

St
Martin
in
the
Fields

**Frontline
Network**

COVID-19 and Homelessness: The New Frontline

The St Martin-in-the-Fields Charity
response through grant making

Published Autumn 2020

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Acknowledgements

Our thanks go to the frontline workers that have supported people experiencing homelessness throughout the pandemic – adapting the way they work and continuing to provide essential support at one of the most challenging times in our recent history. Thank you to those who completed the Emergency Fund Survey as well as those who put in grant applications to support people experiencing homelessness. Thank you also to the VRF team and wider St Martin's Charity team who adapted quickly at the start of the pandemic and implemented remote working which successfully allowed us to deliver the Emergency Fund. Lastly, we would like to thank the OAK Foundation; Julia and Hans Rausing Trust; Brown Dog; The Sandra Charitable Trust; and The Mosawi Foundation for their support of the Emergency Fund.

We would like to thank all those who donated to the 2019 BBC Radio 4 Christmas Appeal with St Martin-in-the-Fields, and who gave so generously last year. Funds from the Appeal have contributed significantly to the Emergency Fund, supporting many thousands of people.



Methodology

The data contained within the report provides the grant data received through the VRF Emergency Fund. The data represents applications made between 8th April and 10th September. Although the Fund closed on the 28th August, decisions were still being made after the Fund was closed for applications that had been 'rolled back' (returned) to applicants for additional information needed before they could be assessed. Unless otherwise stated, the data excludes grants that were returned or cancelled. The data was exported on 16th September.

Introduction

St Martin-in-the-Fields Charity has a long history of supporting people experiencing homelessness. For over 90 years the BBC and St Martin-in-the-Fields have partnered to raise support from Radio 4 listeners to help people experiencing homelessness. In the last two years the Appeal has raised over £8 million.

The money we raise directly supports people through The Connection at St Martin-in-the-Fields and across the UK through the Vicar's Relief Fund and the Frontline Network. This year we have had the unprecedented challenge of responding to the COVID pandemic. While the country entered lockdown, we looked at how we could adapt the VRF (Vicar's Relief Fund) to meet the changing needs of those experiencing homelessness.

Within three weeks at the start of the national lockdown we had launched the VRF Emergency Fund, temporarily replacing the VRF. Over the course of the next five months we gave out more than 4,500 grants and distributed just over £1.65million in emergency funding across the UK.

This report presents a snapshot of the data we received through the applications made to the VRF Emergency Fund during this period.

We hope that this data will be a useful tool both for ourselves, in targeting our current and future resources, as well as for those working in the housing and homelessness sector or in roles that interface with the sector so that we may plan for and improve future responses to supporting people experiencing homelessness.

As we enter a period of local lockdowns and uncertainty about when life will return to 'normal', one thing that the pandemic has shown us is what is possible when the Government acts and we work together. Under the 'Everyone In' Initiative nearly 15,000 rough sleepers were accommodated in record time, and as a result of emergency legislation, renters have had some protection from eviction and longer notice periods during the pandemic. It is crucial that we don't lose this momentum and put into practice the support that we know has a positive impact on people experiencing homelessness.



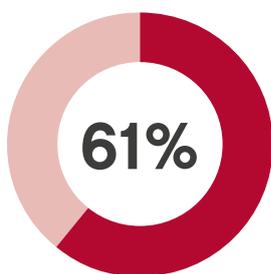
1. www.gov.uk/government/publications/letter-from-minister-hall-to-local-authorities

Listening to the Voice of Frontline Workers

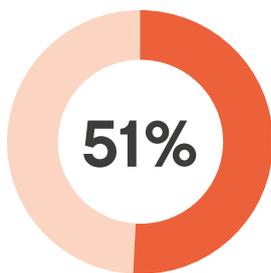
In the early weeks of the pandemic, we surveyed frontline workers² to see how the people they support had been affected by COVID-19. Between March 19th and March 30th we heard from 836 frontline workers – providing first-hand experience of the impact that the crisis was having on people experiencing homelessness. The response detailed both the urgent need for more support but also the huge impact that lockdown restrictions has had on support provision.

Over the short period that the survey was open, we saw an initial emphasis on basic items such as food being highlighted as an urgent need followed by an increasing need for appropriate accommodation for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, and a growing proportion of frontline workers saying that they needed the technology to be able to stay in contact with the people they support.

Key Findings



of frontline workers stated that the people they support urgently needed access to essential items whilst they were isolating



of frontline workers described how their ability to have direct contact with the people they support had been limited



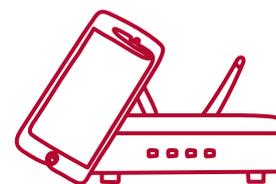
of frontline workers said that they needed funding to help the people they support access accommodation

The results from the survey led to the creation of three grant categories offered through the VRF Emergency Fund:

Basic Essential Needs (up to £150) – (including food, utility costs, and hygiene items)



Overcoming Barriers to Support (up to £400) – (including mobile phones and laptops, data credit, wifi, and ID)



Securing Accommodation (up to £1,000) – (access to accommodation including to specifically self-isolate and preventing eviction)



Applicants could seek support for each category required and we could consider repeat applications for the same individual under Basic Essential Needs. The VRF Emergency Fund categories were different to the VRF which had previously only offered grants for Accessing Accommodation or Preventing Eviction – reflecting the changing needs of individuals experiencing homelessness as the pandemic unfolded.

2. We define a frontline worker as anyone working in a paid position with people experiencing homelessness – from outreach workers to probation workers to welfare benefits advisers.

The Emergency Fund in Numbers

We received

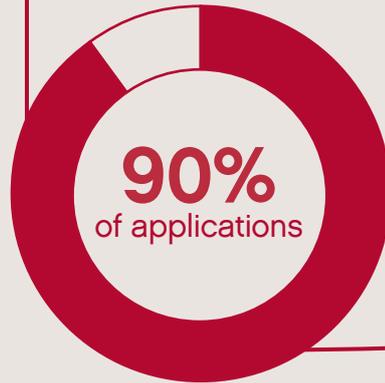
5,139

separate applications



We awarded

4,649 GRANTS



We made

4,649

grants comprising

5,136 AWARDS

across the three categories.³



3. This does not include 86 returned grants or 11 that were withdrawn.

In total

£1,665,209.57

in funding was awarded

With 92 standard days during which assessments took place, this is an average of

54

NEW APPLICATIONS
per assessment day

Of the 4,649 grants,

4,185 (90%)

included an award for one category,

441 (9%)

included two awards and 23 included awards under all three categories.

The Emergency Fund benefitted

6,866

people through these grants



The most common household size of grantees was

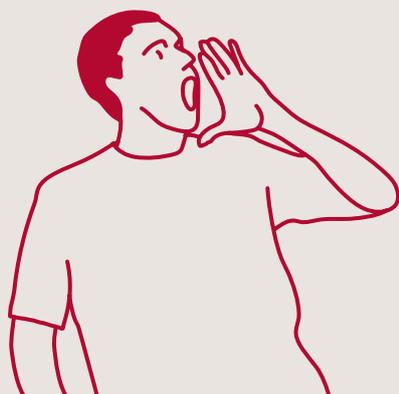
1 PERSON



We were able to award grants to a higher percentage of applications than under the previous VRF –

90% of Emergency Fund applications were successful

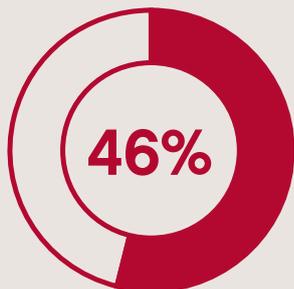
compared to 61% of VRF applications in the same months [April to August] of 2019. This was due to the increased availability of budget.



Note

During the course of the Emergency Fund we needed to make changes to our criteria to manage expenditure.

From 23rd July we closed the Basic Essential Needs and Overcoming Barriers to Support categories. We then reduced the amount that we would award for the Securing Accommodation category from £1000 to £500 on 5th August. We still considered awards above this limit for exceptional circumstances.



The most awarded category was Securing Accommodation



The highest spend was also in Securing Accommodation



	Basic Essential Needs	Overcoming Barriers to Support	Securing Accommodation
Awards	1,598	1,187	2,351
% of total awards	31%	23%	46%
Spend	£287,704	£227,889	£1,149,616
% of total spend	17%	14%	69%
Average award amount	£180	£192	£489

Comparing the VRF Emergency Fund to the VRF (Vicar's Relief Fund)

April to August

We spent 229% more in the five months of the VRF Emergency Fund than for VRF during the same time period 2019 (£1,665,209 compared to £505,745).

There were significant changes in regional distribution.

Greater London more than doubled its share (7% to 16%). The North West of England and Wales saw large reductions in their proportional allocation (22% to 13% and 18% to 10%, respectively).



The proportion of grants given to different household composition types did not change significantly overall.

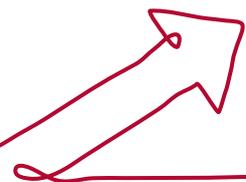


When comparing the VRF Emergency Fund with the VRF for the same period last year, we saw a reduction in the number of applicants who stated that they were currently 'sleeping rough'.

11% of beneficiaries of the VRF for April – August 2019 were 'street homeless' whereas only 5% of beneficiaries of the VRF Emergency Fund were 'sleeping rough'⁴.

8% of Securing Accommodation grants under the VRF Emergency Fund were for individuals who classed themselves as 'Rough Sleeping' compared to 14% of Accessing Accommodation grants for the same period of the VRF in 2019.

There was a 47% increase in the number of new user registrations we received.



We saw an increase in the number of applications from '3rd Sector General Advice / Support Agency – Homeless' services to the VRF Emergency Fund at 29% compared to 20% for the VRF.

We saw a drop in applications from Local Authority – General services

from 14% under the VRF to 6% under the VRF Emergency Fund, whilst applications from Local Authority – Housing Options / Homelessness Department held steady at 6% of applications for both the VRF and VRF Emergency Fund.

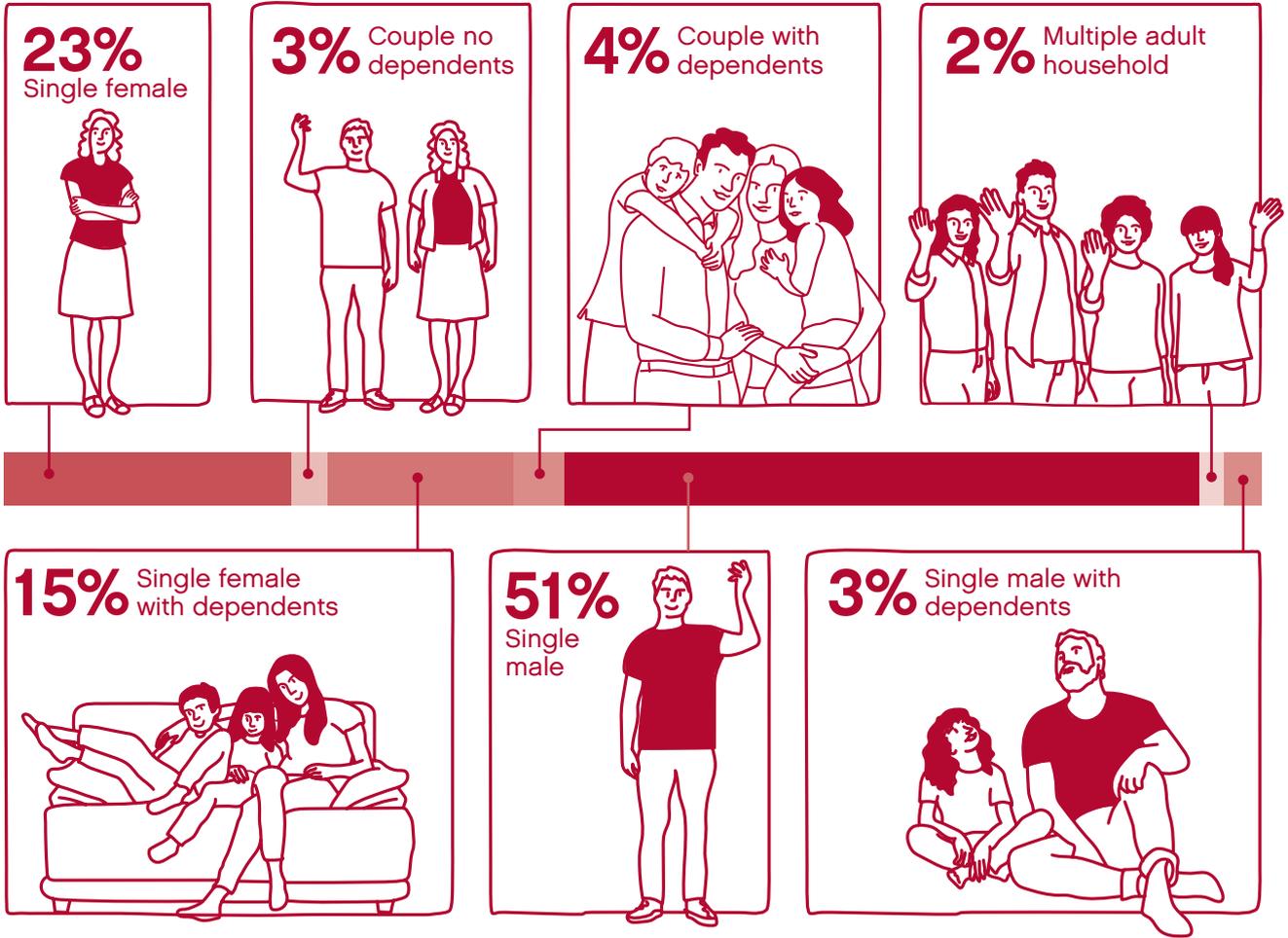


8% of grants were awarded to people with No Recourse to Public Funds under the VRF Emergency Fund. This is twice the proportion of successful applications for this client group during the same period for the VRF in 2019 (4%).

4. Whilst we worded the category of 'street homeless' and 'rough sleeping' differently for the VRF and VRF Emergency Fund, we are confident that these two groups will have been interpreted as the same by frontline workers completing the application form.

Beneficiaries

Household Composition



Regional Distribution



Note: The individual percentages presented within the two sections above add up to 101% due to rounding up.

What we Funded

Over the five months that the VRF Emergency Fund was open we awarded over £1.65 million in grants. This compares to a total of £1,586,471 spent on the VRF in the whole of the financial year 2019/20 – a significant increase. We facilitated this increase by reallocating resources and capacity internally to respond to the increased demand, as well as opening the VRF Emergency Fund five days a week, with morning and afternoon times allowing people to submit applications each day.



I would say that the VRF Emergency Fund was an amazing project that has helped to remove the barriers to accommodation for our customers. The money provided to our customers has helped them to unlock a new and secure future.

Frontline Worker, North East of England

Whilst the initial demand was for items which were classed under our Basic Essential Needs category, overall we gave out the most grants under our Securing Accommodation category – which also saw the highest level of spend at £1,149,616.

The Basic Essential Needs category focused on addressing immediate needs for items such as food and utilities as well as for items which might help someone successfully self-isolate – e.g. a fridge for an individual in shared accommodation.

One support worker told us that the client had just moved into a 3 bed housing association property with her children. For the previous 2 years she had been staying with family and friends, following a relationship breakdown. She and her children only had an air bed to sleep on and needed to furnish the property throughout. Her income from part-time work did not allow her to afford large items and she couldn't apply to the usual council grant for supports as it was closed for applications due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The grant allowed the family to sleep on beds and be able to cook their dinner at home.

The Overcoming Barriers to Support category provided grants which enabled individuals to keep in contact with their support workers and services – eg, accessing a domestic abuse support group online or providing the technology to access their Universal Credit account online or through a mobile.

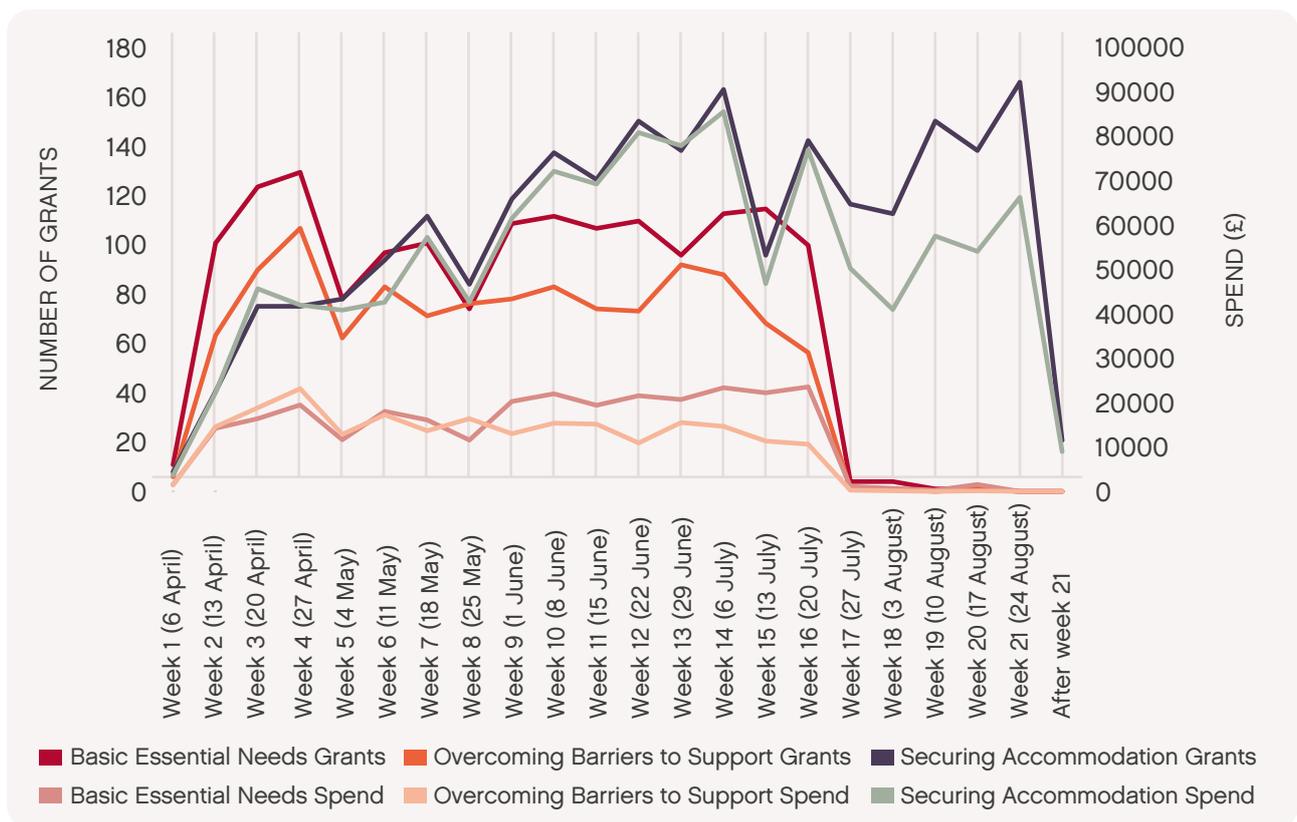
A support worker told us that the client had a phone but “no income whatsoever”, as he was awaiting a court hearing for a tribunal on his entitlement to benefits. This process was delayed due to COVID-19. Our grant allowed the client to purchase phone credit so he could communicate with the support agency helping him with his case, and to contact Housing and the local foodbank when needed. This gave him “a bit more control over his current situation”.

The Securing Accommodation category was very similar to the two grant categories that we operated under the VRF – Preventing Eviction and Accessing Accommodation. However, due to the suspension of evictions which came into place on 23rd March 2020, we didn't provide grants for rent arrears where there was no imminent threat of eviction. The only scenarios in which we would provide a grant for rent arrears is where the individual had a licence agreement rather than a tenancy or where they weren't protected under the Protection from Eviction Act 1977 – and so were still at risk of eviction despite the court suspension.

Whilst we explained within our grant criteria that we would not award for rent arrears where there wasn't an imminent risk of eviction, we still saw requests for rent arrears and specifically for rent arrears which had built up as a result of a loss of employment as a result of COVID-19. We chose not to fund these applications due to budget restrictions. However, it is worth highlighting that despite the suspension of evictions until September 21st and the extension of the notice period required, the imminent threat of eviction for these households has merely been delayed at this point – with no longer term remedy in place.

We were told by a support worker that the client was currently NFA [of no fixed abode] and needed financial support to be able to secure stable and suitable long-term accommodation. The client was released from custody and the plan for him to be accommodated in a Probation Approved Premises was withdrawn 2 working days prior to his release due to an administrative error. The usual accommodation options used by the local authority were significantly reduced as hostels had reduced numbers of residents to ensure social distancing, given their shared facilities. The client could not stay with family members due to some of them self-isolating and the restrictions on freedom movement. Our grant funded a temporary stay in a B&B to allow time for a longer-term accommodation plan to be developed for the client. This was explained by his support worker as “a protective factor which would directly reduce the risk of [him] committing further offences”.

Spend and number of grants given by category



Basic Essential Needs

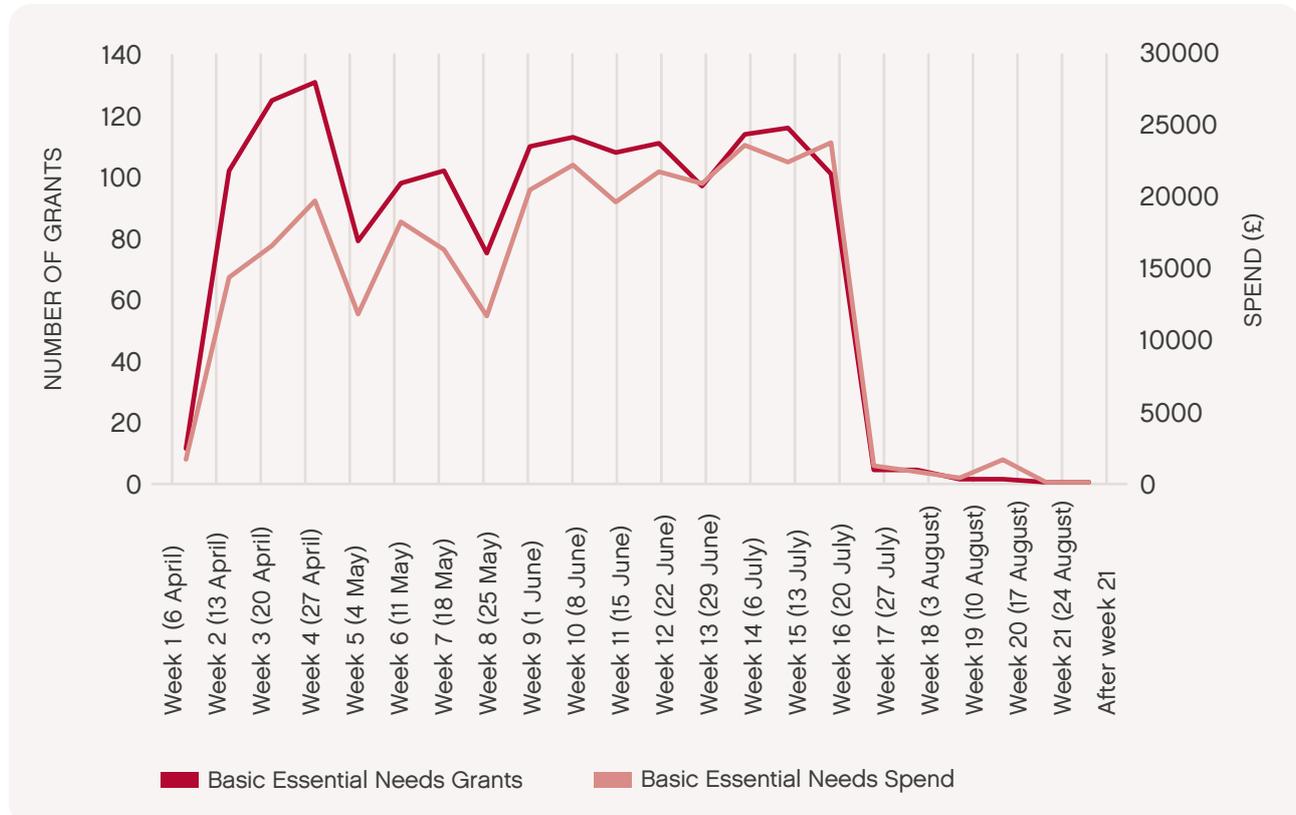
From the launch of the Fund until 15th May grants for Basic Essential Needs were the most requested grant category, with awards for Basic Essential Needs included in 47% of all grants awarded up to that point. Grant requests for this category continued in an upward trajectory until we closed this category as a result of reduced budget in Week 16.

“The clients we support are really struggling to get basic goods such as nappies/baby wipes and affordable staple foods such as pasta, bread and milk etc”. (Frontline Worker Survey Respondent, 2020)

Key Findings

- Exceptions to the advertised upper grant limit of £150 were particularly common for Basic Essential Needs, resulting in an average award of £180.04 (120% of the advertised upper limit).
- Basic Essential Needs grants were more likely than other categories to be made in combination with at least one other category.
- Prior to its closure as a category, Basic Essential Needs saw a decrease in the number of awards but an increase in spend.

Basic Essential Needs Spend and Grants over time



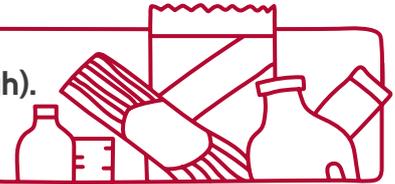
Our average grant for Basic Essential Needs was higher than anticipated as we saw significant numbers of high value applications for white goods. This was because of the need for people to self-isolate – and those in shared accommodation needing their own items whereas previously it had been fine to share, as well as being due to a lot of the usual providers of white goods being closed or inaccessible.

The initial peak and subsequent decline in numbers between April and May reflects the speed with which we were able to respond to the most basic needs of food and safety, as foodbanks and other providers adapted to be able to provide their services at the height of lockdown. The demand for Basic Essential Needs grants then grew, more gradually, as support workers returned to the office as lockdown eased and applications for clients who were now able to access support were picked up.



Food for those self-isolating (food banks do not have enough).

(Frontline Worker Survey Respondent, 2020)



We stopped providing grants for Basic Essential Needs due to a reduced budget and the need to focus on our primary objectives of assisting people to access and keep a home. However, the need for financial support around Basic Essential Needs remained and will likely continue as a result of the massive impact of COVID on the economy and the resulting levels of unemployment and financial hardship.

In the application the support worker told us that the client left her abusive marriage and entered a refuge a few weeks ahead of COVID lockdown. She secured a property with the council for independent living but did not have any furniture or kitchenware. An application for a Local Welfare Provision grant was rejected by the local council, and their staffing difficulties due to lockdown meant they couldn't consider an appeal. She was left in a "half empty apartment relying on a kettle and microwave to eat". At the same time, the client's mental health dropped as her support network was significantly reduced. Our grant brought "a very chaotic and uncertain time to a close, helping [the support agency] to provide a safe home for [the client and her children] that is above the poverty line and safe from abuse".

Overcoming Barriers to Support



No direct contact: Cannot do face to face advice, community outreach advice, home visits, meeting with other services such as health, children services, social care etc.

Frontline Worker Survey Respondent, 2020

As the pandemic unfolded, frontline workers were quick to highlight the barriers that the people they support were facing in relation to being able to access both their services as well as other support services they may have been engaging with. Everything from logging on to access a Universal Credit claim to getting regular counselling sessions was a challenge if not impossible without the relevant technology. As services adapted how they delivered their support provision it became apparent that mobile phones, laptops and internet access were key to helping people access support and maintain contact.



Money to buy phones so clients have access to the internet, money for food if they have to self-isolate and housing costs for B&B if they present with symptoms.

Frontline Worker Survey Respondent, 2020



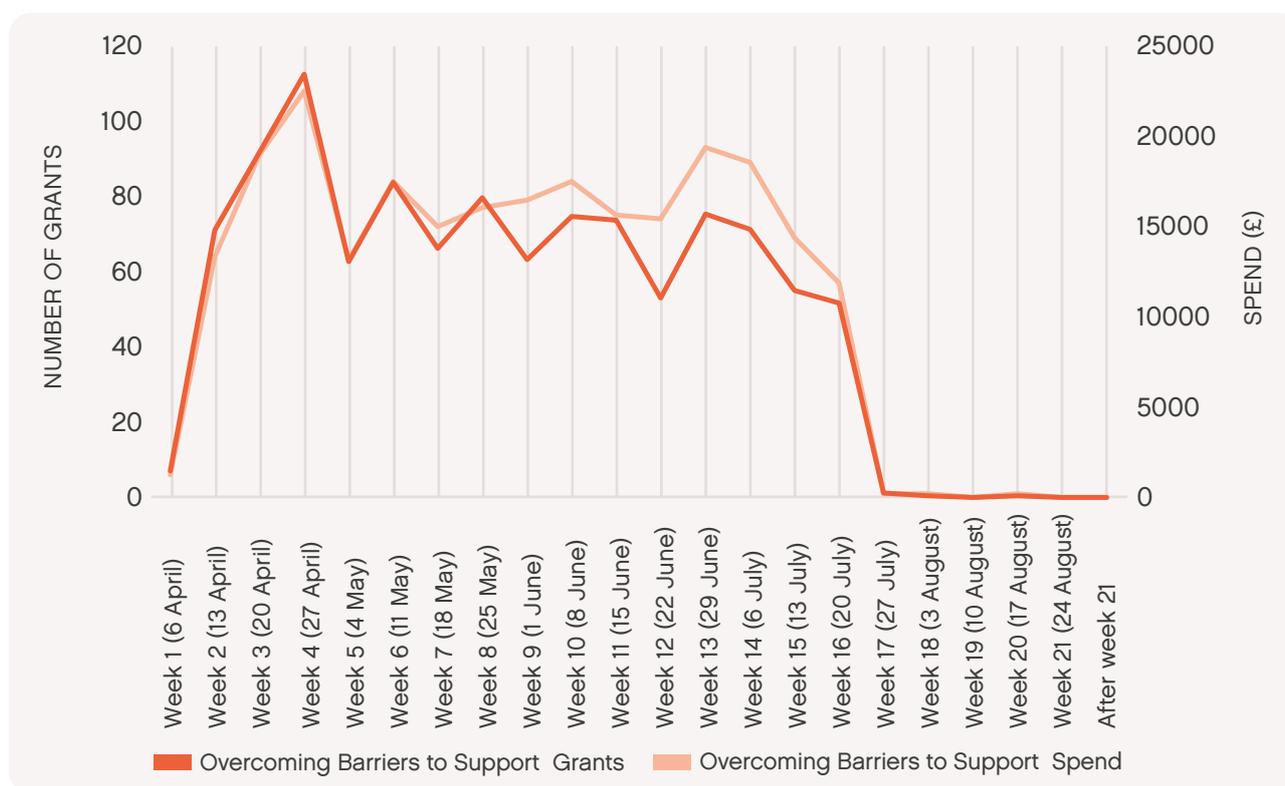
Similarly to Basic Essential Needs we saw a peak of Overcoming Barriers to Support grants in week 4. After a drop in this initial peak we saw an upward trajectory in numbers of grants until week 13 (29 June), with a decline in spend. Both spend and number of grants then declined before we closed that category for budget reasons in week 16. Part of the reason for a decrease in spend as time passed for this category is that we benchmarked the cost of certain recurring items (eg, mobile phones) and only made awards at the benchmarked amount.

As our experience with assessing grants under this category increased we also started to make more of a distinction between grants for accessing support versus grants for items to relieve the 'boredom' of lockdown. However, we considered each application on a case by case basis and if there was a good case for eg, providing a television to someone in hostel accommodation to prevent them from breaching self-isolation rules, then we would consider this. Likewise, where there was evidence that a particular item would prove overwhelmingly beneficial to someone's mental health and ability to cope with self-isolation we were able to make exceptions.

Key Findings

- The upper grant limit for Overcoming Barriers to Support was publicised as £400, however, the average grant given was only £191.99.
- The initial peak in grants for Overcoming Barriers to Support highlights the speed at which we were able to respond to the changing needs of the pandemic.

Overcoming Barriers to Support Spend and Grants over time



A support worker told us that with visits not being possible due to the lockdown restrictions, the client needed their phone to enable them to stay in contact with their support worker, CPN (Community Psychiatric Nurse), and psychiatrist. Their phone was constantly being cut off due to arrears and they were unable to get out of the cycle of debt due to limited funds. Our grant cleared their arrears and allowed them to maintain regular contact with their support agencies.

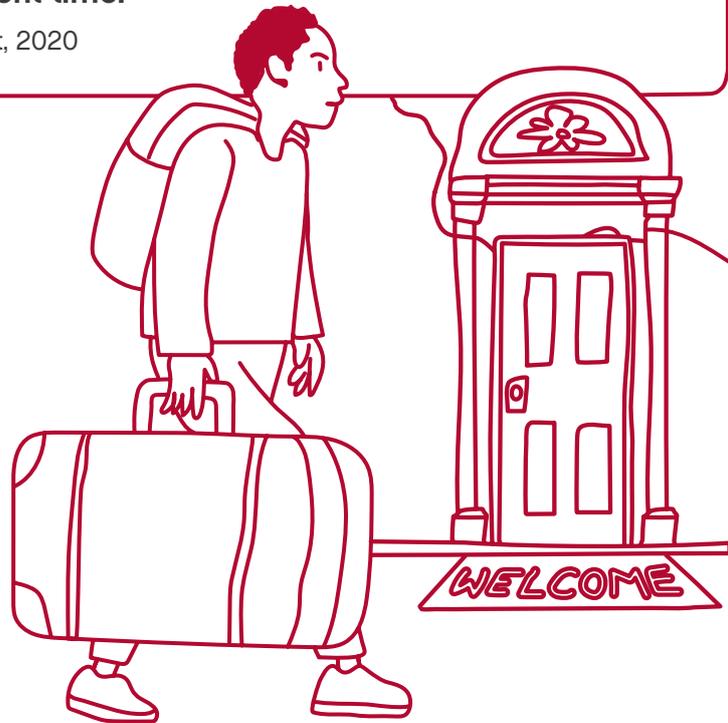
Securing Accommodation



The majority of councils have advised that the temporary accommodation projects within their boroughs have ceased accepting new referrals and moving people on at the present time.

Frontline Worker Survey Respondent, 2020

With the launch of the 'Everyone In' initiative in late March, unprecedented Government support was provided to try and ensure that people who were rough sleeping had self-contained accommodation to self-isolate in. This is shown by the very low number of grants awarded to those sleeping rough to secure accommodation. There were just 187 such awards and these were spread across all regions of the UK apart from Scotland, suggesting there was not a particular geographical bias to where people fell outside this initiative.



We chose to provide an increased upper grant limit of £1000 for the Securing Accommodation grant category based, compared to the £350 we would usually provide through the VRF. However, we found that the average grant award for this category was only £488.99 – less than 50% of the potential grant award.

There was an increase in both spend and number of grants for Securing Accommodation from the first week of the Fund until week 15 where there was a dip. After this there was then another upward trend for both grants and spend for Securing Accommodation – but with spend increasing at a lower rate. The decrease in spend was influenced by a change implemented on the 23 July to reduce the maximum award from £1000 to £500 as a result of a declining overall available budget for the Fund. This change in grant amount resulted in a lower average grant amount between August and September (£390.12) compared to April – July (£525.97). Despite the reduced grant amount, we still saw an increasing demand for grants for Securing Accommodation, suggesting that there was still a high proportion of applicants for whom the lower amount was enough to secure accommodation.

Whilst the VRF Emergency Fund was open the four Governments of the UK put in measures to prevent the evictions of those with tenancies. Evictions for people on licences (e.g. in hostels specifically for homeless people) continued throughout the lockdown and we awarded a small proportion of Securing Accommodation grants to prevent these happening.

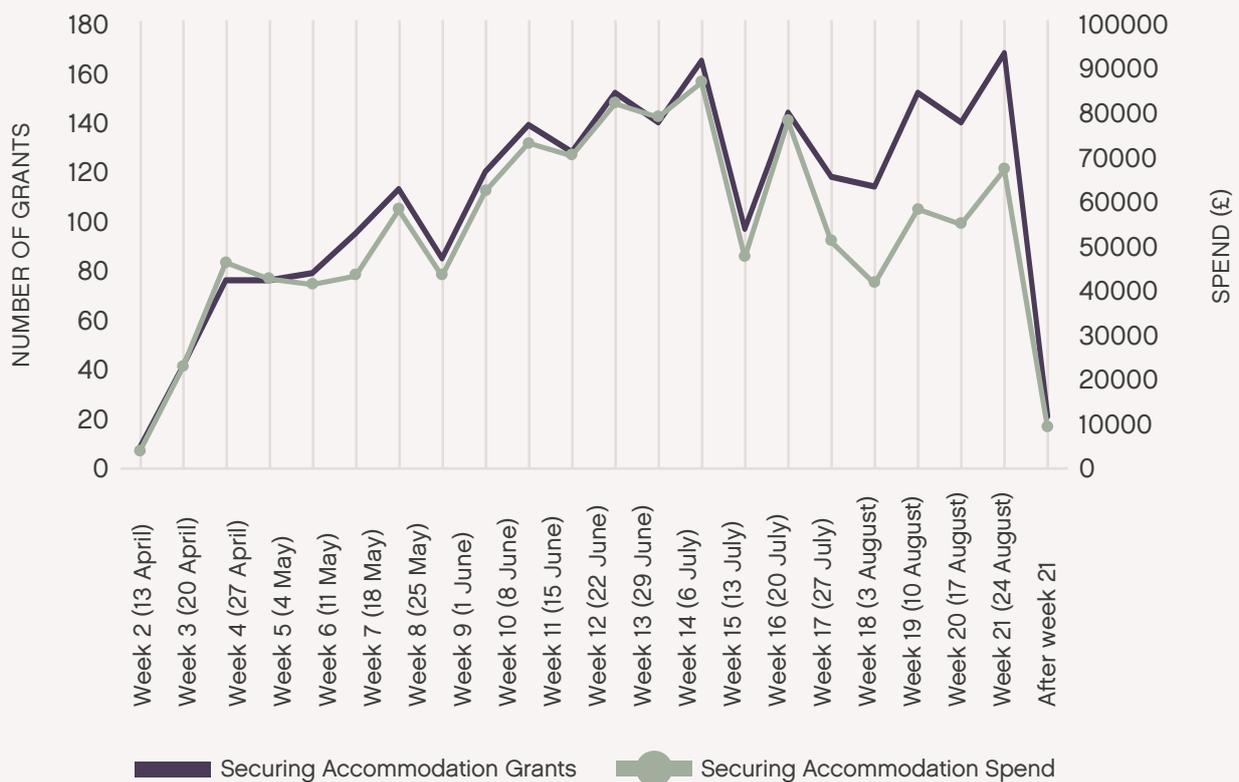
Without the “moratoriums” on tenancy evictions it is certain we would have seen greater numbers of applications, and awards, budget allowing. These tenancies remain at risk and we expect to see an increase in applications to the VRF for ‘Preventing Eviction’ grants, as Court hearings proceed.

Key Findings

- 2,200 grants (53% of all single grants) were for Securing Accommodation only, making it the category most often awarded on its own.
- Just 187 Securing Accommodation grants (8% of Securing Accommodation grants) were for people who were currently sleeping rough, compared to 14% Accessing Accommodation grants for the same cohort for the VRF over the same time period last year.
- Although the numbers are very small, there are two identifiable peaks for grants to secure accommodation for those sleeping rough: at the start of the VRF Emergency Fund and in July as the 'Everyone In' initiative started to decant people from hotels.

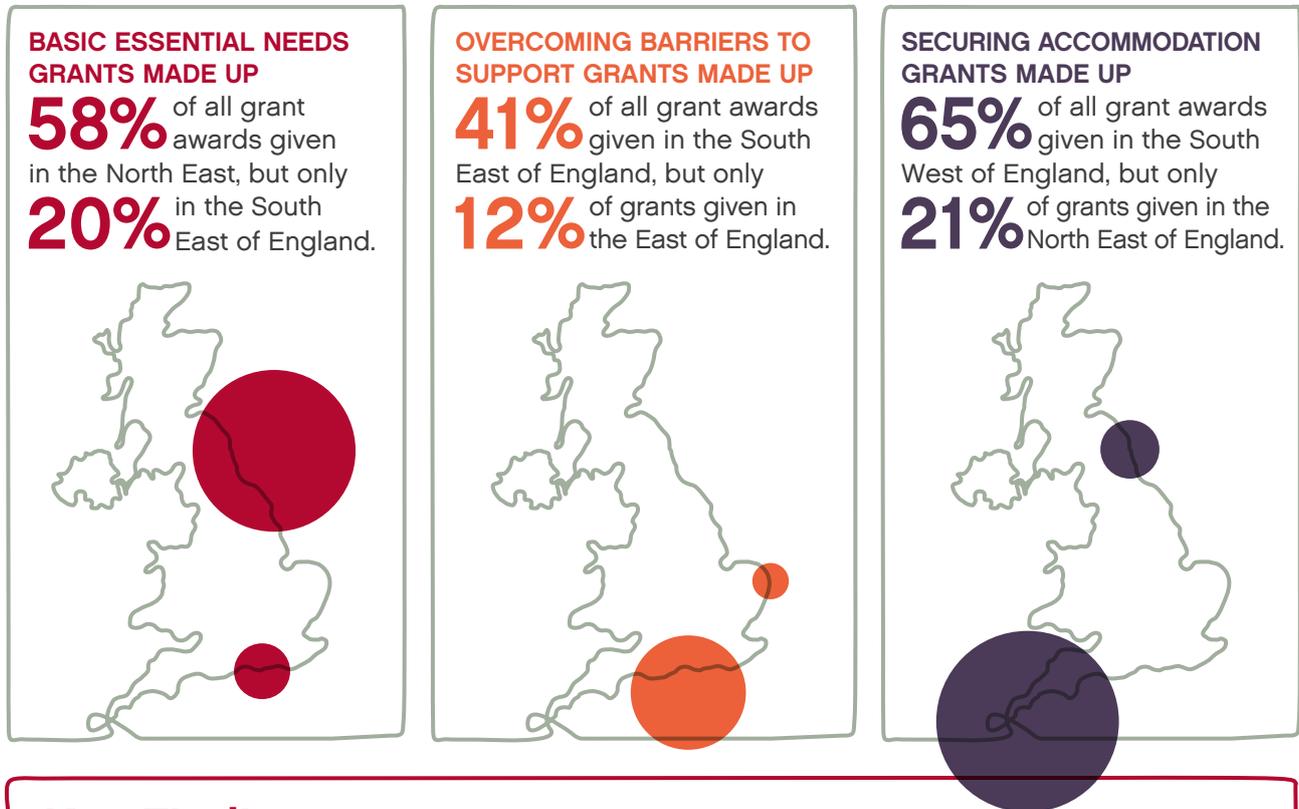


Securing Accommodation Grants and Spend over Time



Regional Distribution

Similarly to the VRF, the VRF Emergency Fund operated across the whole of the UK. There were variations across the different regions in the proportion of grants given for the different grant categories, with London seeing its share of grants increase from 7% for the VRF in 2019/20 to 16% for the five months that the VRF Emergency Fund was live.



Key Findings

- Greater London more than doubled its share of grants from 7% to 16%.
- Northern Ireland saw the highest number of applications with 'Mental Health' ticked as a support need (35%), and also saw the highest number of applications with 'Domestic Abuse' ticked as a support need (17%).

Referral Agencies

All referral agencies were impacted by COVID-19 and the accompanying lockdown, but it appears that small, specialised agencies were quicker to respond to the changing situation than larger organisations, such as councils or large housing associations. This can be seen from the changed proportions of agencies applying to us.

Key Findings

- We saw an increase in the number of applications from '3rd Sector General Advice / Support Agency – Homeless' services to the VRF Emergency Fund at 29% compared to 20% for the VRF.
- We saw a drop in applications from Local Authority – General services from 14% under the VRF to 6% under the VRF Emergency Fund, whilst applications from Local Authority – Housing Options / Homelessness Department held steady at 6% of applications for both the VRF and VRF Emergency Fund.
- Local Authority – General and RSL General Provider were most likely to apply for 'Securing Accommodation' grants, rather than the other two grants.

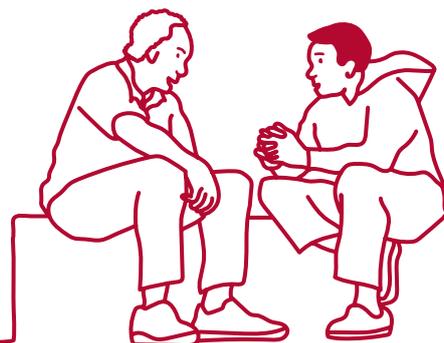
Support Needs and Presenting Issues

With each application, the frontline worker is asked to indicate which 'Support Needs and Presenting Issues' apply to their client. Applicants can 'tick' as many of the options as are relevant. We do not ask applicants to identify primary and secondary needs so each are given an equal weighting.

Key Findings

- 8% of grants were awarded to people with No Recourse to Public Funds under the VRF Emergency Fund. This is twice the proportion of successful applications for this client group during the same period for the VRF in 2019 (4%).
- The proportion of grants awarded to clients where no support needs or presenting issues had been identified reduced by 14% compared to the VRF for the same period in 2019.
- The five most common criteria were the same for the VRF Emergency Fund as the VRF: mental health; alcohol/substance misuse; physical health; ex offending; and domestic abuse.
- Alcohol/Substance misuse increased its proportional share of support needs during the Emergency Fund by 22%. This is in line with surveys that have reported an increase in problematic drinking during the lifetime of the Emergency Fund⁵.
- Overcoming Barriers to Support was the most common category for 10 out of the 17 identified presenting issues (excluding 'none'), demonstrating the value of this category during the height of lockdown.
- Four of the presenting need areas (Domestic Abuse; No Recourse to Public Funds; Other; and Physical Disability) had Basic Essential Needs as their most common category. Those fleeing domestic abuse often have to leave belongings behind and those without recourse to public funds are heavily reliant on vouchers and foodbanks for such items. Those with physical disabilities will have largely been advised to shield and unable to shop as usual for essentials.
- Securing Accommodation was the most common award category for those with no identified support needs. This shows that for some people, homelessness (or the risk of it) is simply a financial problem. Young people also most commonly applied for Securing Accommodation, and this may be indicative of their lower income levels.

5. <https://alcoholchange.org.uk/blog/2020/drinking-in-the-uk-during-lockdown-and-beyond>



Support Needs / Presenting Issues compared between the Emergency Fund and VRF

	EF % of applications in which this was selected	VRF % of applications in which this was selected	Percentage point change
Alcohol/substance misuse	33%	27%	+6
Autism	2%	0%	+2
Domestic abuse	17%	18%	-1
Ex offender	21%	19%	+2
Learning difficulty (e.g. Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Dyscalculia)	7%	7%	0
Learning disability	4%	0%	+4
Mental health	64%	56%	+8
Modern slavery	1%	0%	+1
Multiple/complex needs	18%	11%	+7
No recourse to public funds	8%	4%	+4
None	6%	7%	-1
Older person	4%	3%	+1
Other	9%	11%	-2
Physical disability	8%	6%	+2
Physical health	22%	18%	+4
Prisoner/probation	11%	13%	-2
Young person	16%	16%	0

Recommendations

Every day frontline workers overcome multiple structural and practical barriers, to help individuals access housing and specialist support, and to prevent them from experiencing homelessness. Based on our Emergency Fund data and the feedback from frontline workers to our EF Survey, we have set out the following five report recommendations:

- **Provide anyone who is at risk of losing their home with a 12-month protection period from the benefit cap.** This recommendation seeks to guarantee access to the financial support need if someone has experienced financial hardship during C-19. DWP work coaches can apply flexibility in applying conditionality to prevent the risk of homelessness. This change would allow the DWP to apply a grace period from the benefit cap for 12 months to give people a little more time to recover during this economic downturn, especially during the winter months.
- **Increase the funding available to Local Authorities to provide local welfare assistance, alongside guidance to support the effective use of the money.** We are recommending that Government substantially increases funding for local welfare assistance, operated by local authorities, to provide those being pulled under by immediate financial crises with rapid support.
- **No evictions into homelessness from asylum accommodation.** From 15th September, the Home Office ruled that any negative asylum decision triggers a 21-day eviction notice. Previously, evictions from asylum accommodation had been suspended for people with both positive and negative decisions since the 23rd March 2020. Evicting people into homelessness is always wrong. That is why we are recommending Government suspends evictions triggered by negative asylum decisions, especially now the UK has returned to COVID-19 Alert level 4.
- **Ensure that anyone experiencing homelessness this winter can quickly access Covid-secure accommodation and have the means to stay in contact with the vital support services they would normally receive.** The number of people sleeping rough is not a static one, and there are real concerns that this winter could lead to more people on the streets. This could be from individuals facing illegal evictions, to those fleeing domestic violence, to those experiencing increased financial hardship. Government needs to ensure that safe COVID-secure accommodation is available this winter, so that those sleeping rough are afforded the same protections as the rest of society during a global pandemic.
- **Ensure Housing Benefit permanently covers the average cost of renting across the country, not just during the pandemic.** We are a formal supporter of Shelter's C-19 campaign, which asked for LHA rates to cover the average cost of rent across the country to match the 30th percentile of rents in each local area. This was achieved in March 2020, with any future LHA rate changes subject to review. We are making this recommendation, as we believe Housing Benefit should permanently cover the average cost of renting across the country, not just during a pandemic.



Frontline Network

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