

REPORT OF THE
SHEFFIELD HOUSING SUMMIT



27TH MARCH 2024, SHEFFIELD TOWN HALL

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Introduction

2023 saw an unprecedented rise in the number of people in Sheffield and across the nation needing homes. Already suffering from a shortage of suitable accommodation, changes to how the Home Office calculated the 'move-on' period for refugees exacerbated the problem, leading to local support networks reaching a breaking point.

This summit was the result of a collaboration between Nomad and South Yorkshire Migration and Asylum Action Group (SYMAAG) to bring together local people and organisations in a call to action. The aims of the summit were:

- To outline the current severe housing crisis in Sheffield and its impact on refugees and the 'hidden' homeless
- To explore ideas for responding to this crisis
- To identify next steps for taking action and building a local campaign

Nomad, SYMAAG, local Councillors, City of Sanctuary, Landlords and individuals affected by homelessness came together to speak about their experiences and discussed solutions for these two questions:

1. What specific ideas for action do you have?
2. How can you/your organisation/others help?

Summary of action points

- Identifying (suitable) empty homes in Sheffield
- Winning the hearts and minds of local people
- Creating a cohesive and cooperative network between Sheffield City Council, charities, Landlords and Letting Agents
- Push a long-term system change across Sheffield and the nation

Each of the above points will be discussed further in this report.

This report will outline the contribution that each individual or organisation made to the summit and then will identify ideas that the discussions generated.



Nomad Opening Doors - Sheffield

Karen Awdhali, Head of Services¹



Nomad's vision is that everyone has the right to live independently in safe, secure accommodation and to reach their full potential. Nomad is 35 years old and has always worked with a wide range of people from all backgrounds; their stories are often heart-breaking.

Nomad work with single people who are 'non-priority' as determined by the Council. Non-priority excludes people experiencing; pregnancy, domestic abuse, parenting children, illness, disability, etc. When individuals are not supported by the Council, they rely on support from Nomad and others.

In early 2023, Nomad would receive 20 to 30 referrals a month from 'non-priority' individuals. In September 2023, the Home Office changed the rules for new refugees so they only had a 7 day 'move-on' period (rather than 56 days). Referrals for a home rose dramatically; in January 2024, they received 139 referrals, and now have over 200 people on a waiting list. At this point there is nothing Nomad can do to help these people and it is a sad fact that many will be sleeping on the streets.

These case studies below are just a few examples of individuals* Nomad have recently supported:



Joanna

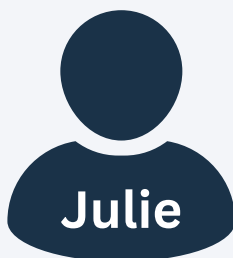
- Zimbabwean
- Lesbian
- Imprisoned and raped on a regular basis as a 'cure'
- Forced to marry



Sam

- Turkish
- Farmer, related to a political activist
- Brother beaten to death
- Imprisoned and raped on a regular basis

*names changed



Julie

- British
- Lifetime of exploitation, bullying, cohesion and sexual abuse from family members
- Only goal in life was to be safe



Steve

- British
- 55
- Relationship breakdown
- Lived in a tent, apprehensive of hostels

Nomad Opening Doors - Sheffield

Nomad has three main components:

Supported Exempt Accommodation: Providing a home, as well as elevating support for tenants new to independent living, including housing advice, rights and responsibilities, debt management, mental health, and independence.

Four Trees Lettings: Transitioning clients to shared accommodation, focusing on securing employment, and life skills development.

Clarity Lettings: Strategically acquired commercial lettings agency to recommend suitable tenancies for clients, enhance collaboration with landlords, and provide financial support to Nomad.

What does Nomad need?

- More private landlords
- Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs)
- Support from all, including social media and fundraising

Jamie - current Nomad tenant



Jamie describes homelessness as being in survival mode, not knowing what the future is and living day to day.

On becoming homeless in May 2023, Jamie contacted the Council and was told that they couldn't help him as he was young, fit and healthy, so he approached Nomad.

Within 48 hours Nomad had given Jamie a place to live. Each week the Nomad Housing and Progression Officers check in on Jamie. He says "Nomad care about your needs and make sure that it is tailored to getting you back into society in the best possible way".

The Landlord Experience

Oliver, Business Manager at SDP Student Homes ²

SDP Student Homes are an established local landlord with a portfolio of properties in Sheffield ranging from one-bedroom apartments for professional tenants, but the vast majority of their tenants are students in Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs).

In 2021 they were approached by Nomad and, as Oliver says “we were a bit sceptical at first, as we hadn’t any experience in letting our HMOs to individuals at risk”. Therefore, an initial 12-month trial was agreed with Nomad, rapidly filling a 13-bed property. All the properties so well looked after that in July 2023 another 18 beds were granted to Nomad.

To summarise the working relationship with Nomad, Oliver said “Karen (Head of Services at Nomad) rapidly put our concerns at ease. Since the start of our relationship with Nomad, we have found them to be a fantastic and hardworking and we are happy to be placing a further 23 beds with them in July 2024”.

The Situation for Refugees

South Yorkshire Migration and Asylum Action Group- SYMAAG ³



SYMAAG is a political campaign organisation made up of a diverse group of individuals. As a migrant-led organisation the ethos is to “work ‘with’, rather than ‘for’ people” in the asylum system.

There has been a large rise in the number of newly granted refugees that are now homeless. Between July and December 2023, the Government’s statistics showed a 1000% increase in rough sleeping refugees, who had been in asylum accommodation. To add to the complexity of the situation, last summer the Government reduced the time people with recently granted refugee status had to leave Government provided accommodation from 28 days to 7 (UK residents get 56 days). This policy was quietly reversed in December, but has still had an impact. Most refugees are ‘hidden homeless’, sleeping on friend’s floors or in cars and are not counted in the statistics.

Factors that impact finding accommodation:

- Asylum Seekers are not allowed to be in employment, so don’t have the financial means to privately rent accommodation
- Single and healthy fall into the ‘non-priority’ category, so are at the bottom of the local authority housing list

Aso - Asylum Seeker experience



Aso, a writer, researcher and journalist, fled Iran after fleeing the dictatorship.

Aso's homeless journey began long before coming to the UK, his journey was directly related to losing all sense of security and control, constantly worrying about what will happen next.

He said "you lose your being, you have to start everything again, you lose all possibilities, language, job, career, connection, family and friends".

Aso feels it's still difficult to get back into normal life, his insecurity lasts because of anti-immigration and government policy.

Many refugees struggle to get support due to:

- Unfamiliarity with, and complexity and bureaucracy of the UK system
- English being a second language
- Having gone through/affected by serious trauma of lived experiences

What does SYMAAG want to happen?

- Start conversations about what options there might be
- Initiate and support local and national campaigns
- Influence local and central Government policy

City of Sanctuary, Sheffield⁴

Blessan Babu - Delivery and Advocacy Manager



Blessan began by asking the question "what is the solution?" and it is a very simple answer – we need housing that is both long-term and sustainable and just as important, housing that will empower people and give dignity.

City of Sanctuary work in partnership with Sheffield City Council, Citizens Advice, education and employment departments, the Mental Health Service, Nomad and other organisations, to support people. Working in partnership is key, there is no point blaming local authorities as we all recognise that provision is very limited due to financial constraints.

The Sheffield Project for Refugee Integration and Growth (SPRING), Rent a Room scheme and the Refugee's at Home project, were highlighted as a way forward; details of both projects can be found on the City of Sanctuary website.

What does City of Sanctuary suggest?

- More partnership working
- Reviewing research from other cities and implementing their solutions
- Local/national housing projects for refugees

Sheffield City Council Representative

Alexi Dimond, Councillor for Gleadless Valley



Councillor Dimond outlined the current picture of housing in Sheffield and re-iterated the situation is dire in terms of homelessness and the pressures that the Council is under. There has been a sustained increase in people presenting to the Council as being in risk of homeless since the end of the Covid-19 lockdown. As of 8th March 2024, there are 2,850 open cases of homelessness in the city. The top three reasons are:

- Their families no longer being able to accommodate them (19.78%)
- Victims of domestic abuse (19.4%)
- End of private tenancy (11.2%)

However, in the last six months 14% of those approaching the Council are those with positive decisions from the Home Office.

As of January 2024, there are 693 households in temporary accommodation (315 families and 378 single households), but only 430 units of temporary accommodation, which does not fill the gap. This highlights the huge rise in people being at risk of homelessness in the last year: in January there was a total of 348 households.

Another issue is that Housing Benefit does NOT cover the cost of putting people in temporary accommodation and costs the Council a lot of money in charges per night. To illustrate this in 2022/23 the Council spent £5.9 million on temporary accommodation, the 2023/24 projection is £8.4 million and is projected to rise to £15 million in 2028 to support people in temporary accommodation.

Currently, there are 24,000 households on the housing register looking for social housing. Each week 6,000 people bid for the 40 properties that go onto the register.

The Council needs more properties for social housing and to provide temporary accommodation. Unfortunately, the Council is competing with many small charities and large organisations, pushing demand, and therefore prices, up.

“
Sheffield faces a perfect storm in terms of homelessness and lack of housing
”

The Council realises that it's a very challenging situation and they are looking at long term solutions, including:

- A new team of 8 people are looking at prevention (currently person working on prevention has a case load of 100)
- Buying a hotel to provide accommodation
- Building more social houses

However, Councillors feel the issue cannot be resolved without ending the 'right to buy' option for social housing as it means that it's not financially viable for councils to build houses as they may lose them.

As there is a wide range of people in need of social housing the Council needs to ensure equity of access, for example having support and assessments for refugees.

Additional comments were made by other Councillors in attendance. Councillor Douglas Johnson, Chair of the Housing Policy Committee re-iterated that change needs to be on a national agenda and that while Sheffield City Council staff are firefighting this year, people need to speak up and hold the Council to account for their policies. Councillor Angela Argenzio, Chair of the Adult Health and Social Care Policy Committee agreed that as Sheffield City Council faces huge budget cuts, individuals and organisations need to work together to bring creative solutions.

Discussion

The following ideas were recorded from the discussion groups during the conference:

- Identify empty homes in Sheffield (this may be being researched by University Researchers)
- Empty Homes Campaign
- More outreach work and trying to explore private sector – explaining the benefits of working with local charities such as Nomad
- Looking at HMO's in Rotherham
- Winning the hearts and minds of people, for example, contacting faith community network such as churches and mosques (donate property, wills, room, landlords)
- Contacting the Good Neighbour Forum
- Empty commercial property (time/cost in conversions may be an issue)
- Discussions with student accommodation providers to give over empty student flats
- Umbrella network – communication between SCC, landlords and letting agents, charities
- Create a forum where landlords can come together and support others.
- Look at student accommodation if they have vacancies (Sheffield Hallam University private landlords have already been contacted)
- Change the system by education and speaking to people
- Homewards Charity (Royal Foundation) Sheffield one of 6 cities that have been selected.
- Focus: form a coalition, bringing new ideas – “rare, brief and none-repeatable”
- Always remember everyone is on the same side – SCC is not the enemy!

A full list of all ideas is in Appendix B.

Appendix A

Nomad Opening Doors – how can you help the housing crisis?

What can you can do?

- Inform others about the ongoing crisis
- If you know any private landlords, put them in contact with Nomad
- Spread the word of Nomad

What do we need?

- Private landlords
- HMO's
- Your support

Appendix B

List of points made in the discussion

1. What specific ideas for action do you have?
2. How can you/your organisation help?
3. Who else could help?
4. Agree two key points to feedback

Empty home campaign

Identify home AULB

Umbrella Network:

- Landlords
- Council / Housing / HMO List
- Estate Agents
- Faith groups
- Faith Community Network – ethical letting
- Refugee at Home

Student Good Neighbour Forum

Identify and engage with Sheffield University Researchers into empty houses in Sheffield

NOMAD

- Paid Adverts
- Reach out to landlords
- Leaflet tenants
- Contact RLA
- Word of mouth

Network for social landlords

Create a private Landlords forum.

Supporting Positive landlords

AGM's can group engage here?

Empty home issue: how can we identify empty homes / second homes / campaign on this / how do we fund refurbishments if empty homes

Refugee at home scheme – faith community network.

- Explore whether grants to help landlords with extra facilities for non-cohesive groups.
 - Use empty housing – compulsory purchase? Problem – councils lack of money for conversion
 - Convert empty commercial property (slow process)
 - Build partnership of various agencies / Avoid competition
 - Use spare student accommodation:
 - Mostly owned by private companies. Problem is that the housing allowance £350, may not be sufficient for company,
 - Advise people of potential letting spare room
 - Council needs to take the lead on partnerships – big business social responsibilities
 - Appeal to public's hearts and minds
 - Empty properties / rooms above shops
-
- SCC offer incentive for families to downsize, eg. Free removal.
 - Change idea of council housing being for life perception.
 - Invite people to be part of solution.
 - ASSIST – hosting.
 - Leave a legacy to a charity in a will.
-
- Prince William 'Homewards' – invite businesses to participate as social enterprise.
 - Involve churches – spread the word to communities, socially minded.
 - Local mosques.
 - Make personal contacts – spread the word!
 - Refugees are invisible – make visible!
 - Council take the lead to give floating support.

Appendix B

- Need to make use of private sector accommodation.
- More outreach work
- Closer work between Nomad and SCC private rented team.
- Look at other areas, i.e. Rotherham.
- Student properties – half empty – private landlords
- Look for partnerships with community /charity groups wanting to invest in social housing.
- Link to national housing organisations (including online) – problem: people may have to move around UK.
- Work with housing associations - do they have capacity/expertise to work with refugees?
- Organise for long-term system change as well as immediate needs for housing in Sheffield and nationally.
- Make regional/national links
- Groups like SYMAAG and Migrants Organise can speak out where charities can't.
- Improve working relationship between Sheffield Council and Homelessness charities.
- How can we use all the empty council houses and empty private sector houses?



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March 2024