



Faculty of Business and Law

Interim Year One Report

Freedom2Work: Buying the future pilot project evaluation

**De Montfort University, Leicester
25 July 2017**

Executive Summary

Freedom 2 Work (F2W) is a simple, person-led response to anyone facing homelessness. F2W enables the person to be part of the solution, to contribute and build resilience. By drawing on clients' talents and encouraging self-reliance, F2W offers a protected way back into the world of work.

The hypothesis being tested is: 'Will a combination of secure housing, flexible tailored support and a culture of saving work together to provide a protected path back to the world of work, whilst developing resilience?'¹

'Freedom 2 Work' is focused on the client's needs and aspirations. Clients have reported that they finally feel 'listened to'. Intensive support is vital to the success of the scheme; it is possible to do this at the scale of the Freedom to Work project.

The project commenced in 2016 and this is the first year interim evaluation report to record progress against objectives so far.

The key ingredients of F2W are:

- Shared property
- Back to work advice and workshops with local employers
- Building up rent credit scheme
- Intensive support for wellbeing and life skills

Accommodation

- 37 people have been on the scheme in total
- 3 were in the control group
- 11 have moved on
- 23 are currently being case worked
- There are 22 property units housing 23 people (one has a couple in)
- The properties are owned by two key sets of landlords: (1) Walton Charity and (2) A couple who own a range of 'above the shop' flats and shared residences who 'buy-in' to the aims of F2W and who see the value of having properties managed for them.
- The key element in allowing 'freedom to' is the control over the management of the property and the rent account by F2W staff at Elmbridge – this is vital to the flexibility at the heart of the project.

Employment/ Training

Across the client group of 37:

- 16 found a job once they'd been housed
- 10 of these remain in work now

¹Reflective 'book jacket' description of the F2W project provided by the Chief Executive Officer of Elmbridge Rent Start and the lead driver of the project.

- 5 are volunteering
- 5 are in training
- 10 who found jobs subsequently lost jobs, but some of these went on to further employment, volunteering or training.

Building up Rent Credit

All current F2W clients have committed to building up rent credit - some of the newer starts are about to deposit or commit their first amount.

Of all 37 clients on, or recently moved on from, F2W there are 14 who have saved in the £100s, with the total amount saved by end of year one at £3446 across the client group; the largest individual amount saved by end June 2017 was £520.

Housing History

Amongst the year one F2W cohort 12 had been street homeless. 25 had been imminently homeless. F2W then had come in at a moment of extreme housing loss or housing precarity.

Wellbeing and Support Needs

Five (5) of the year one cohort of 37 had reported alcohol issues, and 6 reported drug issues (both of these tend to be under-reported). 9 of the cohort reported physical health issues, and 20 reported into the F2W project with mental health issues (3 with learning difficulties). 1 client reported a criminal record.

Given the reported information outlined above, it is clear that the F2W cohort had significant need for intensive support and a framework for living, learning, sharing and working. Without the F2W framework, given the multiple and complex reported needs of the client group, expectations of successful unsupported tenancies in the private rented sector (both in terms of accessing and maintaining tenancies) would have been low.

Conclusions

1. The 'Freedom' in the F2W is both for clients to feel 'free' of wider constraints around accommodation and wellbeing - to be able to go into the world of work; but it is also for F2W service providers to feel 'free' to be responsive and flexible to meet individual clients' needs. The flexible F2W approach results from having the right people on the team – but also having the systems in place, the direct management and control of the rent account to allow for 'freedom decisions'.
2. The importance of stable housing is vital to the emerging successes of the F2W approach, if accommodation is precarious then F2W participants cannot concentrate on getting back to work. Having the housing in the full management control of the F2W team is very important – control of the rent account allows the flexibility around the saving towards rent credit and a deposit towards future housing.

3. The impact of the precarious nature of sanctions, universal credit switch-over as well as housing benefit top-ups led to the need for the F2W team to offer emergency support in the form of food, bike repairs, electricity and heating from a destitute fund operated to facilitate flexible emergency support.
4. The cohort and property stock size (23 currently case-worked/ 22 property units) appears to be optimum for the proper delivery of integral F2W interventions. Caution should be applied in any pressure for 'scaleability'.
5. The wide-ranging, complex needs and the precarious lives prior to coming to the F2W project, means that intensive support is needed for many clients. Improvement in wellbeing is not a linear upward trend throughout the tenancy – flexible approaches are vital to respond to individual needs and circumstances. It is noted in the reflection of the team, and in client interviews that an unexpected outcome of the project to date has been how much interim financial support has been required to maintain the stability of many of the tenancies.
6. Clients reported great value in the F2W interventions. There was value in being listened to and in the personal and trusting professional relationships built between clients and the F2W team.
7. Shared living, whilst not immediately aspirational, had brought additional value to some clients who felt that living with others had built their confidence and produced strong friendships.
8. Employment and training interventions had very positive qualitative feedback comments from clients who reported feeling hopeful about their employment futures.
9. An unexpected outcome from the first year of the project was reported by the F2W team. There was reluctance on the part of clients, once in work, to request the rent free period (the saved rent deposit element) to be applied straight away. Most wanted to see if their new job would work out before utilising the rent deposit element; or they sought to apply it to any rent arrears that might have built up.
10. The prospect of moving on from the F2W scheme was exciting but daunting for some. F2W staff are actively examining the portfolio of housing stock they have access to (not necessarily directly managed) in order to be able offer move-on options and this is to be encouraged in years two and three.

Recommendations

1. The first year of the project included significant reflection on what exactly F2W was; it was firmly established by the end of year one that F2W could only be achieved in its fullest extent in properties over which it exercised management and rent account control. There was also discussion during year one on whether clients were 'saving' or 'building a rent deposit' – this question did not seem to burden clients who were not clear on the precise mechanism but liked the broad idea; but it did appear to exercise the F2W team. It is recommended that in year two there is further detailed scrutiny over the key elements, precise definitions of the main interventions of the project and the exact hypothesis being tested over the remainder of the period. Flexibility in the scheme is vital, but this has led to some uncertainty on the exact ingredients of the F2W scheme, and this may warrant some tightening at the start of year two and by Autumn 2017.
2. F2W will need to continue its good relationships with private landlords who already are within the project, and also continue to work with prospective landlords who may consider joining to add more accommodation units that could be used as F2W. This could be particularly helpful in the question of scalability if the scheme were to grow in subsequent years. However, the evaluation shows the challenges for clients and the F2W are towards the end of the first six months to one year of initial tenancy in the F2W managed properties. It is recommended that discussions with private landlords about expanding future properties under this scheme focus more on expanding the portfolio of 'move-on' accommodation stock.
3. F2W should consider liaising through its strong networks and board of advisors, to talk with housing associations in the region in terms of 'selling' the benefits of 'tenancy-ready' individuals who graduate from F2W. It is recommended that there may be scope to consider different channels into working with the private sector both through traditional social landlords who may provide move-on properties for F2W 'graduates' but also social lettings agencies who may be useful partners to work with in the future.
4. The evaluation team and F2W should focus in years two and three on the strands of the scheme that may be replicable for adaptation, and to clearly show which elements of the hypothesis work particularly well and which elements face challenges. Tighter definitions and standardisation of the interventions may assist in this; or it may become apparent that it is the flexibility of approach which is vital and which could be challenging then to replicate or adapt in different contexts.



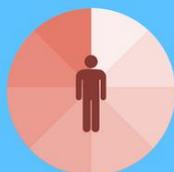
THE STORY OF FREEDOM 2 WORK

Lessons from the first year:



KEY INGREDIENTS LINKED TO PROPERTY

- SHARED PROPERTY
- BACK TO WORK ADVICE
- SAVINGS SCHEME
- INTENSIVE SUPPORT



FOCUSED ON THE PERSON

'Freedom 2 Work' is focused on the client's needs and aspirations. Clients have reported that they finally feel 'listened to'. Intensive support is vital to the success of the scheme; it is possible to do this at the scale of the Freedom to Work project.



YEAR ONE KEY OUTCOMES

- 37 people on F2W scheme in year one
- Intensive support provided to clients re employment and tenancy skills
- 11 have since moved on
- Majority of clients are saving or committed to save
- Clients are either in training, receiving support, volunteering or in paid employment.



EMPLOYMENT/ TRAINING

Across the client group of 37:

- * 16 found a job once they'd been housed
- * 10 of these remain in work now
- * 5 are volunteering
- * 5 are in training
- * 10 who found jobs subsequently lost jobs, but some of these went on to further employment, volunteering or training.



BUILDING RENT CREDIT

All current F2W clients have committed to building up rent credit - some of the newer starts are about to deposit or commit their first amount.

Of all 37 clients on, or recently moved on from, F2W there are 14 who have saved in the £100s, with the total amount saved for rent credit by end of year one at £3446 across the client group.

Contents

Executive Summary	1
Contents	6
Chapter One: Introduction and Context	7
Defining the Project: Key Features of F2W	7
F2W Interventions	8
F2W Clients	8
F2W Context and Elmbridge Profile.....	9
Chapter Two: Evaluation methodology	12
Themes for Interviews with Users and Stakeholders	13
Issue complexity – qualitative evaluation.....	13
Making it count – benefit of F2W to society.....	15
Chapter Three: Literature Review	17
Chapter Four: F2W Year One Findings	22
F2W Client Journeys and Emerging Outcomes	23
Shared accommodation	25
Private rented sector	26
Employment and skills training.....	26
Building up Rent Credit	27
Moving on	28
Combating loneliness and improving wellbeing.....	29
Issues for potential landlords and employers.....	30
Making it Count Data and Analysis	32
Chapter Five: Year One Interim Conclusions and Recommendations	37
References and sources	40
Appendix A: F2W Logic Model	42

Chapter One: Introduction and Context

This interim report provides a summary of the position of the evaluation of *Freedom to Work (F2W)* at the end of the first year of operation – up to 30th June 2017.

There is a broad framework covering three overlapping issues which are central to *Freedom to work*, and which relate to seven F2W ‘interventions’ (detailed further later on) established in an evaluation meeting with service providers on 28th November 2016.

- Provision of accommodation for the type of user group;
- Work and employment opportunities; and
- Building up rent credit.

Defining the Project: Key Features of F2W

F2W is a unique project in terms of the principles and integrated types of intervention². The user group is diverse; but, in general, focuses on adults on the margins of the local housing and labour markets i.e. the revolving door of homelessness and worklessness. It also operates in a high demand housing market in the inner south east on the edge of Greater London. F2W is third-sector-led. There is, thus, potential important lesson-learning as most projects targeting the homelessness worklessness interface are local authority-led and urban/ big city-based (see Rolfe et al, 2015).

The over-riding theme of the project is ‘freedom’. This involves a number of dimensions for staff / service providers and users. In relation to the F2W staff, it includes four interrelated aspects:

- Offering *a wide and diverse range of bespoke support* to reflect the specific needs of individuals.
- Providing *a flexible set of services* that respond to the changing needs of the user.
- Offering *relevant services* i.e. avoidance of a menu of pre-prepared forms of provision.
- Providing an *intensity of interventions* as and when required.

In relation to the F2W service user, it involves a focus on:

- Empowering³ the individual.
- Providing services and support that are valued by the user (and which may be small-scale).
- Balancing interventions and support with freedoms for the user to make choices.

²PATH Devon is developing a project on similar lines, but it covers a geographical area with different housing and labour market characteristics compared with F2W.

³There has been a resurgence in policy-making and academia of the use of the terms, ‘betterment’ and ‘empowerment’, to categorise principles of intervention. Drawing on the use of these terms in North America, betterment refers to provider-centred approaches (and may be viewed as patriarchal and possibly judgmental), while empowerment centres on the actions / needs of the individual.

F2W Interventions

A meeting was held between the evaluation team and the F2W team on 28th November 2016, this was to consolidate information that had been shared up to that point and to attempt to define F2W more specifically. It was suggested by the evaluation team during that discussion that F2W appeared to be a series of seven interventions. This was agreed by the F2W team.

Fundamentally F2W was the freedom to make human decisions in a world of barriers. It was suggested to F2W colleagues that this was not just the freedom for service users, but also the freedom for F2W providers to be dynamic and proactive, to look at a challenge differently, the freedom from traditionally local authority type constraints in this type of service delivery. The seven key interventions were agreed to be:

1. Accessing accommodation
2. Sustaining accommodation
3. Moving on to new accommodation
4. Employment
5. Saving
6. Soft skills and wellbeing
7. Building resilience (staff and client)

A logic model may be an appropriate way of mapping the different interventions and approaches offered by the F2W project (see appendix one). However, there is an empowerment principle that involves interventions as and when required by the user, rather than providing a set menu of sequential step-by-step actions by the provider. Nevertheless, the potential for a logic model to help explain the different interventions may still be valuable to the evaluation.

F2W Clients

At 28th June 2017 there were 26 recorded F2W participants the first showing as commenced in April 2015 showing that some participants were already resident in properties being used as part of this project and who transferred to F2W since it commenced in 2016. The overarching spreadsheet used by the F2W team and shared data with the evaluation team shows that in addition to the 26 current F2W clients, there were also eleven (11) clients who had moved on from the scheme properties, a sample of whom will be interviewed at a mutually convenient point towards the start of year two of the project. During the first year there was reflection on what exactly the F2W ingredients were, as a consequence of this consolidation and learning during year one, three clients on the database who were marked as 'control group' who did not fit all of the elements of F2W. There may be more Elmbridge Rent Start clients to add to this control group, as the project progresses through years two and three. Control group clients are those who are in Elmbridge Rentstart properties, but which are not part of the F2W cohort of properties, and who have not engaged with the F2W scheme. By definition this cohort will be more difficult to engage, but it is hoped that some 'control' Elmbridge client data will help further define F2W.

There were some issues relating to moving people on, particularly relating to two shared properties during the first half of the first year where there were complex issues affecting the individual and the wider shared household. By December 2016 these issues were largely resolved and at that point the minimum cohort of 20 participants was reached. After that the cohort, so that by end June 2017 the baseline cohort currently living in Freedom 2 Work related properties currently being case-worked and supported as F2W clients consists 23 people living in 22 accommodation units (one shared by two people), with a further 11 having moved on already from the scheme.

F2W Context and Elmbridge Profile

F2W operates in an affluent suburban area with a growing population. Issues of homelessness and worklessness are 'hidden'. This is an explicit and an implicit re-occurring theme in the housing and homelessness strategies of district councils in Surrey e.g. Elmbridge and Spelthorne.

The salient points are drawn primarily from four sources:

- *A Housing and Homelessness Strategy for Elmbridge 2015-19* (Elmbridge Borough Council, 2015) and associated documentation.
- Surrey County Council's *Surrey-i*, a one-stop online resource of data and information.
- The Office for National Statistics (ONS) 2011 Area Classifications.
- Centre for Regional Economic & Social Research (2017) study on housing costs for young people in the South East Region

The ONS Area Classifications for 2011 place Elmbridge within the 'prosperous England' group and the 'prosperous towns' sub-group. The pen portraits for these areas highlight the following characteristics:

- High level of home ownership.
- Dominance of detached properties.
- High levels of educational attainment.
- High car ownership.
- Employment in ICT, insurance and financial services sector.
- Dominant household type is 'married with children'.

The detailed data from the second and third sources backs up this portrait of 'Elmbridge as a highly affluent area in the South East Region'.

Thus, households that do not 'fit' this profile face challenges in the housing and labour markets. They may well also be 'invisible' or 'hidden' because of their relatively small size / numbers. This is a reoccurring message from the limited research on rural worklessness i.e. the low political, social and physical visibility of poor households

Population and Households

Elmbridge is an affluent area on the edge of London with a growing population. It continually scores highly in the Halifax Annual Quality of Life Survey. The population of Elmbridge in 2011 was 131,000. There was a 7.3% increase over the previous decade. It is estimated that the population will increase to 149,000 by 2037. There are 53,000 households with 34% with dependent children (compared to 29% for England). Car ownership rates are high (sometimes used as a proxy variable for income) – only 12% of households do not have a car compared to 26% in England.

Economy and Labour Market

There is a relatively high level of economic activity in Elmbridge (74% of the working age population compared to 70% for England). Full time employment is also relatively high (42% compared to 38%). Self-employment is especially high (15% compared to 10%). Levels of economic inactivity are low (26% compared to 30%). The proportion of unemployed persons who are economically active is low (2.7% compared to 4.4%).

Earnings are relatively high. Average weekly gross full-time earnings in 2014 were:

- Work-based (i.e. working in Elmbridge): £722
- Residence-based (i.e. living in Elmbridge): £1,090

The national figures were £629 and £631 respectively.

There is strong evidence of high levels of commuting into Central London. Incomes for those working in Elmbridge make it difficult to access the owner occupied housing market.

Housing Market

The recently updated Home Truths report for the South East Region (National Housing Federation, 2017) reiterates the increasing scale of the issue of the lack of affordable housing. The ratio of mean house prices to mean annual average earnings in 2016 was 13.8:1 for Surrey and 18:1 for Elmbridge. The household income required for an 80% mortgage (at 3.5 x income) in 2016 was £111,000 for Surrey and £162,000 for Elmbridge. Mean monthly private rents per month in 2015/16 were £1,350 in Surrey and £1,845 in Elmbridge⁴.

Enterprise M3 (which is the local enterprise partnership, LEP, for the area⁵) commissioned a study of its housing market in 2014 (Regeneris, 2014). Although it primarily focused on tackling the issue of stalled development sites, it noted that the affordability crisis was hampering the prospects of major local employers in attracting suitably skilled workers. It, furthermore, pointed out that the lack of supply was pushing up private sector rents and

⁴ For comparison purposes, the current LHA shared accommodation rate for Elmbridge is £87 per week.

⁵Enterprise M3 covers parts of Surrey and Hampshire.

house prices much faster than the regional average. Young people on low incomes face major challenges in accessing the housing market in Elmbridge.

There is a high level of owner occupation (73%) compared to England (63%). Social renting is approximately half the national figure at 10%. Nearly 34% of dwellings are detached compared with 22% in England. The proportion of dwellings in the private rented sector increased from 10% in 2001 to 15% in 2011.

Although young heads of households (under 35 years of age) form only 12% of all heads of households, there are disproportionately represented in the private rented sector. Over 55% of this age group live in this sector.

Average house prices in 2014 in Elmbridge were nearly £700,000 and they had increased by 30% over the previous five years. The ratio of lower quartile house prices to lower quartile earnings (which is regarded as a measure of owner occupation affordability) was over 12:1 in 2013. This compared with a figure for England of 6:1

Average rental costs per month were as follows for one-bedroom and two-bedroom property in 2013/14:

- Private renting: £1,200 (2 bedroom) and £860 (1 bedroom)
- Affordable rent: £760 (2 bedroom) and £603 (1 bedroom)
- Social rent: £503 (2 bedroom) and £426 (1 bedroom)

Regeneris Consultancy in a study for the Local Enterprise Partnership in 2014 calculated that indicative annual incomes for various tenures for a two-bedroom property for Elmbridge were:

- Owner occupation: £67,000
- Shared ownership: £52,000
- Private renting: £58,000
- Affordable renting: £46,000

There is a lack of available properties and limited prospects in boosting supply. Furthermore, the emphasis on so-called affordable rents, increasingly places properties beyond the means of low income households.

More generally, a study by the Centre for Regional Economic & Social Research (2017) points out that housing costs across the South East Region are already unaffordable for young people e.g. over 50% of households headed by someone under 35 years of age would be unable to afford a lower quartile private sector rent. Furthermore, additional welfare changes (e.g. the shared accommodation rate changes in 2019) will restrict the rent covered by housing benefit for single people in this age group.

Chapter Two: Evaluation methodology

There are three strands to the commissioned evaluation:

(1) *Evaluation of the benefits of the model*

This aspect of the evaluation involved identification of the project participants through work with the service providers at Elmbridge Rentstart, to include approximately 20 clients across 13 properties. The evaluation will include, where possible, follow-up communication with those that move on successfully from F2W into employment and alternative sustainable accommodation. In the bid, the evaluation team noted that it would be interesting to consider a 'control group' of those in ERS properties but not in the F2W scheme. On reflection from the first nine months of evaluation, it may be possible to glean key lessons from service provider reflections on the initial stages of talking with existing residents about F2W and examining the perceived reasons why some residents signed up and some did not.

This part of the evaluation also includes a 'distance travelled' measure. A broad outline of such an evaluation tool was shared with the ERS F2W team at an initial meeting and the team adapted that for use with clients. As the cohort of clients works through with service providers, there should be some useful broad indicators to illustrate the types of 'journey' F2W clients are on and which collectively should help to show the perceived impact of the project on clients' lives. Additionally, a range of methods provide broader scope to collect service users' views, for example where focus groups are possible, or in the majority of cases where individual interviews are used, completely open questions will allow people to tell their stories.

(2) *Benefits to society*

This second strand of the evaluation is measured through appropriate quantitative metrics. It was agreed in early meetings with the ERS F2W team and with Commonweal that the 'Making it Count' tool would be most appropriate. There were some existing measures in there that did not reflect the central point of F2W that moving out would be a *positive* outcome if attached to sustainable employment and alternative accommodation. After some discussions with the team on specific metrics within that tool, adaptations were made that reflected the F2W aims and allowed the service provider team to share information with the evaluation team. This 'Making it Count' tool has been used in other studies, most notably recently in the Crisis project (Batty et al, 2015) and the authors of the original tool were contacted to ensure the assumptions as part of the model were appropriate and up-to-date for the purposes of the Freedom to Work evaluation.

(3) *Lessons for service providers*

The evaluation team has had good communication with the F2W team and there has been a range of ideas exchange, particularly in the first year on data collection and approaches (for example the distance travelled tool, as well as ideas on a timeline wall in the office to reflect the journey of the project, as well as individual and group reflections). In the longer term there will be opportunities to disseminate ongoing

evaluation findings more widely with the housing and charitable sector and with politicians and policy makers. This will be done following consultation at appropriate points with F2W and Commonweal where there are specific messages and lessons to share.

During year one, the evaluation team met with the F2W team on a number of occasions, to share information, to set out the interventions and to adapt the 'Making it Count' tool. Additionally, a member of the evaluation team visited a number of the properties involved in the scheme in the latter half of 2016 and to talk informally with a small number of residents (not recorded or interviewed, but to visit the properties, introduce the evaluation and get a taste of resident issues). In April 2017 an event with stakeholders was attended by another member of the evaluation team and in May 2017 individual interviews were undertaken with F2W service users, as well as follow-up meetings with the staff on the project team. On an ongoing basis the evaluation team view individual and property reflections from F2W colleagues to provide an overarching picture of what is happening on the project.

Themes for Interviews with Users and Stakeholders

These themes (focusing on the three central tenets of F2W as highlighted in this report's introduction) were piloted at an informal meeting of users and service providers on 12 April 2017, in preparation for the remainder of the qualitative evaluation meetings. They formed the basis of broad themes for open interviews in May 2017 and will do so again for future interviews and focus groups in years two and three.

Shared accommodation

- Reluctance of users to move into shared accommodation with strangers.
- Practicalities of living with others on a day-to-day basis.
- Managing a private rented tenancy in a multi-person household.
- Reluctance of many landlords to take on shared accommodation models because of management and legal complexities.

Employment

- Types of intensive support to help users become 'work ready'.
- Local labour market opportunities, especially precarious employment – advantages and disadvantages.

Building up rent credit

- User ability to build up rent credit.
- Benefits of credits for the client.
- Benefits of rent credit by the user for other stakeholders.
- Designing rent credit schemes.

Issue complexity – qualitative evaluation

As noted in the methodological approach, a range of measures will be used to evaluate the perceptions of F2W on clients' lives. To date the contact with clients has been minimal –

consisting of an initial site visit to a number of properties and a brief introduction to the evaluation. The complexity of some of the issues facing clients means that availability for an evaluation interview may not be of paramount priority and it is for this reason the evaluation team have asked F2W service providers to keep reflective records for their interactions with individual clients and for properties, to add to the evidence base for the evaluation team. Towards the end of year one, it should also be noted that a key member of the F2W project team left the organisation and as such there was a transition moment in the early summer months; with an expectation that the team will have settled down again in the early Autumn 2017 towards the start of year two of the project.

The example below shows how property reflections were being recorded by F2W colleagues in year one, in order to look beyond individual case notes and to see the holistic view of the shared house overall. It is included here solely for the purpose of illustrating the method of data collection.

36 Severn Drive Property Reflections	
<p>TENANTS AG, HM, NR all F2W tenants</p> <p>HISTORY There have been many move-ons from this property but it is currently the most harmonious it has ever been. AG has been there the longest.</p>	
<p>Previous issues Massive issues with drug dealing resulted in a tenant being evicted</p> <p>Smoking and drugs being used</p> <p>Bins not being collected due to improper recycling ended with a maggot infestation</p> <p>Tenants regularly locking themselves out</p> <p>Kitchen left so dirty other tenants could not use it</p> <p>Friends staying over</p> <p>Pans being left to burn out</p>	<p>Current HM has recently found work under the F2W scheme</p> <p>NR moved in recently and is getting on extremely well with HM, however both TT's have slight (not massive) issues with AG</p> <p>AG is extremely angry that he has fallen behind with his rent payments - at present he does not see it as his problem but thinks it is our fault</p>
<p>Before the current TT's moved in there was some aggression between 2 tenants and also arguments between 2 others.</p>	

The evaluation team also encouraged F2W service provider colleagues, where possible and appropriate to continue to ask clients to take 'photo journals' of key moments in their journey in F2W as such images and short explanatory comments can be shared through remote online communication methods which helps to ease the challenges in organising interviews where clients' lives are busy and complex. This has not borne fruit during year one, but it is hoped that a focus group in early stages in year two will re-introduce the idea as it can be a powerful method of individual reflection which adds to the depth of research interview data.

Making it count – benefit of F2W to society

This is ascertained from the quantitative data shared in the adapted ‘Making it Count’ tool. Two tranches of information have been shared so far with the evaluation team. It is difficult at the interim year one stage to make any comments on trends in the data based on this information to date, but the quantitative data team are confident that over the course of the project the quarterly information in this tool will help to present an overarching picture of the quantitatively measured benefits of the F2W scheme. A brief commentary on emerging points is included below.

For the purpose of the Freedom to Work (F2W) programme the quantitative assessment had to be an accepted methodology within the housing sector, manageable in terms of cost and robustness of information, and in a format that is easily understood. The decision was made in term of these criteria to use the Making it Count tool for measuring Value for money and effectiveness indicators for use by the private rented sector (Rugg and Pleace, 2013). Due to the specific nature of the F2W project some adaptations are appropriate in determining project specific indicators that can measure the performance⁶. The Making it Count tool identifies a range of indicators; the list below shows the heading and comments on the adaptations of the measurement tool:

1. Scale of operation
2. Estimating social benefit
3. Successful outcomes:

These are modified to meet the specific needs of the F2W project. The measures are number of tenancies coming to an end in the last quarter; “RED” are those due to eviction, arrears or anti-social behaviour; Amber for those deemed to be making a minimal engagement with the service and Green where tenants have been able to move on positively (e.g. to a sustainable tenancy or owner occupation)
4. Foothold in the local housing market:

Given the very specific nature of the project this has been limited to two relevant elements – number of new landlords to the scheme, and number of properties where the scheme intervention led to improvement in the property standard.
5. Creating sustainable tenancies:

This has been replaced by the heading Effective transition to affordable housing which examines how the tenants are moving through the F2W process. The measures look at: Percentage of clients who receive pre tenancy training; those who engage; those who do not engage (the response here is binary), Percentage attending workshops and finally clients who show a 10% or more improvement in wellbeing.
6. Meaningful activity
7. Value for money
8. Practical interventions

In addition to these performance measures the cost of running the scheme and establishing reserves have been provided by Elmbridge Rentstart F2W colleagues, including reserves or

⁶The initial social benefit costs have been based on the 2013 figures which will be updated to reflect the appropriate indices and set at a common date for comparison purposes

assistance such as rent in advance. The advances that allows tenants the ability to establish a tenancy generate a cash flow funding need but which should be returned when the tenancy ends and can therefore be regarded as a loan rather than a cost. Taking into account funds that should be returned the annual costs are £60,100 with an additional liability fund set up for £12,000. It is worth noting also that volunteering has produced a saving on the project salary costs of £6240 per year.

The benefits comprise a number of measurable and un-measurable aspects. From the reports supplied by the F2W team, quarterly savings of approximately £93,000 based on 19 residents is suggested. Extrapolating this indicates the project would provide a savings in excess of £372,000 savings annually once the full tenant capacity of the programme is taken into account. However, at this stage after just two quarters of information, the evaluation team need to take a measured approach and look again after a full 12 months; as well as evaluating the move-on rate of F2W tenants (the fewer that move on, the fewer new participants in the scheme).

The majority of the savings come from savings of tenants at risk of becoming homeless without the intervention of F2W (£300,000 p.a.) and £72,000 savings from healthcare, professional interventions and policing costs. This however only tells part of the story; 84% of the tenants showed an improvement of 10% or more in their wellbeing, 32% are sustaining employment and a further tenant has taken up volunteering.

The findings are based on the initial reports and will be further analysed and updated over the life of the project to reflect increased savings in interventions and introduction of the living wage.

Going forward, quarterly trends will be established to show how the project is evolving and the findings and analysis will be more meaningful. As the ultimate aim is to establish tenants to return to work and leave to a F2W to stable and sustainable housing the analysis of tenant turnover (successful or otherwise) can be established and various tenant groups can be aggregated. Currently no analysis of successful outcomes in terms of tenancy can be established. Once the successful outcomes of tenants are known an analysis of the cost savings, engagement ratios and savings can be usefully developed. The initial year therefore only shows a snapshot of the initial group of tenants. This snapshot indicates a positive situation, but at the moment it is too early to comment on the long term implications.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

The literature review at this stage is useful for informing methodological approaches; in the final report it will form part of the third evaluation strand – communicating lessons – by placing evaluation findings within the wider literature and analysing key similarities and differences with other projects, published works and across different topics.

Accommodation

There is a small but growing interest nationally on the issue of providing accommodation for single people faced by a revolving door of homelessness and worklessness. Part of the reason for this is the impact of on-going welfare changes (especially around housing benefit, local housing allowance [LHA] and shared accommodation rates [SAR]). For example, there is currently substantial media coverage of the April 2017 changes such as (i) the removal of automatic entitlement to housing costs for 18-21 year olds for new universal credit claims in full service areas, and (ii) cuts in employment support allowance (ESA) for new claimants in the work-related activity. The Chartered Institute of Housing (2017) and the Centre for Regional Economic & Social Research (2017) have recently highlighted the gap between private sector rents and the financial help for meeting housing costs for young single people. They conclude that in some areas, virtually all of the private rented sector properties are out of reach of single people under 35 years of age because of the shared accommodation rate of local housing allowances.

These current changes along with the broader 'welfare reform agenda' are also resulting in councils and housing associations rethinking their allocations policies for single person accommodation i.e. will some groups of single people be able to meet the rents? It is also leading to emerging debates on different types of tenancy agreements and living arrangements for single people on the margins of the labour market e.g. shared accommodation. Furthermore, there continues to be coverage of the willingness or otherwise of private landlords to consider letting accommodation to single households that are welfare-dependent. The House of Commons Library produces regular updated briefings on this topic (see, for instance, Cromarty and Bellis, 2017). This is an important issue for F2W as accommodation is provided in the private rented sector for users. Also, clearly, the broader debate has relevance for three of the seven F2W accommodation interventions – accessing accommodation, sustaining accommodation and moving onto new accommodation.

However, the evidence base on providing accommodation for people faced by the revolving door of homelessness and worklessness is limited. It primarily focuses on young people aged between 25 and 34 (see, for instance, Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcazar, 2017). Other studies include the Sheffield Hallam University review of the Government's 'shared solutions' accommodation project run by Crisis (Batty et al, 2015). A more recent report is a policy-orientated study by the Institute for Public Policy Research North (IPPR North) (Maciver et

al, 2016), which is the concluding publication of a three-year research project. Finally there is the Centre for Regional Economic & Social Research (2017) study on the housing aspirations of young people in the South East Region.

Batty et al (2015) raises some significant issues relevant for the evaluation of F2W including:

- Reluctance, especially among vulnerable households, to move into shared accommodation with strangers.
- Living with others on a day-to-day basis.
- Managing a private rented tenancy in a multi-person household.
- Reluctance of many landlords to take on shared accommodation models because of management and legal complexities.

Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcazar (2017) focus on welfare changes and austerity. They pose the rhetorical question of 'at what stage in the life-course should the welfare state be expected to support residential independence?'. They point out that this leads to forced sharing with strangers that increases the fears and risks faced by young people. They conclude by suggesting that shared property might not be considered a 'home'

Maciver et al (2016, pA3) focuses on unsupported temporary accommodation (UTA), which is defined as insecure housing consisting of 'private hostels, bed & breakfast provision, emergency accommodation, short-stay houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) and guest houses'. It argues that because of the absence of support and services to access permanent accommodation, the only option is UTA. Therefore, action is required to make this an appropriate form of accommodation. It recommends a four-fold approach:

- Creating 'temporary accommodation boards' covering local housing markets and involving a range of public, private and third sector organisations to monitor and share information on bed-spaces and users.
- Establishing 'green lists' and 'exclusion lists' i.e. temporary accommodation boards should maintain live lists of suitable and unsuitable bed-spaces.
- Developing a minimum consistent standard for the UTS sub-market.
- Providing appropriate in-tenancy support for users and landlords / owners.

Again, some of these recommendations provide 'food for thought' for the F2W accommodation interventions.

The Centre for Regional Economic & Social Research (2017) argues that 'overwhelmingly self-contained accommodation is preferred'. Key considerations include:

- Privacy;
- Location (i.e. close to employment and friends and family); and
- Negativity associated with certain types of property and neighbourhood (e.g. fear and risk of criminality).

There is, however, a broader question raised implicitly in these three reports: they provide examples and case studies of 'successful' local action. One of the challenges is 'scaling' i.e. extending successful micro-projects. Scaling-up involves growing the existing project and its

organisation. The danger with this is that it could adversely change the principles. For example, (and hypothetically) would F2W lose some of its empowerment characteristics (e.g. intensive support on accommodation) if it became a larger scheme? On the other hand, scaling-up involves replicating the model in a different area. But this has the danger of simplistic policy transfer of the policies and practices to a geographical housing and labour market with characteristics and issues that are dissimilar.

Employment and Work

The key message from a review of worklessness literature was that innovative local projects are required that build on local institutional support to tackle individual factors. It can be argued that F2W is an example of this type of initiative.

In part, these local innovations are regarded as a positive alternative to the national government's welfare conditionality and benefit sanctions regime. Reeve (2017) provides a useful summary of this regime, pointing out that recent changes have led to the harshest system in the history of the UK welfare state.

Thus, an emerging theme in the literature and policy debates over the last six months has been a critical analysis of work-based opportunities for single people on the margins of the labour market. This is generally referred to as the 'precarious employment'⁷. It has been fuelled in the media by the focus on high profile cases such as Sports Direct and Deliveroo. From a research perspective, for example, Montgomery et al (2016) point out the high degree of employment insecurity of the social care sector for young people. The Institute for Employment Studies (IES) in a study for the European Union make similar points about the hospitality industry and personal services (e.g. cleaners and hairdressing) (Broughton et al, 2016). Similarly and of particular significance for the F2W project, Crisp (2015) previously noted that even innovative micro-scale work-based initiatives (such as work clubs) might result in precarious employment.

Nevertheless the, IES emphasise that there is no clear or accepted definition of precarious employment. Even so it, in addition, points out that zero-hours contracts 'do not offer enough security, in terms of working hours and pay, for anyone with financial responsibilities or a need to plan their working life'. But zero-hour contracts may meet the needs of a student or young person entering the labour market.

There is, thus, a consensus emerging over the crucial question on the type of intensive support to help those on the margins of the labour employment. Put bluntly, is it best to help single people (and other types of households) to become 'work ready' even if the local labour market prospects centre primarily on precarious employment or should the focus be on longer term skills development?

⁷The use of the term, 'precarious employment', is not new – the ESRC, for example, funded a seminar series in 2012 led by the University of Warwick. But it has recently become a much more commonly referenced term by think tanks, the media, policy makers and academic researchers.

Building up Rent Credit/ Savings

One of the seven F2W interventions is 'rent credit'. The focus is on users buying in to the principle of creating a credit rather than specific amounts. Elmbridge Rentstart has been using this 'rent credit' model on previous projects and have evidence that it has three significant benefits:

- Builds user confidence;
- Builds landlord confidence; and
- Contributes to user living skills e.g. money management.

There is a lack of independent robust evaluation of rent credit/ savings schemes by tenants and vulnerable households even though it is a frequently adopted policy and practice e.g. credit unions etc. Crisis (undated) has summarised the issues which include:

- Ability of users to save;
- Management of savings schemes; and, most importantly
- Use of sanctions if savings are not made on a regular basis.

One potential area of investigation is behavioural change and 'nudge'. This is defined as

'...any aspect of choice architecture that alters people's behavior in a predictable way without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives. To count as a mere nudge, the intervention must be easy and cheap to avoid. Nudges are not mandates. Putting fruit at eye level counts as a nudge. Banning junk food does not' (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008).

The utilisation of this approach is not uncommon in related policy areas such as tackling fuel poverty through better management of heating systems. However, there is only one recent UK study that considers savings by low income households (Behavioural Insights Team, 2016). Although the project was more broadly focused on tackling poverty, one of the work streams centred on accumulating savings. It concluded that there were six forms of 'capital' that affected individual decision-making. These are cognitive, character, social, economic, human and environmental capitals. In order to make initiatives successful (e.g. savings schemes), organisations need to:

- Ensure that schemes minimise the time and mental costs of engagement; and, significantly,
- Consider the interactions (positive and negative) between different capitals.

In relation to the latter, the report notes that economic capital in the form of financial insecurity will detrimentally affect cognitive capital and make users less willing / able to save.

It will be interesting for the evaluation team to attempt to identify the 'nudges' in the building up rent credit intervention of F2W. The F2W team will be encouraged to include examples of 'nudges' to clients and any change in savings behaviour that resulted in sustainable savings by the client.

Conclusion

There is an emerging body of published and 'grey' literature on a range of themes linking to different elements and interventions on the Freedom to Work project. This will continue to be interrogated throughout years two and three and an overarching analysis of the literature will be included in the final evaluation report, as well as emerging themes informing the direction of the project and the evaluation.

Chapter Four: F2W Year One Findings

This section of the report looks at the emerging findings from year one of the Freedom to Work (F2W) project. The target in the first year was to have 20 clients in place by the end of December 2016. By the end of June, the position was that there were 26 current F2W clients, across nine shared properties (22 property 'units') housing 23 people (one unit was shared by two people) managed by the F2W team.

There were a number of discussions with the F2W team to establish the exact 'ingredients' of F2W (see further the logic model at Appendix A for the interventions') and one of the issues raised was around the property. Could F2W clients live in some of the properties in the wider Elmbridge Rentstart pool? It was decided by the end of the year one phase of learning and consolidating that the F2W could only relate to F2W properties – namely those properties directly managed by the F2W team and over which they had direct control of the rent account. The reason for this was the control needed to offer 'freedom to...'. This 'freedom to' included the freedom to offer flexible financial assistance rather than strictly a credit on the rent account. This is discussed further on in this section; but mentioned here to highlight what is F2W and what isn't. It did take the first year to go through questions and testing ideas to arrive at this decision, and this was another benefit of the approach, that learning and flexibility (within broad boundaries) will continue to allow the project to meet its aims – to provide freedom.

In the data shared with the evaluation team, there were also eleven (11) clients who had moved on from the scheme properties, a sample of whom will be interviewed at a mutually convenient point towards the start of year two of the project. There were also two clients on the database who were marked as 'control group'. One of these two in the control group were originally counted as F2W until the consolidating conversation towards the end of year one on what exactly constituted a F2W client – someone living in one of the properties over which F2W staff had direct control of the rent account.

As noted in the methodology earlier, the main tool of data shared on a quarterly basis with the evaluation team was the 'Making it Count' spreadsheet. Key findings from three quarters of information (September to December 2016, January to March 2017 and April to June 2017) begin to show some emerging points and potential trends. This will be outlined in the second part of this section.

Firstly, there will be a qualitative evaluation of the interviews with a small sample of F2W clients, with F2W staff team members, and also attendance at an F2W workshop which included discussions with potential landlords, employers and clients.

F2W Client Journeys and Emerging Outcomes

At the start of the evaluation project, there were initial meetings in June 2016 to set out key objectives, meet the F2W team and visit some of the first clients. A number of properties were visited which demonstrated the mix of shared housing available. Some properties were owned by Walton Charity and managed by the F2W team at Elmbridge Rentstart and in each of these were three to four individuals living in the house and sharing facilities such as kitchen, bathroom and garden. The picture below/ overleaf shows the view of the rear of the property, a member of staff is seen standing near a small area where the tenants were collectively growing some vegetables – already demonstrating elements of bonding and shared objectives.



Small vegetable plot to the rear of one of the shared properties

During the initial meeting with F2W clients in their properties there were no formal notes or recordings made as this was an introductory meeting. There were general positive comments made about the property and sharing, and it was observed (see below) that in the main part the properties were well maintained by residents.



Shared kitchen

In addition to the shared houses owned by Walton Charity, the F2W team at Elmbidge Rentstart also managed flats above the shop as part of the scheme, individual clients had their own 'flatlet' and shared some facilities. The owners of the properties above the shops are longstanding contacts of Elmbidge Rentstart who signed up to the values of the F2W project.



Street scene for one of the above the shop properties

In April 2017 interviews were conducted with seven F2W clients (six men and one woman of varying ages). The interviews took place in an office space close by to the F2W office but which was separate and allowed the evaluation team and the client privacy and confidentiality. The breadth of life experience, educational attainment and varying stages on their F2W journeys was apparent throughout the day of interviews. The majority of the sample interviewed had been referred to F2W by an agency – charity or council. There were varying degrees of prior homelessness, some coming to a F2W shared property quite quickly from a prior breakdown in their housing, and others with experience, for example, of sleeping in their car for extended periods of time before accessing F2W.

Some of the sample (and indeed some of the control group) are invested in the F2W and wider ERS team and they almost span the boundary between client and team support. One man for example in sample of F2W interviewed, undertook odd jobs and volunteered for F2W – a senior member of the staff said about these ‘boundary spanners’: “...when they do something for us they feel part of the team”.

A number of themes emerge from the interviews with clients and F2W staff, including the three key areas for evaluative investigation as outlined in the methodology earlier:

Shared accommodation

The vast majority of property used in the Freedom to Work scheme is shared – with people who did not know each other previously sharing common areas. There are two accommodation units that are not in this category – one studio flat with a single occupant, and in another property there is a couple sharing a one-bedroom flat. The remaining 20 F2W clients are sharing in the traditional sense – with their own bedroom, but shared kitchen, communal areas and garden.

“It’s awkward sharing kitchen and bathroom. Whereas I’m used to going to the bathroom [now] you have to ask, can be a bit of a nightmare. If I was a bit younger... now I need more privacy.” (M6)

For some clients, just having a place, being supported to and listened was such a relief. The following quote from a client, for whom English was a second language, demonstrates that:

“[I started F2W] last month. I love it, I sign a form. Lived in a shared property with another lady. I lived there from October and started [F2W] last month. Nice house, nice place, thank God.” (F1)

Shared accommodation may not be the aspirational first choice for many; but the F2W clients did find benefits from sharing.

“I suffer from depression and anxiety so it was a big thing. I was very worried about moving in with people I didn’t know. ERS paired me up with nice guys. I was told I was being put into a scheme. I moved in – the guys were really welcoming, I’ve made a really good friend there, I’m glad it happened. They say everything happens for a reason – doing a share, it was meant to be, because I made a good friend” (M3)

The sharing of accommodation is a consequence of market prices in the private rented sector and in the first instance, not seen as ideal. However, the lived benefits of sharing – through peer support, sharing problems and advice – has been recognised by the F2W team and their clients. It is an integral part of the project and the benefits are evident in the client stories.

Private rented sector

There are mixed views on the private rented sector from F2W clients (just as there are in wider perceptions), but the key concern was the affordability. Some were concerned with being able to save a sufficient amount for a deposit for future accommodation. Others were worried about the cost of the existing private properties utilised in the F2W scheme and the value for money more broadly for those on benefits to be paying rent to private landlords.

One man interviewed who had been in his F2W property for just about a year and was looking to move on said:

“I am on Elmbridge council list and I do bid for properties, hopefully I’ll be able to get on. Rent in current place is quite heavy and I’m quite worried about this Brexit thing. If I was given a council place it would be better, cheaper.” (M1)⁸

The properties included in the F2W scheme do provide value and are a vital component to the sustainability of the F2W project. The F2W team know their landlords well and have a good working relationship – there is a mutual benefit for landlords, F2W and the clients in the arrangement. Nevertheless, there are long-held views that council accommodation offers more affordable and sustainable standards of living and so for some (as with M1 above) this was still an aspiration.

Employment and skills training

The career history and trajectory of the sample of F2W clients is complex and goes some way to undermining perceptions people may have of the qualities and skills of homeless or precariously housed people. In the sample spoken with there were career histories of working in specialised elements of the armed forces, management consultancy, highly skilled trades. For others there had been a long gap or absence of employment and for those there was a need for support to work readiness. Some F2W clients were struggling with the new reality of their current situation – both in the housing and the employment market and were still hoping for a return to careers long since lost.

“I’m on jobseekers and the work programme. I’ve been looking for management consultant work.” (M2)

The new reality of regulations and availability of appropriate work was also the subject pertinent to another F2W client – this time on the cost of regulation in his industry:

⁸ F2W client respondents were coded on evaluation interview team records to protect anonymity

“I’m looking for building work, they give suggestions but I need new certificates, the government are making it so hard with extra paperwork, you have to buy the certificates – have to pay for it. I have one friend that paid £6000 for paperwork. I’m not the sort of person who can sit around all day – I’ve been at my niece’s today decorating.” (M6)

For others there was real hope through practical reskilling to reflect new realities. Following on a serious injury, one F2W client was reskilling in a trade which wasn’t possible to utilise in trade but could be reworked in domestic settings:

“I’ve got a lot of faith in these people [F2W team]. On Thursday I have an interview with someone at Brooklands college in connection with that – it’ll be the next positive step. With domestic wiring – maximum six months and I’ll be qualified. (M1)

Overall, the links and relationships with employers and trainers was welcomed soundly by F2W clients:

“They’ve point me in directions. They’ve invited me to various evening seminars here... the best was from Brooklands college.” (M4)

Building up Rent Credit

The building of rent credit for the future (preferably for a deposit for the private sector) is a key aspect of the scheme but, as mentioned earlier in this section, it is operated in a flexible way to offer the best support for the client at the time they need it and there has been some debate in the team about whether this is a ‘savings approach’ or specifically building up rent credit for the future. F2W staff have control over the rent budget and so it is possible to unlock potential match credit that would be part of the scheme to pay for say a puncture repair for a bicycle. It is important to note that in discussions with F2W clients, although they understood the purpose of payments were to build up rent credit, they used the word ‘savings’ because that seemed to be more meaningful to them.

“I do save with [named F2W staff member] and them, but I think that’s more to do for my [future] deposit. I put in £10 per month for my partner and £10 for me and then I pay in an additional £50 per month. To be honest I haven’t worked out how much I’ve saved so far – I have it on direct debit and I’m very happy with that.” (M1)

There was uncertainty about the rent deposit scheme. F2W keeps the scheme flexible so that it can respond to particular needs – an example was given of funds needing to be used to fix a bicycle so the client could get to a work interview. With flexibility though, there is less certainty about the process, but also about clients’ ability to save:

“So basically you set up a direct debit and Rentstart take whatever you can afford. This helps with a deposit for a place so by the end of the year you have a decent amount. I’m not getting on very well – only £10 per month – it’s very difficult living on income support. I do think it’s an idea, a really good idea to have the savings. Places to rent [in the private sector] are really expensive. I looked at a studio and

they wanted £2k from me. If I had £1k in a savings scheme that that would help.”
(M3)

There was a lack of knowledge and scrutiny of arrangements by some, in relation to the building up rent credit arrangements.

“They’ve asked me a few times to do this; they’ve given me forms on a number of occasions and I’ve signed the form - £30 per month – but as far as I know it hasn’t happened. Financially – I’m lazy, so it could be going through or it might not have been processed... I do think it’s a good idea – originally I thought it was a lot of interference”. (M4)

There is a benefit to setting up an automatic direct debit so that it becomes a regular transactional process part of the F2W scheme; but clients could then become complacent and not keep on top of finances.

Some found the rent credit scheme a good idea, but didn’t feel able to contribute currently:

“Want to start the savings scheme soon – just getting money behind – job seekers is two weeks behind...” (M5)

Others had been saving for a while. The following quotation is from a client who was formerly in the same property with Elmbridge Rentstart and who had more recently signed up to the Freedom to Work scheme:

“... been saving for 18 months now and [it’s] building up nicely.” (M6)

All current F2W clients have committed to saving - some of the newer starts are about to deposit or commit their first amount. Of all 34 clients on, or recently moved on from, F2W there are 14 who have saved in the £100s, with the total amount saved by end of year one at £3,446 across the client group. The largest amount saved by an individual to date, is £520.

Moving on

This is a complex aim and intervention of F2W and during year one the ambitions to have people moving on at six months has changed. A more realistic nine-month period is the stage at which F2W expect clients to be preparing to move on but there are some clients who have been in their F2W tenancies for a year or just over.

In qualitative interviews with a sample of clients there was some nervousness of moving on, not always vocalised – but sometimes in facial expressions and protective body language from those who had been in their F2W property for around a year and who knew that move-on was around the corner.

“I mean, I’m hoping if I haven’t been successful [by the end of the year] then Rentstart will keep me on a bit longer, otherwise I’m going to be in trouble. I want to be earning money, buying things for my kids and hopefully being happy again.” (M3)

F2W staff are looking at utilising the wider stock of properties to which Elmbridge Rentstart can access in order to have a small pool of ‘move on’ properties for those who cannot yet access private rented or council sustainable tenancies. The level of emotional investment made by F2W staff in their clients means there is a reluctance to follow a formulaic approach to moving clients on – but this does have the knock-on effect that there will be fewer individuals helped by moving through the F2W scheme during the three year project, than was originally envisaged.

This is a difficult balance to strike between making clients feel ‘at home’ and ensuring stability and security from which they can find training, employment and save sufficient resources for a month’s rent in advance or other such deposits necessary in the private rented sector. There is a temptation to keep clients secure and to let tenancies go on for longer, but in balance with this is the knowledge that in so doing, there is less capacity to help people with their housing and employment careers.

Combating loneliness and improving wellbeing

A client wellbeing survey is undertaken with a number of the F2W clients to measure the ‘distance travelled’ in the duration of their involvement with the project. A sample of 12 wellbeing survey results reviewed by the evaluation team showed, largely that perceived wellbeing improved. A number of measures were scored:

- Anxiety
- Vulnerability
- Mental wellbeing
- Physical wellbeing
- Confidence
- Motivation

For the majority of the sample the direction of wellbeing travel was from ‘low’ scores of perceived wellbeing at the start of the F2W journey with higher scores towards the end. The cumulative scores across each of the measures above are interesting to track; but it is also interesting to examine individual elements. For example, for one client the perceived motivation dipped at the three month point (lower than at interview for the scheme and at move-in) but then rose back again (tripling) at six months. The peaks and dips in wellbeing scores across the sample happened at different moments for different people – but it is important to note this, and important to recognise and encourage the flexibility in support that F2W can offer to respond to these differing needs.

From the sample of clients interviewed as part of this evaluation, the importance of F2W in combating loneliness came across very strongly. It wasn’t always vocalised in terms of loneliness, but even in the expressions and mannerisms of clients talking about the support they had received – the advice from another human being who showed they cared – it was

clear that living in a F2W property was lifting some of the burden felt by individuals from current and previous precarious and isolated lives. Whilst the initial fear of house sharing was very daunting for some, the lived experience and the alleviation of loneliness was one of the biggest benefits noted.

“I’d hear the guys in the kitchen talking and think to myself I have to get down there and get involved. Yeah, that’s how I got over it [social anxiety] really. I think it’s been best for me, it’s helped with my anxiety, people commit suicide because they’re lonely... Benefits of doing it – I’m less lonely, not as bad as I thought it’d be, sometimes you know – you need to give things a try.” (M3)

This particular theme will be challenging to measure and document throughout the evaluation process, as it is dependent on firstly recognition by clients, and then disclosure to the evaluation team. The clues and snippets of improved wellbeing and feeling less lonely because they were part of a F2W cohort, linked to the F2W service providers and with support from others who lived with them in the shared accommodation, are apparent.

“I mean, I’ve hit rock bottom where I just thought my life was over. You have to build yourself up until you’re a stronger person and make something for yourself. I realise I’ve got to make a life for myself on my own [separate from family] at the moment. These guys [F2W] are offering me that support.” (M3)

The improved wellbeing and reduced loneliness benefit of F2W will continue to be captured in a qualitative ad-hoc way, as it is an important, if understated, outcome.

In conclusion, for F2W clients interviewed, there is a palpable relief – that F2W has been a lifeline:

“If it wasn’t for this place I’d be living in my car, if I still had a car. I’ve managed to hold onto my tools, so definitely – it’s helped me.” (M1)

“I think Rentstart does fantastic work, with more resources they could probably do more.” (M2)

“At the beginning of my relationship [with F2W] I didn’t understand what their role was – I thought they were finding me accommodation and that was that. The follow up calls and visits surprised me and irked me, but once I got my head round what they were about, it made it easier to welcome. Indirectly this has helped – been a bit of a kick up the bum.” (M4)

Issues for potential landlords and employers

Initial discussions with employers and landlords in April 2017 highlighted both specific issues and more general themes.

In relation to the former, two private landlords commented that there are local opportunities to develop good quality shared accommodation (which would be classified as

houses in multiple occupation). These include the conversion of empty office buildings and refurbishment of out-of-date sheltered housing. There are, however, challenges over viability because of the strong housing market in the area. Developers can outbid local landlords for premises, while councils and housing associations frequently wish to redevelop sites for social and affordable rented homes. This strong competition tends to lead to landlords buying one-off existing street properties, which are often expensive to convert and maintain.

In relation to employers, a re-occurring theme was corporate social responsibility. Large employers badged their partnership with F2W as part of a moral and ethical imperative to help meet the challenges faced by local communities. Nevertheless, in addition, they argued that their involvement was also on the basis of a sound business case, for example:

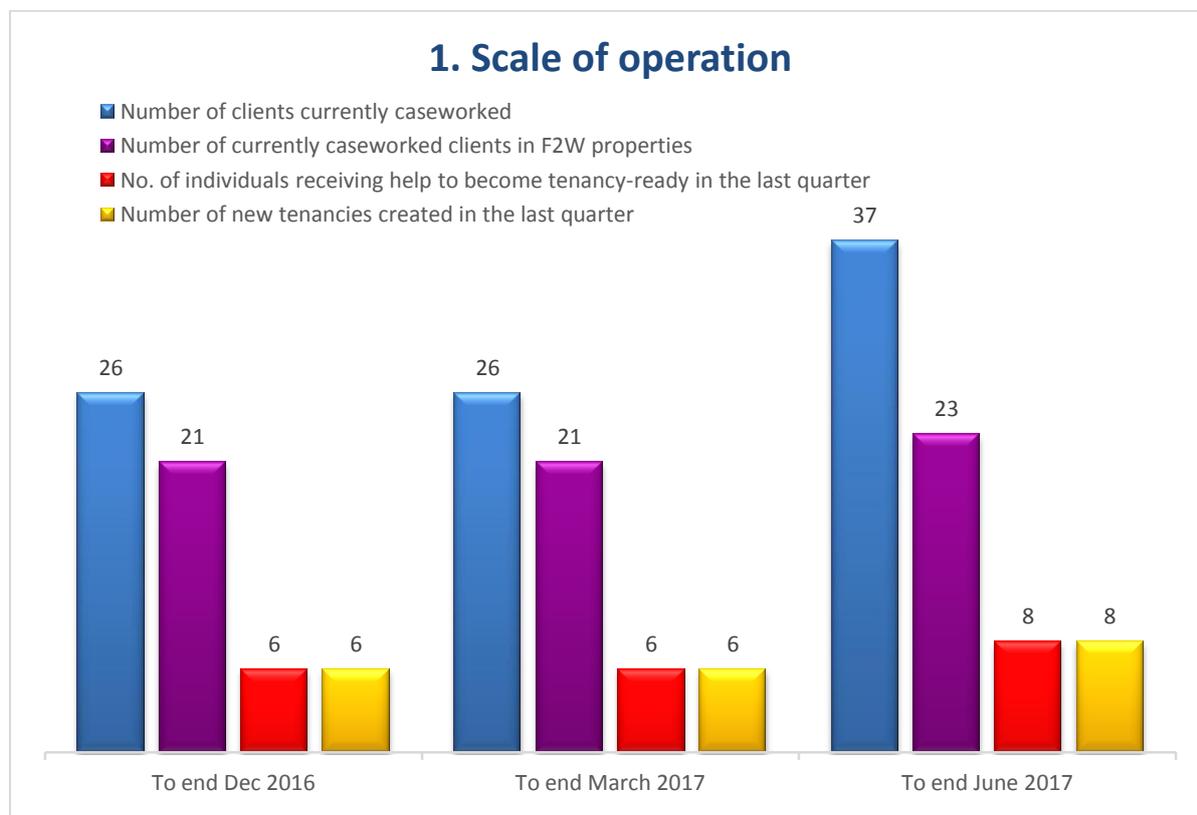
- Filling vacancies in a tight labour market;
- Flexibility over hours worked; and
- Retention of employees.

However, for both landlords and employers, the overriding message was twofold:

1. Importance of local formal and informal networks of third sector / voluntary organisations as well as individuals.
2. Significance of 'trust' between organisations and individuals.

These links and trust provide reassurance and certainty to landlords that tenants will be suitable and that any issues (e.g. rent payments, good tenant behaviour) can be quickly addressed. Similarly, employers recognised the benefits of having well-established links in identifying potential employees and resolving issues, such as time-keeping, appearance and other positive employee habits.

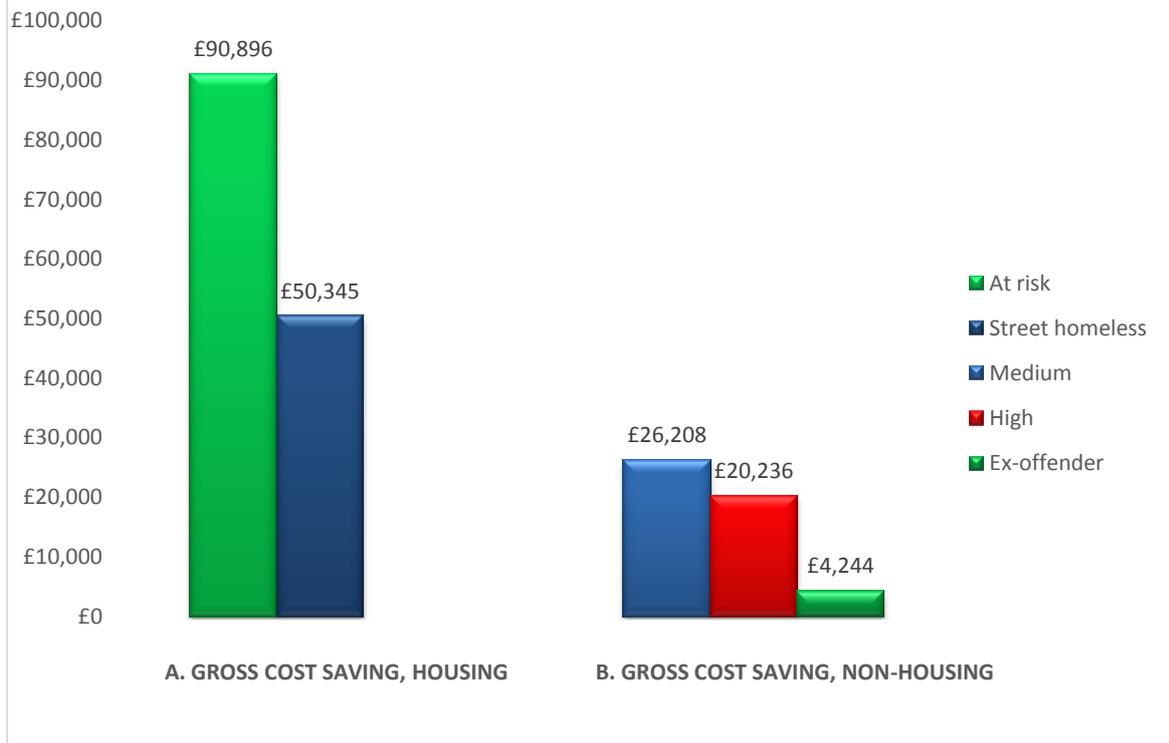
Making it Count Data and Analysis



The case load has developed over the three quarters starting with 26 clients, 11 have moved on as discussed in greater detail below. This shows that in the first nine months the time lag of the impact can be seen. In future reports we will analyse the length of the average time lag and analyse how successful the project is in terms of speed of settlement into permanent housing as well as the financial costs.

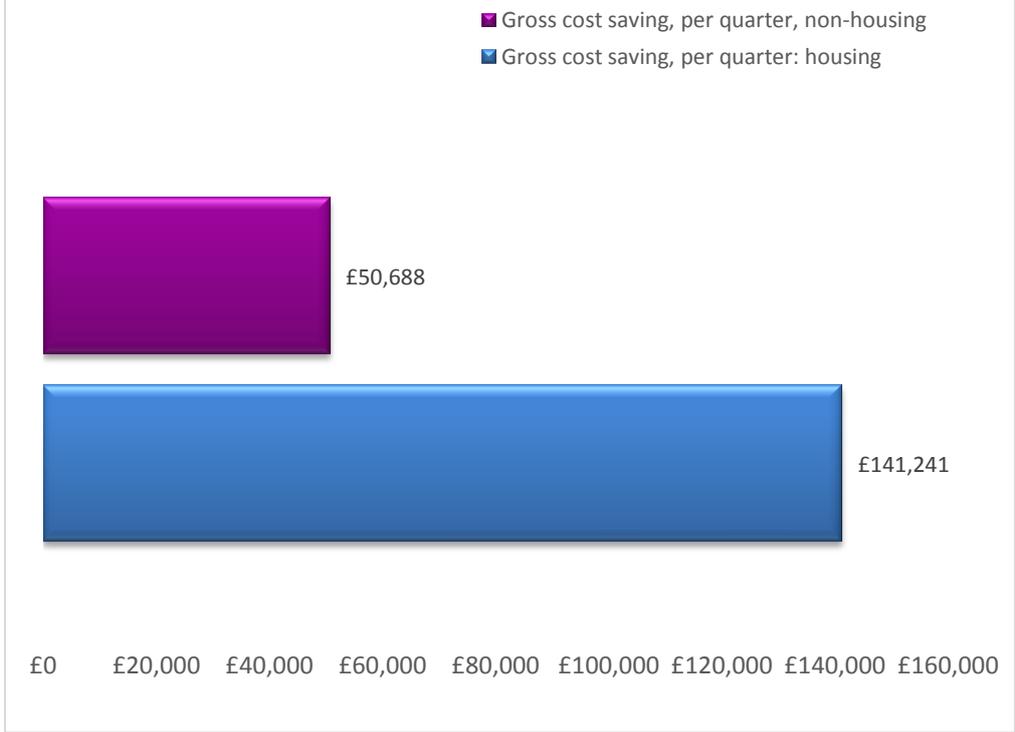
In the first 9 months the financial benefits have been significant and interestingly the greatest financial benefit is in the early intervention of the at risk group.

2. Estimating social benefit - breakdown



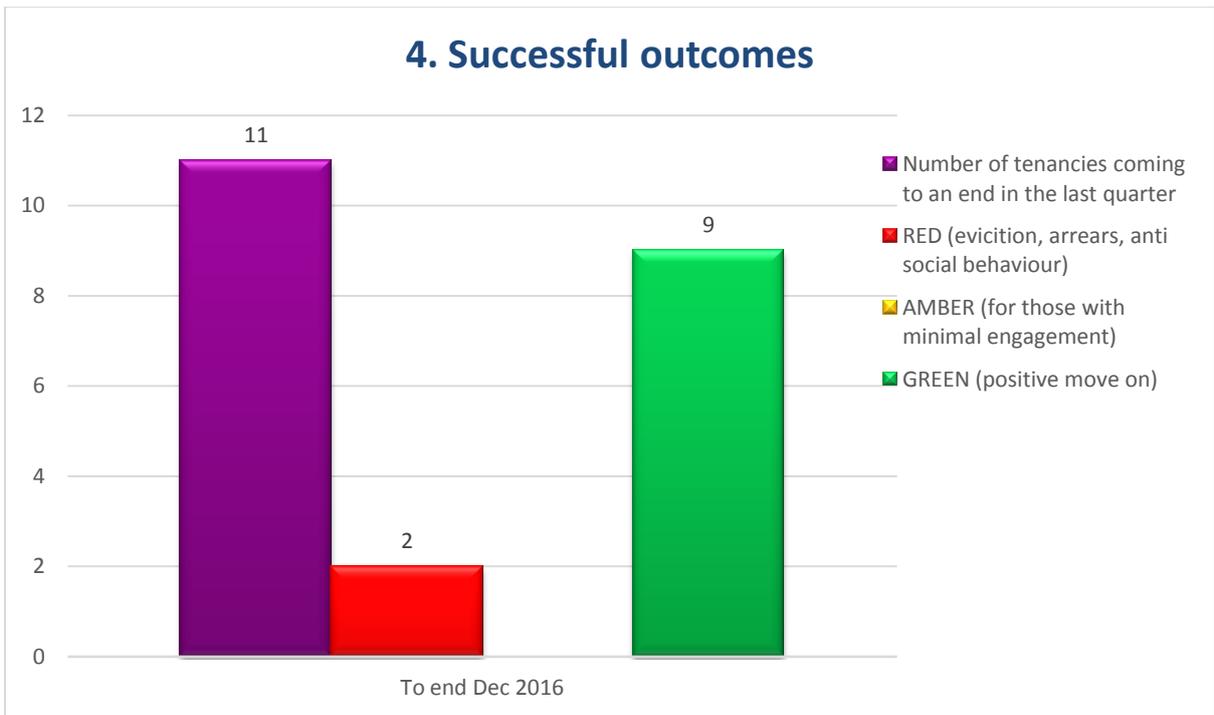
Having identified the savings of the at risk group as being high it is also the largest group within the sample. The high risk group also shows substantial financial benefits from interventions.

3. Estimating social benefit - total

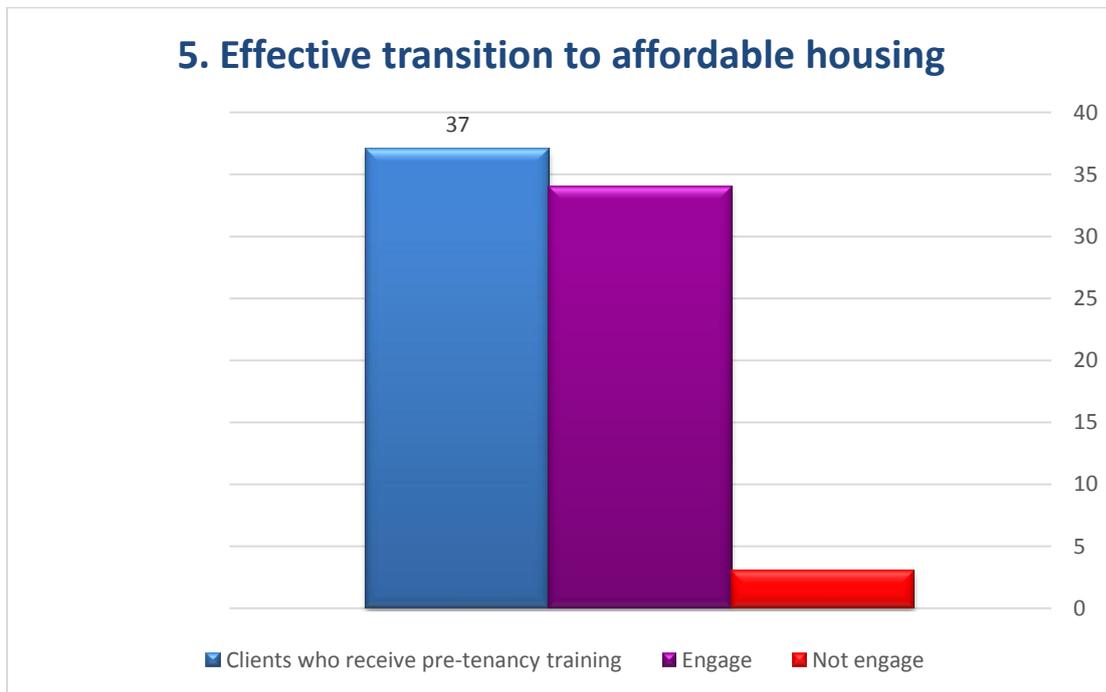


Of the 37 cases although financial savings are in themselves significant the primary objective is of successful transition into permanent homes. Of the 37 caseloads, 9 have had a successful outcome and 2 unsuccessful ones. This does mean that the cost savings going forward will reflect the unsuccessful tenants.

4. Successful outcomes

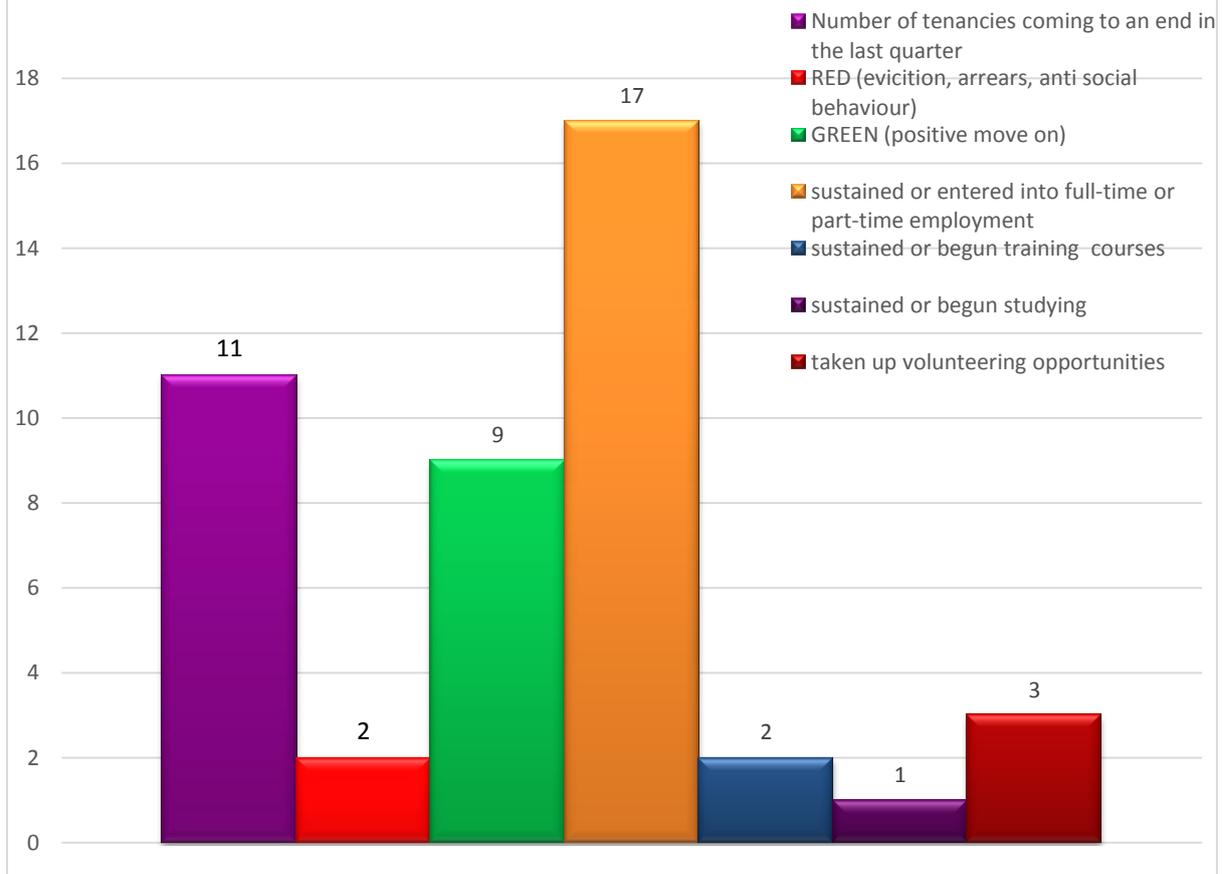


Of the 11 tenancies ended 9 were successful and two evictions were due to anti-social behaviour. It demonstrates that the scheme is taking successful so far in over 82% of cases. This is however too early to say if this will improve over time or reduce.



There were three tenants who did not engage in the pre tenancy training. Going forward it is proposed to analyse the relationship between engagement and successful transition both to sustainable housing and also 'meaningful activity'.

6. Successful outcome and meaningful activity



Conclusions

Year one of the project has been a year of learning, clarification and consolidation. There are clearly successful outcomes for the project, and the clients have reported on the felt benefits to them of being on the F2W programme. Analysis of the outputs as shown in the 'Making it Count' tool will be more robust as more cases are examined throughout years two and three. It is challenging at this interim stage to begin to draw conclusions on the project, or to show trends and sustainable trajectories. Nevertheless, it is clear that on all counts that are measured – accommodation, employment and (outwith Making it Count tables, but examined elsewhere – savings) F2W is demonstrating achievements against its objectives.

Chapter Five: Year One Interim Conclusions and Recommendations

In this report, any conclusions and recommendations are interim and based on the data only for year one so far. There are a range of conclusions and some recommendations to build into aims and aspirations (such as development of move-on accommodation) for years two and three.

Conclusions

- 1 The 'Freedom' in the F2W is both for clients to feel 'free' of wider constraints around accommodation and wellbeing - to be able to go into the world of work; but it is also for F2W service providers to feel 'free' to be responsive and flexible to meet individual clients' needs. The flexible F2W approach results from having the right people on the team – but also having the systems in place, the direct management and control of the rent account to allow for 'freedom decisions'.
- 2 The importance of stable housing is vital to the emerging successes of the F2W approach, if accommodation is precarious then F2W participants cannot concentrate on getting back to work. Having the housing in the full management control of the F2W team is very important – control of the rent account allows the flexibility around the saving towards rent credit and a deposit towards future housing.
- 3 The impact of the precarious nature of sanctions, universal credit switch-over as well as housing benefit top-ups led to the need for the F2W team to offer emergency support in the form of food, bike repairs, electricity and heating from a destitute fund operated to facilitate flexible emergency support.
- 4 The cohort and property stock size (23 currently case-worked/ 22 property units) appears to be optimum for the proper delivery of integral F2W interventions. Caution should be applied in any pressure for 'scaleability'.
- 5 The wide-ranging, complex needs and the precarious lives prior to coming to the F2W project, means that intensive support is needed for many clients. Improvement in wellbeing is not a linear upward trend throughout the tenancy – flexible approaches are vital to respond to individual needs and circumstances. It is noted in the reflection of the team, and in client interviews that an unexpected outcome of the project to date has been how much interim financial support has been required to maintain the stability of many of the tenancies.

- 6 Clients reported great value in the F2W interventions. There was value in being listened to and in the personal and trusting professional relationships built between clients and the F2W team.
- 7 Shared living, whilst not immediately aspirational, had brought additional value to some clients who felt that living with others had built their confidence and produced strong friendships.
- 8 Employment and training interventions had very positive qualitative feedback comments from clients who reported feeling hopeful about their employment futures.
- 9 An unexpected outcome from the first year of the project was reported by the F2W team. There was reluctance on the part of clients, once in work, to request the rent free period (the saved rent deposit element) to be applied straight away. Most wanted to see if their new job would work out before utilising the rent deposit element; or they sought to apply it to any rent arrears that might have built up.
- 10 The prospect of moving on from the F2W scheme was exciting but daunting for some. F2W staff are actively examining the portfolio of housing stock they have access to (not necessarily directly managed) in order to be able offer move-on options and this is to be encouraged in years two and three.

Recommendations

- 1 The first year of the project included significant reflection on what exactly F2W was; it was firmly established by the end of year one that F2W could only be achieved in its fullest extent in properties over which it exercised management and rent account control. There was also discussion during year one on whether clients were 'saving' or 'building a rent deposit' – this question did not seem to burden clients who were not clear on the precise mechanism but liked the broad idea; but it did appear to exercise the F2W team. It is recommended that in year two there is further detailed scrutiny over the key elements, precise definitions of the main interventions of the project and the exact hypothesis being tested over the remainder of the period. Flexibility in the scheme is vital, but this has led to some uncertainty on the exact ingredients of the F2W scheme, and this may warrant some tightening at the start of year two and by Autumn 2017.
- 2 F2W will need to continue its good relationships with private landlords who already are within the project, and also continue to work with prospective landlords who may consider joining to add more accommodation units that could be used as F2W. This could be particularly helpful in the question of scalability if the scheme were to grow in subsequent years. However, the evaluation shows the challenges for clients and the F2W are towards the end of the first six months to one year of initial tenancy in the F2W managed properties. It is recommended that discussions with private landlords about expanding future properties under this scheme focus more on expanding the portfolio of 'move-on' accommodation stock.
- 3 F2W should consider liaising through its strong networks and board of advisors, to talk with housing associations in the region in terms of 'selling' the benefits of 'tenancy-ready' individuals who graduate from F2W. It is recommended that there may be scope to consider different channels into working with the private sector both through traditional social landlords who may provide move-on properties for F2W 'graduates' but also social lettings agencies who may be useful partners to work with in the future.
- 4 The evaluation team and F2W should focus in years two and three on the strands of the scheme that may be replicable for adaptation, and to clearly show which elements of the hypothesis work particularly well and which elements face challenges. Tighter definitions and standardisation of the interventions may assist in this; or it may become apparent that it is the flexibility of approach which is vital and which could be challenging then to replicate or adapt in different contexts.

References and sources

Batty, E. et al (2015) *Evaluation of the Sharing Solutions Programme*, Sheffield, Sheffield Hallam University, CRESR

Behavioural Insights Team (2016) *Poverty & Decision-making: How behavioural science can improve opportunity in the UK*, London, BIT

Broughton, A. et al (2016) *Precarious Employment in Europe*, Brussels, EU

Centre for Regional Economic & Social Research (2017) *Capping Aspiration: The Millennial Housing Challenge*, Sheffield, Sheffield Hallam University, CRESR

Chartered Institute of Housing (2017) *Gap between LHA and rents putting private sector rents 'out-of-reach'*, Coventry, CIH – see [http://cih.org/news-article/display/vpathDCR/templatedata/cih/news-article/data/Gap between LHA and rents putting private rents out of reach](http://cih.org/news-article/display/vpathDCR/templatedata/cih/news-article/data/Gap+between+LHA+and+rents+putting+private+rents+out+of+reach)

Crisis (undated) *Making it Happen – Your PRS Scheme in Action*, London, Crisis.

Crisp, R. (2015) *Work Clubs and Big Society, People, Place and Policy Online*, Vol 9 No 1, pp 1-16

Cromarty, H. and Bellis, A. (2017) *Private Renting Solutions for Homeless and Vulnerable People*, London, House of Commons Library CDP-2017-004

Elmbridge Borough Council (2015) *A Housing & Homelessness Strategy for Elmbridge 2015-19*, Elmbridge, EBC

Elmbridge Borough Council (2015) *Housing in Elmbridge: Facts & Figures 2015*, Elmbridge, EBC

Local Government Chronicle (2014) *The Agenda: Work Programme*, 3 July, pp 10-13.

Maciver, C. et al (2016) *The Journey Home: Building a Solution to Unsupported Temporary Accommodation*, Manchester, IPPR North

Montgomery, T. et al (forthcoming) *Who Cares?: The Social Care Sector and the Future of Youth Employment*, *Policy & Politics* – see also blog at <http://discoversociety.org/2017/04/05/policy-and-politics-a-pathway-to-precarity-youth-employment-and-the-struggling-social-care-sector/>

National Audit Office (2014) *The Work Programme*, London, NAO

Office for National Statistics (2015) *Pen Portraits for the 2011 Area Classification for Local Authorities*, Newport, ONS

National Housing Federation (2017) *Home Truths 2016/17 – The Housing Market in the South East*, London, NHF

Reeve, K. (2017) Welfare Conditionality, Benefit Sanctions and Homelessness in the UK, *Journal of Poverty & Social Justice* Vol 25 No 1 pp 65-78

Regeneris (2014) *Enterprise M3 Housing Evidence Study*, London, Regeneris

Rolfe, H et al (2015) *Local Authority Schemes Supporting People towards Work*, London, NIESR

Thaler, R. &Sunstein, C. (2008) *Nudge*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books

Wilkinson, E. and Ortega-Alcazar, I. (2017) A Home of One's Own: Housing Welfare for Young Adults in Times of Austerity, *Critical Social Policy* Vol 37 No 3, pp 1-19

Appendix A: F2W Logic Model

