Aquila Housing is a housing charity based in the North East of England which delivers a wide range of services for vulnerably housed and homeless people. Services include supported accommodation, housing and support services for vulnerable families and services and accommodation for homeless people. This latter group of services includes a *No Second Night Out* scheme, a bond scheme, a mentoring scheme and a drop-in centre. The bond scheme, which has been running for four years, is partly funded by Crisis and this is where the organisation's Sharing Solution Pilot Scheme sits.

<http://www.oasisaquilahousing.org/>

Local context

There is a lack of shared accommodation in Gateshead, and there is no established culture of sharing. The city has very few HMOs. Rents for self-contained PRS accommodation are relatively affordable and properties are readily available. The LHA rate works well, and Gateshead is advantaged by the BRMA falling within more affluent areas of Newcastle and Tyneside. For example, the 1-bed LHA rate would be sufficient to privately rent a two-bed property. In addition, Tyne and Wear Homes, the region's choice-based lettings system, has an 'always available' service that provides relatively easy access to social rented housing. These factors have reinforced self-contained accommodation as the norm.

While the SAR changes have had an effect, the project reported that clients were willing to remain in hostel accommodation rather than move to shared accommodation, and in some cases this qualified them for the 1 bed rate of LHA.

Oasis Aquila's Sharing Solutions Scheme

Oasis Aquila Housing purchased and renovated several long-term empty properties, using an empty homes grant for DCLG. These properties were used for their Sharing Solutions pilot scheme. Initially Oasis Aquila intended to use them to accommodate clients of a three-month 'training tenancy'. However, they changed tack after struggling to stimulate sufficient demand, given the nature of the local housing market. Instead the properties were used to provide more settled, but shared, accommodation. The pilot scheme trialled the use of a lead tenant model, and has also offered 'taster tenancies' for people who were reluctant to share.

About Crisis

Crisis is the national charity for single homeless people. Our purpose is to end homelessness.

Crisis helps people rebuild their lives through housing, health, education and employment services. We work with thousands of homeless people across the UK and have ambitious plans to work with many more.

We are also determined campaigners, working to prevent people from becoming homeless and to change the way society and government think and act towards homeless people.

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Homelessness ends here