

## Frontline Network, Impact of COVID-19 (Coronavirus) on homelessness: Call to Evidence

At the Frontline Network, we support frontline workers from the public, statutory and voluntary sectors, who work with individuals experiencing homelessness.

During the COVID-19 crisis outbreak, we saw an opportunity to do more to help people who have been directly affected by COVID-19, which is why we created the "VRF - Emergency Fund".

To identify the best ways of supporting people experiencing homelessness at this time, we set up the 'Emergency Fund Survey', to gather feedback from frontline workers on what they were seeing and what was needed.

Our eighteen-question survey confirmed that, so far, there are consistently high levels of need for accommodation where individuals can self-isolate; a high need for food and essentials; and an increasing need for the digital resources necessary to keep in contact with key workers and support networks.

Please find below a summary of our survey's key findings from 19th March - 30th March 2020, with focus on two areas where the Committee is interested in finding out more:

- 1. How effective has the support provided by MHCLG and other Government departments in addressing the impact of COVID-19 on those in the private rented sector, rough sleepers, and the homeless?**

### Key Findings

Between 19th March 2020 - 30th March 2020 (as of 9:00am), a total of 836 responses to the VRF-Emergency Fund Survey were received. Frontline worker responses comprised of 'keyworkers' (63%), 'managers' (27%), 'volunteers' (1%), as well as 'other' (8%) frontline roles. Responses were received from a variety of

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that frontline workers can respond multiple times to our survey. We are keeping our survey open and would encourage all frontline workers to complete it as needs shift. This is to ensure that we continue to adapt as the needs of people experiencing homelessness change over the course of the COVID-19 crisis.



service types, including those working in outreach, housing, charity, social work, health, and probation.

### **Barriers to effective support:**

In our Emergency Fund survey, we asked frontline workers if they could identify any emerging areas where COVID-19 has directly impacted their ability to support people experiencing homelessness.

As people go into isolation, an increased number of frontline workers described how many face-to-face services are closing due to public health concerns.

The impact for those experiencing homelessness who usually receive support through these services is significant, and the most significant barriers have been cited below:

- **No direct contact, face-to-face meetings/contact (51%)**
- **Services have been closed/reduced (47%)**
- **Clients/staff cannot buy essentials such as food, sanitizer and food banks are closed or experiencing shortages (17%)**

An area which showed consistently high levels of need when the survey was first opened was access to food supplies. However, over the course of the first two weeks, an increased emphasis was placed on sourcing appropriate accommodation for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Indeed, a growing number of frontline workers have requested a rapid intervention grant to help access accommodation where individuals they support can safely self-isolate. As many do not have access to phones, digital resources, or the internet, a large concern is that lots of people have now lost direct contact with their key workers.

### **Impact of COVID-19 on supporting people to access accommodation**

From 19<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> March, many frontline workers stated there was a shortage of accommodation and cited the impact this is having on support people experiencing homelessness. Several responses likened it to a “bottlenecking” or slowing down”: *“Slow-down or move-on options which will limit availability of service to current homeless.”*

Some stated that landlords are currently less willing to let to people who are symptomatic, and that this is causing move-on to be paused. If viewings are happening, it is stated staff are not always able to accompany people as would usually happen.

It is also stated within several responses that hostels are also not accepting admissions or giving interviews. Some suggest rooms are being kept as voids so that they can be used to self-isolate people if needed: *“We cannot accept new referrals at this time due to the need to keep some rooms void in case they are*

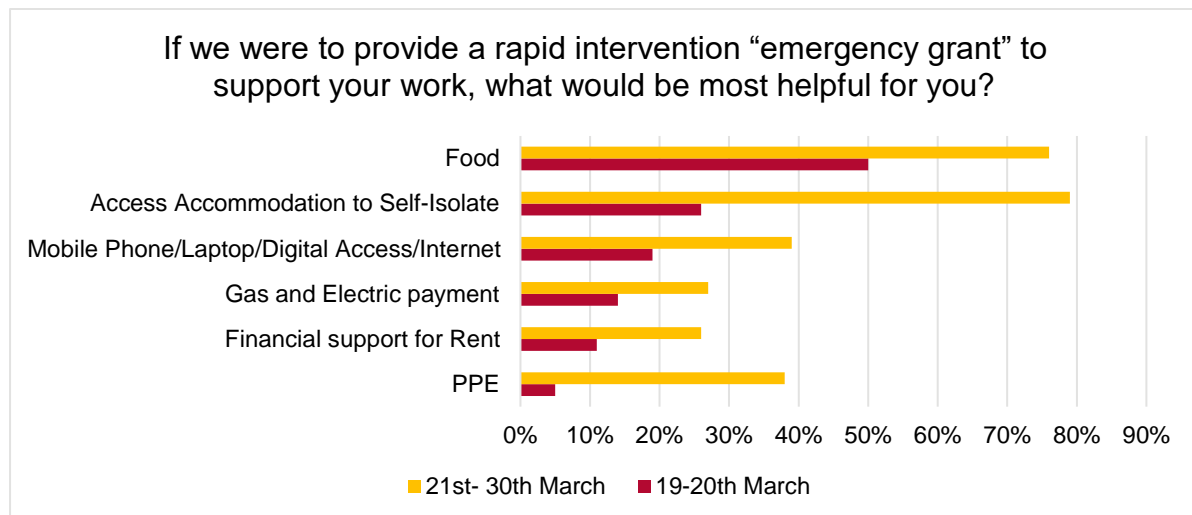
needed as isolation rooms and also to minimise risk by reducing numbers coming through“.

Some also suggest rooms are not being cleaned as much due to staff being off (R109). Frontline workers have also said that services are also starting to see a reduction in staff levels which is impacting on their ability to provide support.

### **What funding support would be most useful?**

We also asked frontline workers if we were to provide a rapid intervention “emergency grant”, exactly what funding support would be most helpful for their work.

Between 19<sup>th</sup>- 20<sup>th</sup> March, we received 485 responses to our survey. During this time, frontline workers highlighted the immediate need for food, accommodation, support and contact with the people they support.



Between 21<sup>st</sup> - 30<sup>th</sup> March, 361 responses were received, where the support needs initially stated in the first two days became more pronounced. During this ten-day period, nearly four in five frontline workers mentioned the need for a rapid intervention grant to find accommodation where individuals can self-isolate.

In the same period, over three in four frontline workers suggested that urgent financial support is required, to guarantee the people they support have access to food supplies. Many also suggested in the survey that their clients may not have access to phones, IT, or physical services, and that they have now lost all forms of contact with their frontline workers. Rapid interventions in relation to offering payment for utility bills and rent has also been suggested.

Between the period 21<sup>st</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> March, there was a significant rise in the number of frontline workers requesting personal protective equipment, and sanitisation products for the people they support, compared to the first two days of the survey being open.

Overall, our survey responses to this question show that, so far, frontline workers are requesting support for accommodation, food, support, and methods of keeping in contact with the people they support.

### **Direct Quotes:**

- **Funding to Access Accommodation/Access to Self-Isolation:**  
*“Appropriate housing, which is safe and can facilitate self-isolation. Provisions to provide those in need with food and emergency supplied”.*
- **Funding for Food:**  
*“Food for those self-isolating (food banks do not have enough)”.*
- **Funding for Mobile Phone/Laptop/Digital Access/Internet:**  
*“Money to buy phones so clients have access to the internet, money for food if they must self-isolate and housing costs for B&B of, they present with symptoms*
- **PPE/sanitisation products (for clients and FLWs):**  
*“Month’s rent in advance as well as deposit if a private landlord was to offer a tenancy”.*
- **Funding for Gas and Electric payment:**  
*“Funds to enable us to assist clients with gas and electric top ups as well as the ability to provide essential household items”.*
- **Financial support for Rent:**  
*“Access to effective PPE for volunteers to ensure the longevity of our daily emergency response (gloves, masks, sanitiser)”.*

## **2. What problems remain a current and immediate concern for these groups?**

### **Key Findings**

As of 27<sup>th</sup> March 2020 (8:30am)<sup>2</sup>, we added two questions to our survey, which relate to support for people who are now accommodated in self isolation.

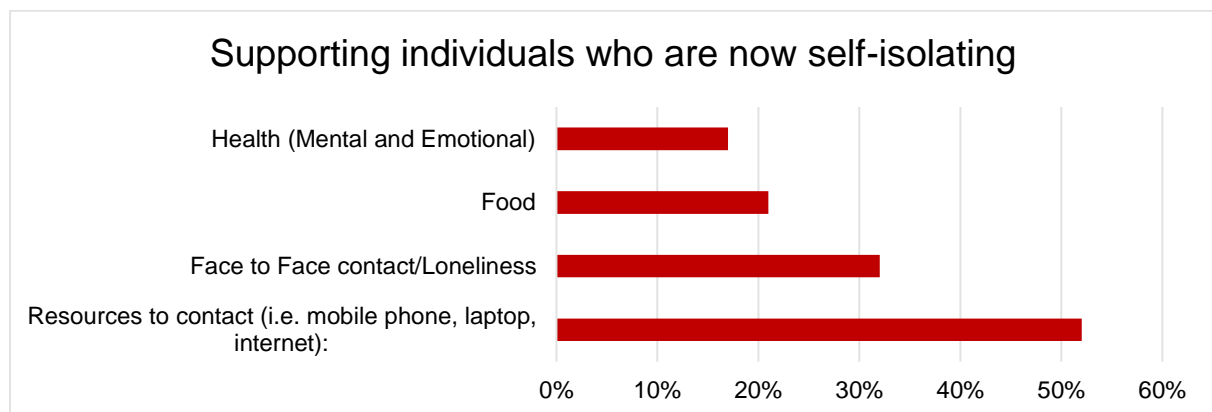
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<sup>2</sup> Please note that this question was added to the Emergency Fund Survey on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2020. The above analysis refers to the 65 responses received during the period 27<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> March.

## Frontline Workers Supporting Individuals Self-Isolating

We asked frontline workers for examples of how best to support people during self-isolation. So far, our feedback confirms that frontline workers are finding it hard to contact the people they support - especially as many do not have access to digital resources.

The concern over contact has been highlighted both in terms of supporting identifying individual's immediate needs; (i.e. food supplies, sanitisation products and payment of utility bills), to identifying people's longer-term support needs during self-isolation. The areas that people found most of challenge when trying to provide support to those who are self-isolating, include:

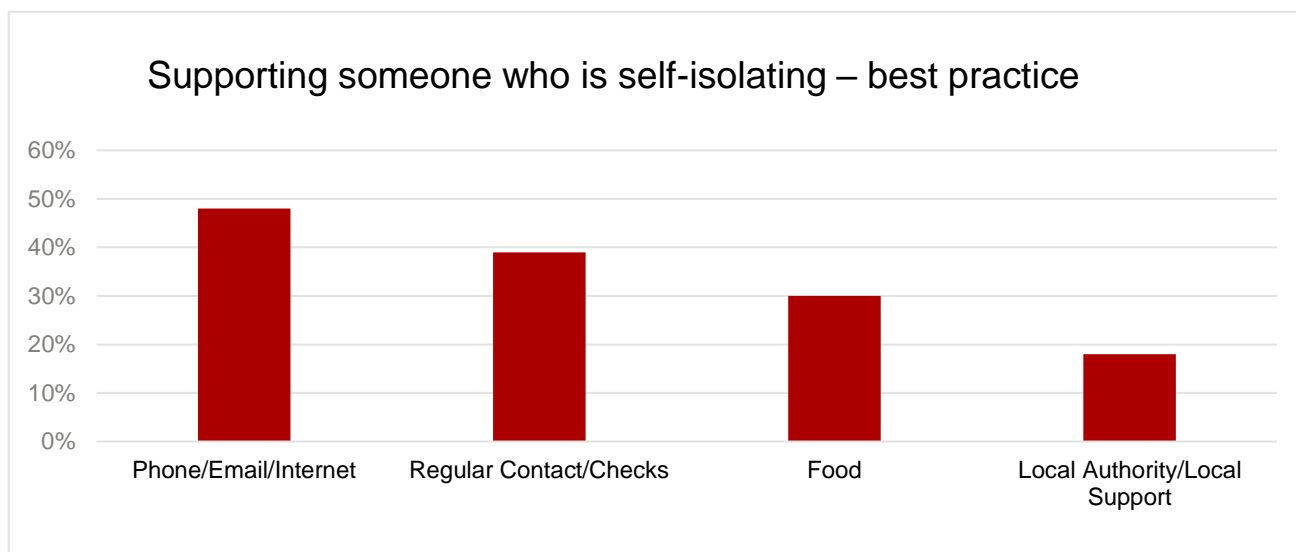


### Direct Quotes:

- **Resources to contact (i.e. mobile phone, laptop, internet): 52%**  
*"I cannot communicate with them because they don't have phones"*
- **Face to Face contact/Loneliness: 32%**  
*"Not seeing family members and feeling cut off from society and doing things which would have been a focus for them".*
- **Food: 21%**  
*"Lack of food, support and contact"*
- **Health (Mental and Emotional): 17%**  
*"This is impacting hugely on their mental health and I have to try and keep their spirits up over the phone the best I can. Also, contacting benefits and food parcels"*

### Supporting someone who is self-isolating – best practice

In addition to the challenges around supporting individuals during this time, we also asked frontline workers for examples of how best to support people during self-isolation. Here is our list of the most frequently cited examples to date:



- **Regular Contact:** *“Regular phone contact so they hear a voice and have someone to listen and speak to. Contact details for online and telephone support services”.*
- **Food:** *“Food fund so we can facilitate the order and delivery on their behalf, starlight to their door. There has to be consistent contact by a range of methods including phone calls, texts, WhatsApp and email”.*
- **Phone and Digital Access/Resources:** *“Give emotional support over the phone and give resources that can keep them occupied”.*
- **Local Authority/Local Support:** *“Identify local support who are able to visit. e.g. local authority has started a community hub, enabling referral to voluntary services who can arrange deliveries”.*

### Concluding remarks

Overall, frontline workers have stated there are consistently high levels of need for accommodation where individuals can self-isolate; a high need for food and essentials; and an increasing need for the digital resources necessary to keep in contact with key workers and support networks.

Whilst great efforts have been made to accommodate individuals, our feedback confirms that frontline workers are finding it hard to contact the people they support - especially as many do not have access to digital resources.

The concern over contact has been highlighted both in terms of supporting identifying individual’s immediate needs; (i.e. food supplies, sanitisation products and payment of utility bills), to identifying people’s longer-term support needs during self-isolation.

As face-to-face homelessness services remain closed in line with public health guidance, there should be a recognition that great support can be provided through increase access to digital resources.

Without this access, there is a significant concern that individuals will lose direct contact with their key workers and vital support networks.