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Official URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2016.09.024>

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2016.09.024>

EPrint URI: <https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/id/eprint/4095>

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Supported housing in global austerity: local providers' fears for the future in Gloucestershire, England

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Abstract

Shelter is a key component of an individual's well-being and as a consequence is an area of policy development that cuts across national policies including welfare, health and social. Supported housing is a sub-set of the wider category of social housing, offering support services intended to help people with a range of challenges live as independently as possible. This paper is based on case study research in an English county that has a diverse range of rural and urban contexts. The analysis draws on evidence gathered mainly from interviews with decision-makers representing the largest supported housing providers in the region across a range of specialisms and needs provision. The research demonstrates that supported housing professionals have a range of concerns for the future of supported housing provision. Respondents reported that reforms to welfare payments and funding of housing support is creating great concern for the organisations and the fracturing of services meant it was increasingly difficult to offer comprehensive coverage in the county. However, the housing professionals also discussed a range of innovative and entrepreneurial responses to these uncertainties. This paper concludes that on the one hand there is a real and pressing threat of increased residualisation within the sector and within services for these most vulnerable groups reduced in both their scope and coverage. While on the other hand, those organisations able to operate more flexibly, and who were communicating effectively with local authorities, felt they had the best chance to respond to uncertainty in the policy landscape.

Key words: Supported housing, uncertainty, austerity, residualisation

1. Introduction

Access to shelter is a right enshrined in the international Convention on Human Rights and explained by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN Habitat, 2009). Shelter is a key component of an individual's and a household's wellbeing and as a consequence is an area of policy development that often cuts across a number of ministries and government departments. The UK is not an exception. Provision of shelter for the most vulnerable groups in society overlaps with welfare, health and social support. Consequently, those accessing this support are much more susceptible to political and economic uncertainty. Although this vulnerability is an issue intrinsic to this complicated and multilayered support for these at risk individuals, it was made particularly evident through changes to welfare provisions during the period following Global Financial Crisis (GFC) and the austerity measures put into place in many countries, including the United Kingdom.

It is our contention in this paper that reductions in funding and reforms in welfare provisions have an overlapping effect on housing and living support, and that those who are at risk or in need in society are often most exposed to the impacts of these changes. However, it is often not until these changes have had an impact that key agents working in this sector have a chance to reflect on the impacts these changes have had, how they have responded and in retrospect how *best* to respond. This paper focuses on the perspectives of the professionals working on the provision of housing to vulnerable groups in a county of the UK. It gathers evidence from these professions to explore their fears and concerns around changes, particularly in the context of the global financial crisis (GFC). As such, it acts as a scoping exercise that outlines key areas of concern for professionals working in supported housing in the UK. These key concerns offer a guide for future research that can detail the ongoing and changing impacts for both providers and for the individuals that access this support.

Uncertainty is part of modern politics and policy change is nothing new. However, the significant policies of austerity that were part of the UK government's response to the GFC have heightened this uncertainty and has, more importantly, led to a range of policy changes that impact on the different services involved in housing and support. A particular concern, and the primary focus of this paper, are the impacts of these policy changes on supported housing: that is, the particular branch of social housing that incorporates higher levels of subsidised support for those judged to be most at-risk in society. As a result, Jacobs & Manzi argue that recent reforms in welfare policy, particularly in relation to social housing, merit research attention:

'a key feature of the contemporary housing landscape is the accentuation of policies to encourage local government agencies to disengage from service delivery and the implementation of new mechanisms to enable private sector agencies to provide and manage social housing. These processes are enabling fundamental shifts in the governance of housing, yet they have been subjected to limited empirical research' (Jacobs & Manzi, 2013; p. 7).

Jacobs & Manzi assert that there is therefore a significant 'gap in knowledge' (2013: 10) around the changes that are shaping housing policy and provision, which has become particularly

important at a time when changes are taking place in the sector that are profound. Similarly, Beer et al (2011; p. 1189) note that the GFC 'has created both the need and the opportunity for innovation in housing policies across nations.' However, the link between cuts in housing investment and other aspects of welfare appear not to be a straightforward linear relationship. In France, Wong & Goldblum (2016) highlight complexities in the relationship between social housing and public welfare on the one hand and public expenditure on the other that are not linear. While research in Australia shows that:

'... such concerns are misplaced and that the imagined risks to public sector borrowing capacity are more than negated by improvements in population wellbeing and, potentially, consequent reductions in public sector outlays on health and other social services.' (Beer et al, 2011; p.1190).

This paper is a scoping exercise that explores some of these key issues of supported housing service provision at a time of uncertainty. It begins with a review of the role that supported housing plays in the United Kingdom and the context of uncertainty which has become heightened in the aftermath of the global financial crisis. Then, through a case-study of supported housing providers in Gloucestershire based on a range of interviews, the paper explores the fears and concerns of service providers in Gloucestershire, examining the emerging strategies they are considering and using in order to mitigate some of these issues. A discussion of key themes emerging from this localised case-study illustrates how specific policy changes are impacting on the sector in the UK and how the concepts raised speak to parallel change further afield.

The authors have a history of working in relation to supported housing, including running joint projects in concert with local supported housing organisations; managing student-led research projects on aspects of housing including social housing and in the past working directly for supported housing bodies. Consequently they bring a wide range of industry experience to the research in the project, but they are now university-based researchers independent of any supported housing provider.

2. Understanding Uncertainty and Supported Housing

There is a need for more research and evidence in the social and supported housing sectors, particularly in the context of uncertainty (O'Malley, 2004) and at a time of austerity. This section considers several key themes around supported housing and the impacts of uncertainty, austerity driven changes, including the link between austerity and housing support, the role supported housing plays in contemporary societies, and the ways in which this paper is assessing the challenges facing the sector.

2.2 Supported housing in the UK

There are several different types of housing provision that are commonly misunderstood or confused with one another: social housing; supported housing; and emergency housing. The confusion is, in many cases, understandable as there are significant overlaps between the three. Broadly speaking, social housing refers to what might have once been referred to as council housing, that is, housing that is provided at a reduced rate, or built as affordable housing for those who have limited – or vulnerable -economic means.

In the United Kingdom, social housing is defined in the Housing and Regeneration Act (2008; section 68) as 'low cost rental accommodation ... and ... low cost home ownership accommodation'. Similarly, the national housing charity, Shelter, describe social housing as that which is 'let at low rents on a secure basis to those who are most in need or struggling with their housing costs' (Shelter, 2015 p1).

In the UK, social housing is generally divided into two main categories: 'council' housing and housing association dwellings. The majority of council properties, of which there are around 2.2 million, were built in the early- to mid-twentieth century by local authorities with significant levels of state subsidy. On the other hand housing associations, which are now the predominant builder of social accommodation, account for around 2.7 million residences and fund their construction using a mixture of subsidies and other resources including private finance (Pawson & Wilcox, 2012 ; Ferrari, 2015).

At the other end of the scale from social housing, emergency housing is the provision of short term temporary accommodation for those in extreme need. Emergency housing in recent times has been in the public attention with the amount of money being spent by local councils on B&B (ref/evidence). Other types of emergency housing include day or night shelters that take people on day-to-day basis. In a report on Homelessness and emergency accommodation, the Local government Ombudsman states that '55,300 households were in temporary accommodation on 31 March 2013, a 14 percent increase on the same date in 2011', and of these, 4,500 were in bed and breakfast accommodation (LGO, 2013: 2).

Supported housing sits in between social and emergency housing, often involving people in both types of accommodation. A government-commissioned report defined Supported Housing as housing that 'provides strategically planned housing related services which are typically parts of packages of support and potentially other services (which may be provided by the public, private or third sector)' (Ashton & Hempenstall, 2009; p. 5).

Supported housing provision has typically been paid for in a combination of ways. Central funding from local government and the Supporting People Agency provided a portion of the expenses, however in most cases, the majority of funding came from individual claims through housing benefit, occasionally supplemented with small weekly additional payments from this money. The NHF reported that reduced allocation of funds to this programme is 'putting the very existence of

supported housing at risk' (NHF, 2015; p. 7). The NHF reported that the National Audit Office estimated Supporting People budget cuts to be 45% between 2010/11 and 2014/15.

The National Housing Federation, an alliance of UK organisations that provide social and supported housing, describe supported housing as including 'some of the most vulnerable people in society who face barriers that go far beyond housing. Those receiving support can be socially isolated, have physical and mental health problems, histories of offending, or substance dependency issues (NHF, 2015; p3)' The UK government defines supported housing as follows:

'supported accommodation in England is also provided by housing associations, with specialist projects for people with mental health or learning disabilities, with substance misuse problems (drugs or alcohol), the formerly homeless, young people, ex-offenders and women fleeing domestic violence' (Gov.UK; 2012).

In many cases, groups in social housing have compounds of these issues which means that whilst housing support is the primary focus for supported housing, additional services are also often part of the package.

Supported housing has generally been divided into three categories: high, medium and low support. high support would typically include those with issues that required more intensive support, for example those with prolific or serious offending histories or ongoing drug and alcohol addiction. Support here may include 24 hour service staffing and close tie-ins with other support agencies. Medium and low support housing is likely to offer less intensive support, in the case of project-based work, this might be staffing during the day only and in the case of low support, this might more commonly mean clients living in self-contained flats owned by the housing organisation and offered some degree of community-based support.

Carr (2005) points out that the complex needs for those in supported housing, along with the evolution of supported housing as a concept and a service has resulted in an exceptionally diverse provision that can vary extensively as a result of the location and level and timing of government support. As a result:

'Generalizations about supported housing provision then ... are of limited use but serve to record its origins, at least in part from an oppositional tradition, its independent nature and its ideological leanings' (Carr, 2005; p. 392).

For Carr (2005) the management of supported housing is linked to wider welfare policies in several complex ways, and yet is not an area that has a high level of voter awareness. Perhaps because of this, research on social housing is limited. For example, the government commissioned report conducted by John Hills' (2007) is a comprehensive review of social housing in the UK. However it contains very little reference to supported housing; indeed, the term is only mentioned once in the entire report.

2.2 Uncertainty and the politics of austerity in supported housing

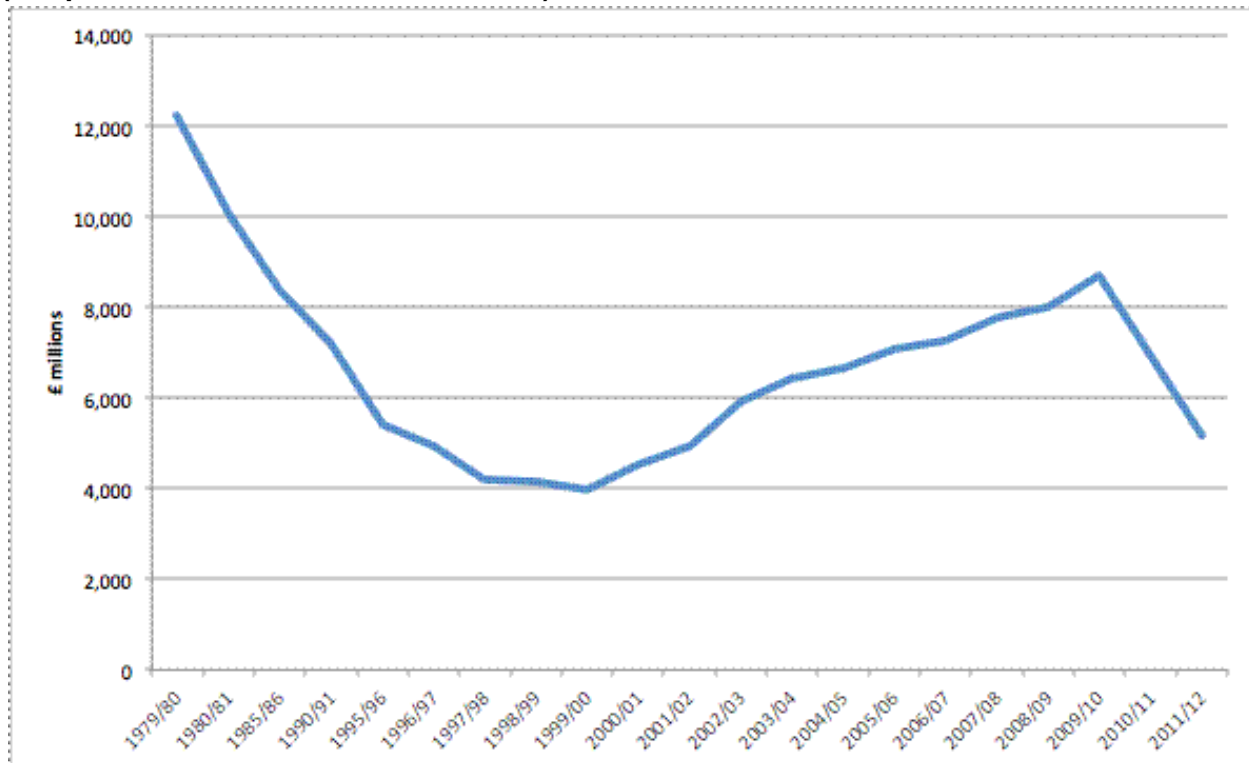
In the UK, the National Housing Federation estimated that, in 2010 supported housing resulted in net annual public savings of approximately £640m across all client groups representing a little less than £1,000 per person per year' (NHF, 2015; p 3). At a time when evidence has been emerging that social and - especially supported housing - can deliver real benefits in health and wellbeing to residents and economic savings to local authorities, health-care providers and governments, it is particularly important to understand how the changes affecting these sectors will impact on this.

Supported housing, both in terms of those that access the support and the sector as a whole, is particularly vulnerable to change. The often compounded needs of the client groups and the spread and political nature of funded supported housing means that key approaches to researching these issues, according to Jacobs & Manzi (2013), involve analysing housing within a wider framework. These inbuilt vulnerabilities and change are particularly relevant in the Social and political impacts of a volatile global economy. For instance, the range of austerity packages introduced by different countries as a result of the GC impacts on both the needs of citizens as well as the support available for those who find themselves in socially vulnerable positions. Coupled with this, changing attitudes towards welfare from both governments and populations, and considerations of widespread migration, whether real or perceived, impact on political and social discourses of funding and support. The outcome of this is an environment of uncertainty in which the providers of supported housing services are struggling to position themselves in a dynamic and changing environment.

The coincidence of the GFC have led some to accuse recent governments of using the financial constraints as a pretext for welfare reform. This has been described variously as producing inequality, class warfare, residualisation and gentrification. Writing about the wider housing sector in the UK, Whitehead and Williams (2011: 7) argue that there are 'major uncertainties as to the impact of a range of policies introduced by the new government, and by regulators which may further restrict housing options and choices into the long term'.

Obtaining data on supported housing is difficult because the nature of the funding streams is diverse. Figure 1 shows the decline in gross social housing investment in England – of which supported housing comprises a part. This provides an indication of the trend from the end of the 1970s, which marked the removal of government investment in the social housing sector under the Thatcher government. This trend towards a privatisation of social housing was slowed and reversed as Labour came back into government in 1997 and reinstated after the emergence of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition in 2010.

Figure 1 Gross Social Housing Investment in England 1996-2012 [2012 prices]
(Adapted from: Wilcox & Pawson, 2013)



Similarly, Beer et al (2011) present evidence in Australia's post-GFC context that although all forms of housing assistance have beneficial health and wellbeing impacts on low and moderate income households, in the context of the GFC, policies have been changed as a result of the requirement to re-balance public sector finances. It may seem obvious that cuts to welfare payments would result in public finance savings, but in the UK, CapGemini estimated that the *Supporting People* programme - some of which supports residents of supported housing - resulted in £3.41bn per annum benefits for the client groups against an overall investment of £1.61bn (Ashton & Hempenstall, 2009). The implication could be that cuts to the programme would result in disproportionate adverse impacts on these residents or the costs may have to be borne by a different public sector service, simply transferring the burden.

The relationship between local, national and private investment in social housing in England has experienced a shift towards private finance and increased centralisation through the introduction of the Homes and Community Agency, at the expense of local authority management (Carr 2005). Trends since the late 1980s show how a decrease in local spending was supplemented by centralised state involvement in the sector prior to the GFC, however subsequently and the massive growth in private finance in the sector is particularly evident post 2006/7, and a subsequent dramatic decline in spending across the board from 2009/10 onwards (Wilcox & Pawson, 2013). This demonstrates the vulnerability of the sector to the vagaries of recession

economics as well as the impacts - some foreseen, others unforeseen - of regulation and the constriction of welfare provision.

In terms of Gloucestershire, which is the focus of a case study in this paper, the Four Year Supporting People Strategy describes a 'a period of significant grant reductions' in which they are working to retain their 'fitness for purpose in the changing local government landscape and financial climate (GCC , 2011: p3). This is presented within the context of a strategy to achieve savings and efficiencies, while shifting the emphasis to earlier interventions and prevention of household accommodation crises. The national austerity-driven funding environment is clearly having an impact on local service provision. At the county level, Gloucestershire, which is typical of many areas that have a mix of rural and urban environments, is looking at how to manage these impacts whilst maintaining the integrity of their supported housing provisions. The following case study on Gloucestershire explores this challenge on two fronts: the changes already happening and the conditions on supported housing providers on the ways in which these changes will impact on their services, and the fears of providers around the impacts of welfare Policy Reform.

3. Methods

This research is a case study of a county selected because it incorporates a diverse range of rural and urban contexts: Gloucestershire has a geographically dispersed population with several urban clusters, two of which have populations of around 120,000 each.

The majority of the data for this research was collected in 2014, and charts the concerns of providers at a period of significant change in social policy and funding structures. This Gloucestershire case study therefore, is a reflection of key concerns of professionals in the supported housing sector, and their evaluation of the challenges that were facing at the time and their concerns over the on-going impacts.

The first stage of the research involved mapping supported housing provision in the county; the provision has not been collated and made available to the public or providers. It is, however, vitally important to show its spread and its congruence with the demographic needs of supported housing across the county. Mapping was first based on the team's experience- based knowledge of providers, and then enhanced by information from internet searches for areas of the county and for the providers. The data was mapped and, where possible, checked directly with providers themselves or workers in the field.

The second research stage was a series of interviews with supported housing providers. A purposive sample of six providers was selected; these were largest supported housing providers in the county and also represented many kinds of provision for differing groups, including: people

in need of mental health support; young people, those with substance abuse issues, and prolific offenders. Five of the six providers were willing to participate and one person from each was interviewed and each interviewee was involved with the management of services and the planning of current and future provision. They were: a CEO, a head of supported housing, a supported housing manager, a business manager and a team leader. Additional Interviews with a district Strategic Housing and a Strategy and Enabling officer from Gloucestershire provided further insight into the overall patterns and challenges in the county.

The interviews were semi-structured, addressing the three broad areas which emerged from the Literature Review:

- the current context that the organisations are facing;
- how they are experiencing change specific to their projects and within the sector as a whole.
- the future for their provision and for supported housing more generally;

The resulting interview data was subject to a process of inductive thematic analysis (Flick 2014) and two major themes emerged from the data. These are changes to service provision and impacts of welfare policy reform. Table 1 shows how these two key themes are divided into three specific issues that cover the most important aspects emerging from our interviews. The results section expands on these themes and issues in order to illustrate the perspectives of housing professionals on the changes to the sector in light of the austerity programme and reforms to welfare policy.

Table 1: Key themes and specific issues

Key themes	A. changes in service provision	B. Impacts of welfare Policy Reform	
<i>Specific issues</i>	A.1 Map of changing service provision in Gloucestershire A.2 Fracturing of location and provision A.3 Strategies and solutions	B.1 Changes to individual funding and benefits (directional) B.2 Changes to central funding and competition (structural) B.3 Strategies and solutions	

4. Results

The two key themes identified from the data represent a collection of significant issues expressed by the representatives of supported housing agencies. Whilst it is important to acknowledge that this data refers specifically to Gloucestershire, the issues raised are likely to be common across the national supported housing sector, particularly in the context of austerity. The results discussed in this section also reflect some of the wider considerations of supported housing

internationally, and the ways agencies respond to changing economic and policy climates, as expressed by Beer et al (2011).

A. changes in service provision

The first of our key themes deals with the nature of service provision at the time of data collection. Preliminary discussions with representatives of supported housing organisations suggested that the situation was changing rapidly in Gloucestershire, and as a consequence there was little overview of the supported housing provision in the county. It therefore became clear early on that interviews should cover respondents' understandings of the current scope, scale and location of service provision. Data collection at the time of the interviews provided the information used to construct the map in figure 2 and the interviews then focused on the detail of the provision and the dynamics of change.

A.1 Map of changing service provision in Gloucestershire

Figure 2 illustrates the changing nature of Gloucestershire's supported housing, as captured at the time of data collection. It is clear from the map that there are a number of providers identified as being in the process of closing, merging or significantly changing their service type.

Figure 2: the changing nature of supported housing in Gloucestershire as of late 2013.

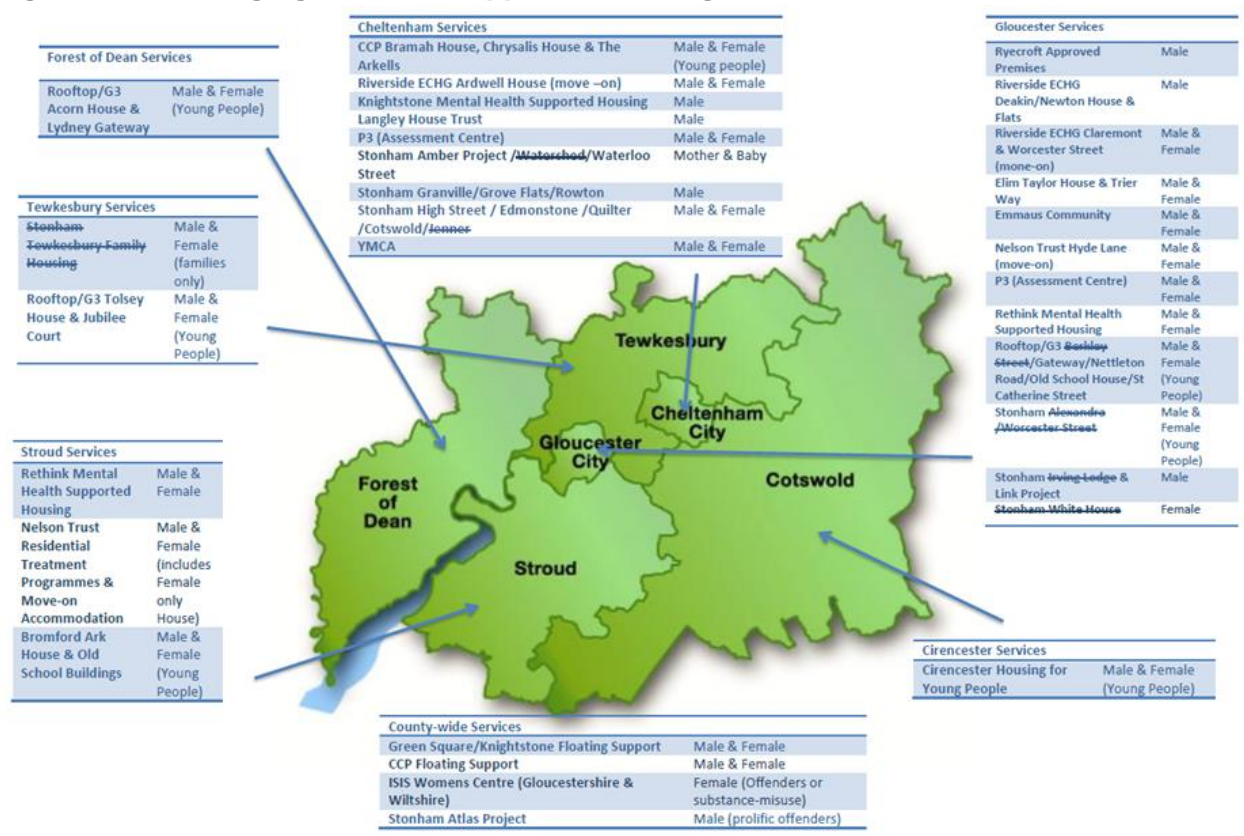


Figure 2 demonstrates the complex layers of authority between local and national housing organizations. Supported housing providers have to interact with agencies such as police forces, healthcare providers, social work providers and emergency accommodation and crisis services which are at county, district and national levels. Social housing providers often find themselves at the focal point of a range of services that can be located at district, county and regional authorities, as well as national policy and they are often heavily involved with statutory provision of services, such as adult safeguarding, mental health provision, social services and general welfare provision. The analysis attempts to disaggregate themes within this complex set of relationships, but inevitably there are overlaps between certain themes.

Issues of location and type of service provision are fundamental to the success of Supported Housing in any given area. As the map in Figure 2 illustrates, projects in Gloucestershire are dispersed across the county, and provision type and access is not uniform. This is highlighted at a national level in the Select Committee report on Supporting People, in which the potential for increased freedoms and removal of ring-fencing is recognised as potentially resulting in a loss of excellent provision. The Select Committee report went on to recommend joint strategic needs assessments were carried out to ensure comprehensive area based provision (Communities and Local Government Committee, 2009). This topic elicited a good deal of discussion amongst our

respondents, who commented on a number of aspects on the geography of service provision, particularly issues around service distribution when compared to need and resource allocation.

With the next budget cuts that have come in, that's going to place further issues on councils as the ring-fencing is no longer there. Other departments which have already taken quite a substantial brunt will complain so the cuts we've got may have to go even further again (Service A).

A.2 Fracturing of location and provision

There was a feeling among several of our interviewees that there existed a mismatch between the services available within the region and the needs of those in local communities. For example, one respondent described how this geographical mismatch can result in some client groups being unable to find appropriate supported accommodation, while elsewhere similar accommodation lies empty:

There's possibly adequate supported housing in terms of numbers, but not necessarily the right or most appropriate housing. We need something dedicated to street drinkers, who would form the core of hard-to-place clients or continuous rough sleepers. Also for chaotic drug users, who may or may not be ready to address their substance misuse, a high tolerance model which would provide interventions at all levels (Service B).

This particular interviewee goes on to illustrate the point with a specific example:

'We hear that the assessment centres run by [redacted] hold a permanent waiting list, yet we sometimes have empty rooms. It seems immoral that people are sleeping rough when we have vacancies for homeless people, particularly if this is due to a reluctance of staff to 'share' clients' (Service B).

Geographic fracturing between need and available provision is a reflection of the difficulty in offering a comprehensive service on a county-wide scale, particularly where there are differing needs of rural and urban communities. A number of the representatives interviewed elaborated on the challenge of meeting the needs of their diverse communities:

'Yes, it's huge, and different settings. You have got real rural communities that are difficult to access and difficult to get into, so people can become quite isolated within their communities ... the providers are going to have to work much harder to get into the rural communities (Service A).

An example of this is given in one interview, where the respondent explained that their organisation has significant need for more community-based support for individuals with learning

disabilities. Because of a historic arrangement with a large provider, they have substantial residential capacity for individuals with both physical and learning disabilities:

... we are trying to redress that mis-match, with a lot sitting in residential care which isn't best suited for them. We should be looking to provide something else in the community that's more suited to them (Service A)

Further examples of fracturing between available services and community needs were identified for younger clients, for example:

'what the young people of the Forest of Dean need and want is very different to what Gloucester needs and wants' (Service C).

This was also identified for older people, where one interviewee explained that they *'haven't quite got enough ExtraCare provision in the Forest'* (Service A), referring to limited opportunities to access support from the ExtraCare charitable trust, which supports 4,400 retired people across the midlands and North of England (ExtraCare, 2015).

Ultimately, our interviewees feared the reductions in funding would result in a complete loss of service in some locations:

Not having enough income to deliver the service, it could - if we lose our grants in Gloucester then we will have no Gloucester service - it could mean the loss of a whole department, support and care (Service C)

Issues around fracturing in service provision were frequently described by the respondents as areas of concern. One of the difficulties was around the legacy of the initial change over to the Supporting People scheme, a programme that was launched in 2003 with the aim of helping to 'end social exclusion and to enable vulnerable people to maintain or to achieve independence through the provision of housing-related support' (Community & Local Government Committee, 2009; p. 5). Supporting People provided £1.6 billion per annum through over 150 local authorities, in partnership with Third Sector organisations who delivered a large proportion of the provision (Community & Local Government Committee, 2009).

'The problem with Supporting People is that it inherited existing schemes and everybody piled everything in to start with and the cost of it went through the roof. Then it left the county with an uneven provision so the provision did not match the need. So, we in the rural areas, lagged behind the urban areas and provision tended to be in the urban areas' (Service A).

Another significant concern interviewees identified in fracturing of service provision was a shift from geographically located services, which provide support to clients in one location, to services based around 'floating support'. This non-static provision, offered across a much larger

geographical area, has meant that support that might once have been provided to a specific group in a fixed location is now offered on an individual basis to clients dispersed amongst supported housing, privately rented accommodation or in their own homes. The pressure of this change has meant that the types of service on offer have altered radically. For example:

'... in the traditional sense, in the district we only have now two schemes for young people ... There is a fair bit of what was sheltered housing and that has now moved to housing with floating support ... It is very much this move away from bricks and mortar to "floating support" (Service A).

And:

There is lots of provision in the county. It is now tending to move away from accommodation-based support and into more floating support (Service D)

Whilst 'floating support' might work in some instances, there are clearly some areas in which it is less likely to be suitable. For example:

'The other Supported Housing that we did have was a women's refuge and that closed about a year ago with the new contract coming through. We are not yet certain where women fleeing domestic violence now - who don't come through us - actually end up; whether they are actually supported' (Service A).

One of the identified consequences of this transition from 'bricks and mortar' provision to floating support is fewer dedicated housing spaces and the difficulty of moving people on into suitable accommodation if - and when - their circumstances change. For example moving a client on from a youth project to one for adults, or when changes to a client's needs require a different level of support.

'... from high support it is a massive jump into your own flat at a young age. So we are talking about people who are 16 ... where do they go at 17?' (Service C).

This puts added pressures on the organisations to maintain appropriate environments of support, in some cases requiring the use of temporary accommodation to fill gaps in local provision:

There is still the use of emergency provision for very young people. So when I say emergency provision, I'm talking about the old traditional bed and breakfast. Except it doesn't have the breakfast, but neither does it have the support. And people are being referred into emergency provision, but their support needs are not being looked at ... We've recently introduced a 'crash-pad' as well, so that it is there in an emergency. And we have done that in partnership with the [named redacted] Council. So we can put people here in an emergency and they have got support then, as well (Service C).

This move to short term purchasing of provision is similar to approaches identified as part of the move to quasi-market based funding that exists in other aspects of social care provision (Hardy & Wistow, 1998). This is widely known as 'spot purchasing' which is recognised by the UK Parliament's Select Committee on Health (2006) as a system used relatively widely in health care practice. It is an increasingly large part of social housing provision and various councils provide contract guidance. For example West Berkshire Council (2010; p. 7) describe their use of 'spot purchasing as the 'specific purchase of care hours for an individual Service User or Users which may be cancelled or altered by way of notice ... A spot purchase agreement does not constitute a guarantee from the Purchaser that a minimum number of hours will be purchased.' There are also advocacy and support groups that managing the spot purchasing process. For example KAG (Knowledge Advocacy Guidance), who describe their role as providing 'spot purchase advocacy to Housing Associations, Local Authorities' and are 'directly commissioned or [their] services are purchased by the housing association or local authority for a particular piece of work' (KAG, 2015; no page).

In all of the issues discussed above the respondents describe situations where the support within the context of supported housing is less geographically fixed and focused on clients as groups. This results in a focus more on individuals and although promoted as more flexible and responsive, is largely described by the professionals as resulting in a geographically fractured provision.

A.3 Strategies and solutions

The changes in service provision identified here mean that the current climate offers some significant challenges of supported housing. Fracturing in locating of services, move away from brick and mortar, and an increasing reliance on short term solutions such as spot purchasing, means that even on a county-wide basis supported housing agencies are struggling to provide comprehensive support. This is feeding into a process of residualisation, in which the denigration of public and social housing provision means services are increasingly restricted to those who are at the high end of support need and the most vulnerable or needed within society.

As a process, residualisation has a longer history than the period since the GFC. Pearce and Vine (2014; p657) argue that, 'over the last 40 years, social housing has become dominated by households on low incomes'. As a consequence of these changes the sector has experienced a transition from a 'public housing' model, providing housing for a broad spectrum of households, to a 'social housing' model, supporting only those unable to house themselves in the private market (Malpass and Victory 2010). Residualisation has been a longer, more fundamental process than the austerity since the GFC. However, residualisation has left the supported housing sector and its clients more vulnerable to changes, leading to greater levels of uncertainty. The respondents in this research described significant structural changes brought about by the combination of structural reform and welfare policy reform. Consequently, residualisation has become more pronounced as services are reorganised and level of support are reduced.

There were a number of strategies and solutions reported in the interviews that address some of these challenges, as the respondents and their agencies sought to mitigate the difficulties caused. As mentioned above, many of the agencies represented were already engaged in increasing their floating support as a way to manage the reduction in estates and funding. However, this approach is not without its issues, particularly when it means in practice further reduction of services

I think we will become more reliant on floating support, I think that's a good thing actually. I think there needs to be a back-up plan in case that doesn't work (Service E).

A parallel approach has been the introduction of the Reconnection Policy: a Supporting People driven initiative in partnership with Gloucestershire County Council, and a key part of their Four year supporting people strategy (2011: 28). The intention of this policy is to:

improve access to Supporting People funded services for vulnerable and homeless individuals and support those without local connection wishing to seek accommodation in an area where they have such connections and supportive networks (GCC, 2012 p.1).

The outcome of this Reconnection Policy is that, at least in some cases, services have been able to help clients move to areas where they have more local support networks. Johnson & Jones (2015; p.vi) define Reconnection as: 'the process by which people sleeping rough who have a connection to another area ... are supported to return to this area in a planned way', and argue that it has become an increasingly prevalent feature of rough sleeping strategies in England in recent years. They do, however, also argue that this has been largely in the absence of robust evidence regarding the impacts on these groups.

Despite the reservations of Johnson & Jones (2015), one of our interviewees described in positive terms the introduction of Reconnection and its impact on addressing the geographical fracturing of service provision, in this instance with homelessness and young people:

The Reconnection Policy is a great thing. We've had a real bugbear here around: if you've got a young person who is living in Tewkesbury or Gloucester and all of the beds are full and yet in Cheltenham you might have two or three beds empty, where's the issue? ... The Reconnection Policy is addressing that. ... So, we would certainly say Reconnection Policy – brilliant. It needs to be cross county and agencies need to adhere to it (Service E).

Reconnection does offer a partial solution to residualisation. It provides a route for individuals to relocate to areas in which they have more local or community support. However, we share the

reservations of Johnson & Jones (2015) insofar as Reconnection is clearly only suitable in certain circumstances, for example dealing with homelessness. In other in other situations, such as provision of emergency accommodation for people in abusive relationships, reconnection is of little use.

Another approach taken by our respondents in light of the pressures of around changes in services provision was the use of Asset Based Community Development (ABCD). This is an approach to community development that builds on the assets already present within communities in order to engage volunteers and organisations to meet local needs. As such, ABCD has been a popular solution to austerity driven resource management as it offers ways to strengthen local communities in a cost effective manner. One of our respondents was a particular proponent of this approach:

I think there's a great future in looking at how we mobilise volunteer workforces to complement and paid workforces to work together to provide services and I think that's going to feature quite highly in the future and we would be great advocates of that actually (Service E).

ABCD offers a route democratising community services, changing a top-down approach of resource allocation to one that harnesses the strengths of the community to meet the need of that community. In this way, it can offer a solution to residualisation, where 'social position, reputation and stigma, access to services and to jobs, social cohesion at the neighbourhood level, and hence to life chances for the citizen' (Pawson and Kintrea, 2002; 646). ABCD can add both capacity and resilience to service provision, as our interviewee identifies:

It shouldn't just be a County Council or a government issue to deal with these local issues, we've got to get the community involved. So I think that these types of developments, these types of innovations will become more mainstream as money becomes a bit tighter (Service E).

Asset Based Community Development has been successful in certain contexts with Gloucestershire. Around the time of our interviews, the Gloucestershire charity, the Barnwood Trust, was developing an approach based on ABCD. This was to encourage 'a strong commitment to embed strengths-based approaches across the county' (Barnwood Trust, 2012 no page). These have been successful and, in part, the success has meant that ABCD was subsequently incorporated into the 2012 Local Partnership City plan in Gloucester (Gloucester Partnership, 2012 no page) and became a significant part of the Police and Crime Plan for Gloucestershire (Surl, 2014 no page).

Although the climate in which our interviews took places was clearly difficult, with the threat of reduced funding and changes to service provision, it was clear that those to whom we spoke were actively seeking ways to mitigate the issues. However, some of these issues are compounded by the reform of welfare policy, and this is considered in the following section.

B. Impacts of welfare policy reform

The second theme emerging from the interviews focuses on the concern of the representatives of the supported housing providers around change to national policies on welfare provision and support for housing. Funding is increasingly becoming a complex mix of charity donations, local government allocation, central government funding for specific services, all of which may be topped up with money from clients' government-allocated housing allowances, some of which are provided through the Housing and Communities Agency (HCA) grant and others through other welfare benefits, such as housing benefit. There was a feeling amongst those interviewed that the growing demands of managing, allocating and commissioning funding were changing the ways services are working. From the interviews, we identified change as both directional and structural.

Directional change is represented by a shift in location of payments that favours a funding flow that comes through the client rather than through the provider, described by some as a quasi-market approach. This is particularly apparent in significant welfare reforms. For example:

- a system introduced to replace a wide range of other welfare benefits, known as 'Universal Credit',
- the 'direct payment' plan for government allocated Housing Benefit,
- the introduction of the so-called 'bedroom tax'.

Structural change is concerned with the allocation of funding directly to supported housing organisations. In particular:

- the processes for funding supported housing,
- the removal of ring-fencing for the Supporting People programme,
- increased competition in the sector.

B.1 Changes to individual funding and benefits (directional)

In terms of the changes to the direction of funding, a shift to universal credit and direct payment was a particular area of concern for respondents. The proposed changes meant that supported housing providers would no longer be able to claim housing benefit on behalf of clients, but instead this money would be paid directly to individuals (DWP, 2011). This change was subsequently introduced and has been significant. The organisation *Support Solutions* who consult on 'issues affecting Providers and Commissioners of housing support and social care services', describe the changes as a 'paradigm shift'. They identify the 'sheer scale and diversity of simultaneous change that presents both providers and commissioners with what amounts to the biggest challenge to the way the sector does things that [they] can recall' (Patterson, 2012; no page number). This concern was echoed in our interviews with testimony of direct impacts of changes in the direction of funding flows.

One area of significant concern was the move to direct payments, with one interviewee describing the uncertainty that this was causing:

We are yet to see what the welfare reforms will throw up really. There is all this concern about the payment of Housing Benefit isn't there? (Service A).

Direct payment incur some potentially significant impacts on how individual clients manage their tenancies, particularly for those clients who may lead chaotic lives or have issues with substance abuse. There are a range of other impacts identified by our interviewees, for example, one reported consequence of the policy commonly known as the 'bedroom tax' was a deficit in single bedroom properties. As a result, some of those who lost a portion of their housing benefit will be forced to move into 'more appropriate housing'.

... there is a limited supply of - a very limited supply of - one bedroom, single person properties in this district. It's disproportionately small compared to the other districts. And the other traditional part of the sector where you place people is in the private rented sector and that's small here as well, or certainly the part that would accept the type of clients we are talking about is small - and is poor quality (Service A).

The difficulty in securing suitable accommodation for moving people on and out of supported housing means that services either become congested and unable to move clients out, or that clients might reach a maximum stay-duration common in many projects. In both cases they might be faced with a move into unsuitable or unsustainable accommodation, or have no move-on provision at all. For example:

... we have accommodation that we basically rent off landlords to secure for young people coming through these high-support services; to make sure that they get the support they need. And ideally when they are moving on from that they are not going with any bad debt records and they are moving in as good tenants....Landlords and going to be picky about who they take in. And suddenly you will have another form of discrimination going on. Interestingly, someone told me yesterday that one authority has informed them that no-one under 30 will be offered a one-bedroom flat (Service C).

This issue of move-on for those under-35 emerged as a particular issue in the interviews. The UK Government Housing Benefit advice website succinctly states: 'If you're single and under 35, you can only get Housing Benefit for bed-sit accommodation or a single room in shared accommodation' (Gov.UK, 2016; no page).

The other group identified as at particular risk were those who required 'places of safety' accommodation. This is a concept where the housing agency has a stock of self-contained

housing that they can use for emergency need. The client would not have to share, thus mitigating safeguarding issues. However:

Universal Credit is a big problem for the 'places of safety' accommodation ... If a woman has got two eighteen year old kids, she can move in with them so they are not sharing with other women, like in a refuge. So there are lots of positive things. Welfare benefits have caused a problem for that. If you have got a three bed house and a single woman happens to move in or a woman with a three month old child then she is going to get a huge reduction on her benefits. So that's a big problem for us (Service F).

The issues are not just around the lack of affordable accommodation for single people, or those with young families that need suitable, safe accommodation. It is also an issue for housing agencies that predict they may have to take up additional cost for this housing, at least in the shorter term:

We're working with the council to try ... to secure two bed homes because probably the losses are minimised as far as we can. Then if you have got lots of kids we just have to manage until we can find something better (Service F).

A further indirect impact is the additional work that welfare policy reform has created. One respondent, who mentions the added burden of managing this significant change at a local level, illustrates this:

Obviously, there's cuts in benefits, national cuts and bedroom taxes and all those sorts of things result in difficulties for tenants and tighter controls on Housing Benefit spends, over scrutiny by councils. All these impact on the amount of time our staff spend improving services/properties (Service B).

This was echoed by another respondent, who describes the disruption caused by welfare changes and the pressures of supporting this transition:

The other impact of welfare benefits just on the population at large. Where a lot of our time ... is just being taken up managing the welfare benefit process. So you have got a fair amount of people who aren't really vulnerable per se, perhaps their mechanisms for coping with change aren't very good but [they] were fine. But now we find we spend a lot of time helping them with 'can they move?', 'can they afford to move?' because of the bedroom tax and what the impact is on them (Service F).

B.2 Changes to central funding and competition (structural)

Structural changes in funding for supported housing caused significant concern for our interviewees. In particular, the change in funding practices in which 'the Supporting People funding ring-fence was removed and its allocation devolved to the local level' (Johnson & Jones, 2015; p. 10). In practice this removal of ringfencing has led to some concern that local Councils might use these funds more generally, or at least for aspects of housing provisions that were likely to be viewed more favourably. A 2010 survey found that 'Eighty-two per cent of local authority commissioners said that 'little or no protection' would be given to their supported housing programmes when their budgets are set next year' (Twinch & Bury, 2010; no page). This fear was echoed in our responses:

Supporting People have now refocused where they are placing their resources, so they are developing community-based services. That doesn't really, in my opinion, have successful outcomes for the more challenging groups of people (Service C).

As a consequence, changes in provision are being driven by funding rather than by needs identified by local services. A dimension of this was the 'creep' in service support, where services that were once low or medium support are increasingly taking clients with higher support needs. This was largely being driven by the cuts in direct funding from supporting people, and the pressures that organisations were coming under to continue to provide a wider range of services with existing teams and services:

...probably a third of our grant is supporting what they used to call low/medium services. But within that low/medium we were providing higher levels of service simply because it was our staff team (Service C).

One significant effect of this process is that smaller providers were finding it harder to compete in the market:

The other thing is that we have seen a number of small providers disappear, as we are trying to streamline everything due to the funding coming down and we have put the money towards the front services. Like most authorities, you have seen them going into block contracts and trying to minimise the amount of contracts that we've got. Therefore, we are just looking for providers who can provide a huge range of things... You have these big companies. They are all chasing the contract values, which are reducing (Service A).

As with the changes to individual payments and support, the uncertainty over the impacts of changes to central funding was causing a high level of concern amongst our interviewees. For example, competition and new providers increasingly impact on the market:

Probation changes are a concern. We have many clients who are offenders, including high-risk offenders. And there is uncertainty how the restructures work

and how future providers will work in partnership with supported housing because they are looking to be run by a private organisation (Service B).

And elsewhere:

I think the constant competition for monies, the constant need to drive down costs, affects the quality of services and potentially affects the standards (Service C).

More generally, the introduction of competition was having a significant drain on resources for some of the organisations:

If and when we are pitched in competition so much energy will go into that, so much time and resource. Everybody will be doing that. It's a huge amount of input for possibly only one provider to come out triumphant and what happens to all the others and all the energy that's been expended in that process? (Service E).

The cumulative impact of these effects of competition feeds into structural changes within the sector. The outcome of this is 'uncertainty how the restructures work and how future providers will work' (Service B). Ultimately, rather than developing strategic approaches, structural changes mean that providers are chasing the policy context whilst trying to provide for the immediate needs of clients:

It can take your eye off the ball and putting that care and support in place for young people who need it and let's focus on getting the model right with good providers, with local providers before we chop and change too much (Service E).

B.3 Strategies and solutions

Although a great deal of the commentary reflected concerns for the future, there was also a positive note in many interviews, particularly around how forced changes might drive strategies and solutions in service development.

Again, we feel quite positive. Although through the tendering process we have lost some contracts and there may be more losses in the future, we also have more opportunities to work with different groups and help our clients in a wider variety of ways. (Service D)

For example, one organisation in particular was trying to use the changes in legislation as way to support groups who have traditionally been very difficult to place in accommodation:

What we are hearing nationally is that people are being affected by it [the changes]. People are struggling to pay their rent. Well we might be able to use

that to our advantage as we have got a bunch of homeless young people who actually might be able to go in and share in somebody's house where they do have a spare room for a period of time. ... We have done it on a couple of occasions and it's worked really, really well (Service E).

The general feeling from interviewees was that, where they had been able to prepare for the changes, they felt more confident. In particular, where they were consulting and engaging with local authorities and other bodies, they have more confidence in managing change:

We've been part of forming the county plan. We are impressed with the way the County Council consult with us even if we don't like some of the tender outcomes. We do believe that the County Council do listen to providers and that providers do have absolutely adequate opportunity to feed into strategic plans (Service E).

In Gloucestershire things are okay actually with the Local Authorities, the Local Authority to be honest seem fairly, reasonably well organised....maybe Gloucestershire is in a better position, better organised. But other councils have and don't seem so organised, you can see the potential is there (Service F).

It was clear that the changes to welfare provision would have some profound impacts on the nature of both supported housing as well as the wider housing sector more generally. For some, there was a drive to engage in new working practises that could mitigate some of these changes:

'New ways of working will emerge, more focus on keeping people in their own homes, maybe more reliance on tele-health or tele-care and a 'virtual' support provision (Service B).

However, the same interviewee goes on to express concerns about the impacts of this change, which at the time of interviews was in its initial stages:

There is a danger that this will lead to social isolation, relapses into social health or actions, which may not be identified early enough for appropriate interventions if one to one support isn't frequent. There is an emphasis on squeezing everything out of providers and we appreciate the need for value for money, but quality must remain if services are to be meaningful' (Service B).

5. Discussion

Supported housing has faced some considerable challenges over the past few years. Changes to funding practises, welfare payments and the introduction of new forms of competition have all changed the context in which housing providers work. This paper captures interviews with professionals at a significant point of change, assessing their view on the biggest challenges and

potential solutions within the supported housing sector. For many, this has meant difficulties but some have responded with innovation.

The concerns of those we interviewed clearly demonstrated significant issues with welfare policy reform. Our analysis suggests that our interviewees consider this in two main categories, directional changes to individual funding and benefits and structural changes to central funding and competition.

Our interviewees described how structural changes to central funding have led to increased competition and the loss of some providers. This focuses supported housing providers' attention on economic viability rather than client need. Jacobs & Manzi (2013: 11) also recognise this process, describing 'new landscapes of housing' characterised by the impacts of the 'Commodification of care', a 'reconfiguration of the welfare state' and 'changes in spatial geographies' - all features present in the interviews reported in this paper. They argue that a key feature of the new housing landscape is 'the accentuation of policies to encourage local government agencies to disengage from service delivery and the implementation of new mechanisms to enable private sector agencies to provide and manage social housing' (Jacobs & Manzi, 2013; p7).

The changes to welfare provision have created landscape where corporate approaches to housing provisions have become more necessary. In effect, they have forced the public and voluntary sectors into a more commercial landscape in which competition and marketization become increasingly important aspects of day-to-day work. Jacobs & Manzi (2013; p. 4) 'observe the operation of private sector organizations seeking to fill the vacuum in public policy and analyse proposals to expand their role in areas of welfare'.

The particular concern expressed around 'commodification of care' focuses on the removal of government involvement in housing provision and the role that housing agencies play in helping individuals to manage the services they require. This change is particularly apparent in relation to challenges that have arisen as a result of the changes in the flow of money to support individuals to obtain their housing needs, rather than service providers to ensure the needs are met.

The specific concerns around impacts to the individual focus on the shift from direct provision of housing through local authority to a system that uses Universal Credit to provide direct payment which incurs some potentially significant direct impacts. Impacts highlighted by the respondents include the lack of 1 bed flats in the right locations, and indirect impacts such as the increased need for time to provide the assistance and service that clients need. The National Housing Federation (2015, p3) argues that 'a lack of appropriate support can result in huge costs to public services and in some cases create serious antisocial behaviour problems.' They argue that efficient supported housing delivers net annual savings to the public purse. Furthermore, the impacts of change to individuals within supported housing can be significant. The result is a comprehensive reform of welfare policy and supported housing that could neither achieve

improved care nor reduced long term costs and - worse - could increase the costs both socially and economically.

In terms of changes in service provision, the biggest concern expressed by respondents was around the fracturing of services, both geographically and in terms of levels of service provision. Our key concern with this is that it leads to entrenched residualisation within the supported housing sector. Although the current round of austerity savings in welfare budgets around the world has served to reignite debates on how residualized populations access the support they need, residualisation itself has long been a concern on terms of social and supported housing, and is not restricted to the United Kingdom.

The process of residualisation is common in many parts of the world facing similar challenges to our case study in the United Kingdom. In Australia, in depth interviews conducted by Morris (2013; 1) describe how 'high demand for public housing and its limited availability, means that in order to be eligible, potential tenants usually have to be in greatest need'. For Morris (2013; 15) a 'policy for making public housing primarily the domain of people with greatest need has serious implications'. For example, Morris (2013) cites the possibility that this can have the particularly unsettling effect for individuals who are unpredictable, threatening or who have issues with a psychiatric disorder or substance abuse. These findings were borne out by responses from interviewees in this study who described the challenges of housing clients with a complex range of needs and vulnerabilities, particularly where there is dissonance between need and provision in a local community.

In Sweden, Andersson & Turner (2014; 3) describe how in the 1990s, the Liberal-Conservative government sold off housing stock that had up to this point been key in the Social Democrats' policy of providing 'secure, high quality, affordable housing for all'. The continuation of the process through successive governments, and particularly re-emphasis of this process under austerity measures, mean that 'inner city Stockholm has further gentrified and that non-converted housing properties experience residualisation (households have become poorer in relative terms)' (Andersson and Turner, 2014: 3). They argue that politically initiated changes in Sweden over the last 20 years have changed the role of public housing and that is unlikely to be reversed. 'For the foreseeable future it will be the political ideologies of these local governments that will locally decide the future of particular public housing companies as well as how to address and counteract residential segregation.' (26-27). In Australia and Sweden, the process of public housing reform is resulting in residualisation as it appears to be in the UK and in all these cases the question is whether this is a barrier or a an opportunity for the agencies responsible.

From the data here, it is clear that residualisation has particularly affected those members of the community with the greatest need for support. Although residualisation is nothing new within the housing sector, our respondents reported that the austerity-driven changes place burdens on supported housing provision that have led to fracturing of services. Reduction in availability and pressures on the ability for people to be able to move on to more suitable accommodation, which in many cases is not available. Jacobs & Manzi (2013 p 7) argue that this is an active intervention

by the government, with the intention of marketing housing provision and reconfiguring the nature of state support: 'It is evident from even the most cursory reading of government policy documents that the long-term aim of the Coalition government is to reframe public housing as a transitional mode of housing until tenants can exit to the private rental or owner occupied sector, and thereby reconfigure the view of public housing as a residual tenure.'

Although this causes significant difficulties in the Gloucestershire context, with supported housing managers and professionals have responded with a variety of approaches and solutions to manage the dynamic and challenging policy landscape. One of these responses has been the movement to a floating-support approach in which 'bricks and mortar' provision is being steadily replaced by support that is less tightly managed around housing projects and more associated with supporting people in their own or privately rented homes. This move was sometimes a planned change in working patterns, and sometimes a forced response to the increased emergency use of 'spot purchasing'. In either case, there was a clearly identified shift towards the floating-support approach to deal with the changing geographical and support needs of clients.

Other solutions were part of a more coordinated plan, led by statutory agencies and organisations such as supporting people and the county council. The introduction of a Reconnection Policy formed part of Gloucestershire County Council's four-year Supporting People Strategy (2011: 28) and offered an opportunity for housing agencies to enable people to move location to areas where they had more local support, thus reducing the burden on the agency. Similarly, a move to Asset Based Community Development, in which housing and community organisations collaborate with local government to develop a community based response to community need has developed as a creative, bottom-up response that builds on community strength. This has been a key part of a wide range of local strategies, including Local Partnership City Plan in Gloucester (Gloucester Partnership, 2012) and work by the Police and Crime Commissioner.

These solutions are all driven by austerity and offer a response to the dangers of further residualisation. As is clear in some of our responses, and evident in the literature (Morris, 2013; Andersson & Turner, 2014; Sheridan et al, 2004), in the context of austerity and change it will be important for supported housing providers to work hard to maintain coordinated and adequate support. They must adopt an entrepreneurial approach in the context of a shifting policy environment to maintain and develop partnerships between local communities, providers and local authorities to provide quality supported housing that meets the needs of the most vulnerable members of the community.

Conclusions: where they are now?

This article is a scoping exercise that explores supported housing in a heightened context of uncertainty. The core of the paper is an analysis of interviews with professionals in the supported

housing context in Gloucestershire. These interviews revealed a range of key challenges faced by supported housing professionals. In particular, the impacts of welfare policy reform on both individual funding and benefit and structure funding and competition were discussed as significant challenges. Further to this the fracturing of provision in the county meant that it was often difficult to address these issues in a coordinated way. This links to the concept of residualisation in which supported housing provision is increasingly only available for those most in need. Although residualisation is nothing new in the supported housing context, the pressures of austerity driven by the global financial crisis, mean that our participants addressed concerns that suggest that recent changes have heightened the pressures of residualisation.

Given the scope and level of the change, at the ground level, our interviewees were responding to the shifting housing landscape in a range of innovative and entrepreneurial ways. Unsurprisingly, those that were able to operate more flexibly found that they could respond to the uncertainty in a more effective manner, although the ability to do this depended on their organisation's capacity to dedicate time and resources. Most significantly the capacity to communicate effectively with local authorities offered these housing agencies the chance to respond as proactively as possible to changes in the funding landscape. This would not mitigate those changes, but was allowing them to prepare for the more significant changes and more significant impacts of changes that were yet to be fully realised.

We don't really get a good feel for the future, our place within it, have we got a place within it? And I suppose if we are deemed to be a credible, effective provider of supported accommodation how the plan will ensure that we can continue to make a positive contribution in the County because under competitive tendering we can't be assured of that. However, what we're beginning to hear is that individual consultations might take place with current providers around their offer. (Service E)

In the three years since this initial data was collected, it is interesting to note how many of the concerns of our interviewees are realised. The impact of policy changes on supported housing have still 'been subjected to limited empirical research' (Jacobs & Manzi, 2013; p7), which is concerning given the relatively significant impact on national and local communities, as well as on the lives of clients who often rely on these services. In 2015, the National Housing Federation produced a report that detailed the need and supply of supported housing in the UK, concluding that 'there is a growing crisis in supported housing to which reduced revenue funding, challenging commissioning and partnering structures, and the wider housing crisis all contribute' (NHF, 2015; p2). These concerns around revenue and funding, commissioning, and partnering (particularly in relation to the role of private sector organisations) clearly resonate strongly with the concerns expressed previously in our interviews.

This paper has provided a local case study, which sheds wider insights into processes that are emergent in supported housing in a range of international contexts as a result of policy reform. This paper has provided evidence from housing professionals of their reflections on their responses to the uncertainties, and concludes that there is a real and pressing threat of further

residualisation within the sector. Although the professionals interviewed as part of this research described a range of innovative and entrepreneurial responses to this threat, it is essential that further research explores how effective these responses are in challenging the threat of residualisation. Having focused this paper on the perceptions of the housing professionals, this paper has revealed several important findings that have wider implications for the supported housing sector. There is now a clear and urgent need for future research to focus on the particular issues of change and uncertainty from the perspective of a wider range of stakeholders, including institutional stakeholders and the experiences of those service users and others in a position of need of support for their shelter.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank all the organisations that have supported this research by allowing the respondents time to take part in the research. Thanks to the respondents who gave up their time to be interviewed and responded positively to our follow-up questions. Thanks to Gaby Green who acted as a research assistant on this project. Thanks to the editor and anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on an earlier draft. The authors also acknowledge the University of Gloucestershire School of Natural & Social Sciences Research Culture Fund for the financial support that made this collaboration possible.

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